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A Study in Sherlock: Revisiting the Relationship between Sherlock Holmes and Dr. John Watson

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You see, but you do not observe

—Sherlock Holmes

Introduction

Since the publication of *A Study in Scarlet* in 1887, the stories of Sherlock Holmes and his companion Dr. John Watson have captured the hearts and minds of many. With each generation, a Holmesian adaptation is introduced with some variation of success. However, just as Holmes feels about Watson, the loyal fans of Holmes merely see but do not observe. They become enveloped in the stories and characters, both the originals and the adaptations, but nobody stops to question the characters' success. One measure of the success of Sherlock Holmes is by audience reaction to the death of this character.

In "The Final Problem," at the end of *The Memoirs of Sherlock Holmes,* Holmes meets his demise at the Reichenbach Falls: "and there, deep down in that dreadful cauldron of swirling water and seething foam, will lie for all time the most dangerous criminal [Moriarty] and the foremost champion of the law of their generation" (*The Memoirs of Sherlock Holmes* 505). His death was met with public outcry and protest. 20,000 readers cancelled their subscriptions to the *Strand,* and "dedicated followers of Holmes wore mourning in both Britain and America" (Wexler 19). Many fans begged Arthur Conan Doyle to somehow bring back their beloved detective. The editors of *Tit-Bits*, a popular weekly, wrote on January 6, 1894:

> The news of the death of Sherlock Holmes has been received with the most widespread regret, and readers have implored us to use our influence with Mr Conan Doyle to prevent the tragedy being consummated […]. We can only reply that we pleaded for his life in the most urgent, earnest, and constant manner. Like hundreds of correspondents, we feel as if we had lost an old friend whom we could ill spare. (Qtd. in Green xi)

Late Victorian readers were devastated by the death of Sherlock Holmes. While some believed that he was a real man residing at 221b Baker Street with his dear friend Dr. John Watson, many saw this fictional detective as a close companion, without whom they could not live.

Since the publication of the first Holmes stories, during the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, a multitude of film and television adaptations have appeared. Many actors have played the famous duo. In the mid-twentieth century, Basil Rathbone served most famously as Sherlock Holmes, alongside Nigel Bruce as Dr. John Watson, in American film adaptations. At the end of the twentieth century, the BBC launched the BBC Granada Series with Jeremy Brett as Holmes and Edward Hardwicke as Watson. This particular series served as the dominant media representation of Holmes from the 1980s through 2009, when Guy Ritchie's *Sherlock Holmes* came to the big screen, only to be overshadowed in 2010 by the launch of a contemporary Holmes in the BBC series *Sherlock.*

In *Sherlock*, Holmes and Watson are referred to as Sherlock and John, starring Benedict Cumberbatch and Martin Freeman, respectively. The show is set in contemporary, twenty-first century society. *Sherlock* writers Steven Moffat and Mark Gatiss fully understand the relationship between Holmes and Watson in the original texts, and place emphasis on the characterization and development of this homosocial relationship within the show. Although it is set in contemporary British society, the show draws from and relies on the original representation of the relationship between these two men. Throughout *Sherlock*, Moffat and Gatiss explore the reasons for this male friendship, often incorporating, within the diegesis, elements of literary criticism about the original texts.

Sherlock's depiction of this friendship has sparked considerable interest across the globe. Sherlock's death at the end of Series Two prompted a public reaction tantamount to that which

followed the death of the original, literary Sherlock Holmes. Just as the literary Holmes's fans took to writing letters to weekly editors at *Tit-Bits*, the show's fans took to social media sites such as Tumblr, Twitter, and Facebook. They started a widespread "Believe in Sherlock" campaign, creating posters as part of their public outcry in cities across the globe. One fan writes:

> I guess you all have heard/read/seen the news. It's been pretty hard to miss it –the death of Sherlock Holmes. I'm gutted but I'm doing my best to keep it together [...]. He was an inspiration for all of us to be more observant in our everyday lives, and I won't accept the so called truth about Sherlock that is all over the media. I know you feel like I do, and now it's our turn to show that we haven't lost faith in him. Sherlock might be gone, but I won't sit silent!
> (#believeinsherlock Tumblr)

Such fans share the feeling of loss that readers experienced at the end of the nineteenth century, when the literary Holmes died. Contemporary fans, like the original fans of the literature, argue that Sherlock is more than just a fiction. It is the consistency of the friendship that continues to capture audiences. Sherlock and John offer a sense of stability in a professional, male friendship that has the ability to span generations.

The television adaptation draws on the body of criticism about the Holmes stories and novels to develop the relationships between characters and highlights late-Victorian cultural issues within the original texts. The show explores Sherlock, who retains all the qualities of a degenerate criminal yet remains in opposition to criminal society, by highlighting the likeness between Sherlock and Moriarty. John serves as Sherlock's bulwark against criminal degeneracy, keeping him from degenerating and becoming a master criminal like Moriarty. The line between

consulting detective and consulting criminal is thin, and John Watson is what defines it. In turn, however, *Sherlock* suggests that John is a social degenerate who is saved by his relationship with Sherlock. The difference in degeneracy between the two men is slight, yet important to highlight. John risks being a social degenerate, a person who living in society, but contributing nothing. He has the potential to lead an idle life and wither away. Sherlock, on the other hand, has the potential to be a criminal degenerate, partaking in criminal activity and doing harm to the society in which he lives.

Spanning over a century, these fictional characters have clearly elicited deep and real emotions. For *fin de siècle* audiences, these characters offered an example of what it meant to be professional working men. They also offered domestic adventure, bringing the excitement of the exotic to the safety of London. The contemporary Sherlock and John offer this same excitement for their fans. However, unlike the original stories, which use Moriarty only as the instrument of Holmes's death, the show makes Moriarty a central figure, highlighting the importance of the interdependency between Sherlock and John.

While very little scholarship has yet appeared about the BBC *Sherlock* series, the stories have engendered a rich critical history. Even so, the professional relationship of Holmes and Watson has not been extensively researched. Stephen Arata writes about the importance of professionalism and degeneracy in *Fictions of Loss in the Victorian Fin de Siècle*, stating that these professional bonds promised "national and personal regeneration" (80). They were a deterrent to the threat of a backward, degenerative society. Lastly, Arata's work focuses on heroic friendships and what he refers to as "male romances" (79). Many of the social and cultural issues that he analyzes are applicable to the Holmes texts and, by extension, to the *Sherlock* series as well. Historian John Tosh's work on the transition from marriage to single life

at the end of the nineteenth century also illuminates the Holmes/Watson relationship. He analyzes the reasons why men began to reject marriage at the turn of the century, and although his work focuses on nineteenth century England, Tosh's observations resonate with our own society. Homosocial bonds have become "bromances," and the place of marriage is in flux. Another vital intellectual context here is German physician Max Nordau's analysis of criminal degeneracy. Extrapolating from the research of Caesar Lombroso, Nordau defined the traits that lead to degeneracy. The ways in which Sherlock is poised to play the role of a criminal degenerate in society, yet remains resistant to this, is highlighted by Nordau's research. Through their friendship, both men resist degeneracy, whether social or criminal and prove to be beneficial members of society.

ADAPTATION

When looking at *Sherlock* as an adaptation of the texts, it is important to first understand the role of adaptation theory, primarily the study of Victorian adaptations. As a discipline, adaptation theory is "one of the oldest areas in film study" (Leitch 1). Adaptation theory is used as a means to study films based on original, literary texts. Adaptations can reject parts of the original texts, emphasize certain aspects, serve to recreate or re-imagine, or successfully pay homage to the original work. Thomas Leitch discusses the benefits of studying Victorian literature adaptations:

> [Adaptation study of Victorian literature] restores the sense of nineteenth-century culture as a repository of strategies for making sense of the world for both the Victorians who lived in it and the modern students who labor to understand it. In reawakening a sense of cultural values as equipment for living for both a culture's members and its inheritors, it allows students to recognize nineteenth-century

> values more recent cultures have chosen to accept, transform, or reject in favor of values they find more superior. It also empowers students to...consider critically the ways their own culture is doing so. (Bloom and Pollock 17)

In many ways, adaptations reflect the society in which they are created. The principles that are embraced, changed, or rejected, are indicative of the society and culture that made these choices. Just as the original texts are reactionary to their own contemporary society, so too are adaptations: "the reading of Victorian texts, the re-reading and re-writing of them, and the (neo-) Victorian experience they represent is something that defines our culture as much as theirs" (Heilmann and Llewellyn 4). What a society chooses to read, write, and study is influenced by cultural trends and anxieties. Another reason why Victorian literature is commonly adapted is because of the trend in what is considered "major." Leitch describes this trend: "Instead of being major because they are long, dense, self-serious novels by prolific authors, the Victorian properties that are now most often studied for their contributions to the cinema are '*major* in the sense that they have been and remain the subject of substantial critical work'" (Bloom and Pollock 10). Because there is substantial criticism of these texts, they are often desirable for adaptation. Although literary criticism is not a widely read area, it offers another dimension when analyzing an original text. When creating an adaptation, criticism gives additional perspectives and insights into the original texts. In *Sherlock* specifically, literary criticism plays a major role in the development of the characters. The writers successfully integrate original canon and its criticism to create a successful adaptation of Conan Doyle's classic characters. Lastly, Victorian literature offers rich stories with complex and interesting characters for adaptations. Leitch writes, "...Victorian novels, with their well-ordered stories of rich and varied characters set against a believable social canvas, seem ripe for adaptation" (Bloom and Pollock 7). Because

there is a parallel between Victorian society and our own "social canvas," opportunities for adaptation abound. Neo-Victorian studies focuses on this parallel. Ann Heilmann and Mark Llewellyn explain:

> Since the Victorians ushered in (proto-) modernity, there is a sense in which our continued return to them masks nothing less than our own awareness of belatedness. It is this belatedness, and the strength of our desire for harking back to the Victorian, which informs [...] the various ways in which the present is negotiated through a range of (re)interpretations of the nineteenth century. (3)

Heilmann and Llewellyn emphasize the idea that the present often reinterprets the nineteenth century, much because we share cultural and social parallels. We too face major technological advancements and must find ways to accept our growing industry. There continues to be an ever-growing gap between the wealthy and poor, which continues to result in economic class struggle. And, like our Victorian counterparts, we face anxieties over the changing ideas of marriage. We continue to remain aware of the likeness in these periods, and neo-Victorians focus on what this likeness means for our future.

In a study of Victorian literature adaptations, critics have said that the work of Charles Dickens "bore the same relation to [his readers] that the film bears to the same strata in our time" (Bloom and Pollock 2). This is also apparent in a study of the work of Arthur Conan Doyle. As an adaptation, *Sherlock* has proven to have the same relationship with viewers of the show that the original texts had with their readership. The friendship between Sherlock and John is as influential as the bond between Holmes and Watson in the original texts. Audiences continue to connect with the pair. Overall, Arthur Conan Doyle's *Sherlock Holmes* stories are one of the most adapted literary texts. In the silent film genre, these stories "lead the field with eighty silent

adaptations, seventy-five of them chronicling the adventures of Sherlock Holmes" (Bloom and Pollock 3). With such various adaptations, it is not surprising that Doyle's envisioning of Sherlock Holmes's physical appearance has changed over time.

The Sherlock Holmes figure that appears in most adaptations is quite a departure from the Holmes that Conan Doyle himself envisioned. In fact, it is actually the 1940s *Sherlock Holmes* series, starring Basil Rathbone as Holmes and Nigel Bruce as Watson, that provide the most frequent image of Sherlock Holmes: "Both Rathbone's Holmes and Nigel Bruce as his Dr. Watson shaped the most frequently and persistently transposed characterization of the detective and his sidekick, thus displacing Conan Doyle's actual representation of the pairing" (Bloom and Pollock 206). Most notable about Rathbone's Holmes is the infamous deerstalker, a hat that never appears in the original texts. This hat has become a symbol, which has become synonymous with the name Sherlock Holmes. This highlights the power of adaptation as the figure of Holmes is based on an adaptation's representation, rather than the man who appeared in the original texts. Yet, despite its familiarity with audiences, *Sherlock* rejects the "Rathbone Holmes" and returns Sherlock Holmes and Dr. John Watson to their origins, creating these characters in the image of Arthur Conan Doyle's stories.

In *A Study in Scarlet*, Dr. John Watson gives a distinct physical description of Holmes:

> His very person and appearance were such as to strike the attention of the most casual observer. In height he was rather over six feet, and so excessively lean that he seemed to be considerably taller. His eyes were sharp and piercing, save during those intervals of torpor to which I have alluded; and his thin, hawk-like nose gave his whole expression an air of alertness and decision. His chin, too, had the prominence and squareness which mark the man of determination. His hands were

> invariably blotted with ink and stained with chemicals, yet he was possessed of extraordinary delicacy of touch [...] (Conan Doyle 16)

This was the Sherlock Holmes that Conan Doyle imagined. As previously discussed, this is not the Sherlock Holmes that most adaptations present, since the iconic Holmes is usually pictured with a deerstalker hat and pipe, items never appearing in the original texts. *Sherlock* works to reject this depiction of Holmes, explicitly mocking Sherlock's donning the deerstalker. In fact, Sherlock only grabs a deerstalker as a way to shield his face from a mob of paparazzi. The show continues to mock the role of the deerstalker through a series of events, including Sherlock's reception of the hat as a prank and his continual annoyance with the media for always using what he refers to as the deerstalker photos. *Sherlock* also strives to represent the Holmes that Conan Doyle himself described. For example, Benedict Cumberbatch, the actor playing Sherlock, appears to be exactly what Conan Doyle envisioned. In height, he is exactly six feet and is extremely lean, in contrast to other actors –for example Robert Downey, Jr., who starred as the famous detective in the 2009 Guy Ritchie film. Cumberbatch's facial features are also much like the ones described in the text, having piercing eyes and a prominent jaw. In the physical persona of the actor alone, *Sherlock* has succeeded in bringing Conan Doyle's Holmes from the page to the screen.

Also essential to the Holmes texts is the character of Dr. John Watson. He is also a key figure in criticism regarding Holmesian adaptations. Nigel Bruce has been criticized for his role as Dr. Watson, as many believe that his portrayal makes Watson appear less intelligent than he really is. He comes across as a bumbling fool, highlighted by the pure genius of Holmes. However, this is not how Conan Doyle rendered him. Watson is a doctor who has served in the military. Although he is no match for Holmes intellectually, he is reasonably intelligent. Despite

the physical representation, another essential element is the friendship between these two men, and its role in the professional and domestic realm.

Flight from Domesticity

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, the family and domestic sphere were given a prominent role in society. Specific familial roles of men and women were being refined and structured since "the Victorians placed a higher value on family life than any generation before or since" (Tosh xi). For British men, "authority relations of the household were a microcosm of the state: disorder in one boded ill for the stability of the other" (Tosh 3). Men felt they had to exert absolute power over their homes in order to sustain a stable nation. The home became a reflection of the state and as the state changed, so too did the domestic sphere. As the empire expanded and technology advanced, the home became less important, marriage became less vital to a man's identity, and a new emphasis on the importance of homosocial bonds arose.

The nineteenth century saw "economic and social advance reach[ing] unprecedented levels" (Tosh 1). The professional men of society were credited for these great changes, and such credit was attached to expectations for their domestic lives. Historian John Tosh writes that, "the men credited with these achievements were expected to be dutiful husbands and attentive fathers, devotees of hearth and family" (1). Because of all they had accomplished for the nation, it was presumed that these men were particularly interested in their domestic lives. If a man was capable of great accomplishments within the social sphere, than it was believed that he would show equal enthusiasm and success in the domestic sphere as well. Throughout the nineteenth century, however, this idea of the successful professional man as the master of domesticity shifted. Tosh refers to this change in perspective as the "flight from domesticity," a social and cultural trend in which men began to reject the institution of marriage.

Men began to view marriage and the domestic as a restriction and threat to homosocial bonds. For these men, "domesticity no longer represented a fresh vision of comfort and reassurance, but a straitjacket...its main drawback was the check it imposed on intimate relations between men" (Tosh 172). The focus on duty in the domestic shifted and masculine friendships amongst professional men became a priority. Not only could professional men better society by contributing to the nation's industry and economy, but also, through friendship and bonding, they could positively influence other men in society. If rejecting marriage completely were not an option, some men would "continue after marriage a bachelor style of living" (Tosh 178). Following marriage, men maintained strong masculine bonds and emphasized their need for homosocial companionship. There was no need for them to place significance on their domestic lives; what were most important were bonds with fellow professional men.

Not all men embraced the idea of homosocial bonding over marriage, of course: "bachelorhood as a preferred rather than enforced status was frowned on, since it suggested an abdication from patriarchy and an indifference to lineage and posterity" (Tosh 173). If the household was thought to be a microcosm of the state and household dynamics were fragmenting, many were concerned with what this meant for the state. The future of the state was also at risk as men showed indifference to their patrilineal duties. Without marriage, virile heirs were not being produced. Not only were men rejecting the idea of marriage, but the rise of "The New Woman" saw women doing much of the same thing. Women felt that they should be able to set themselves apart from men and have a completely independent identity. These changing perspectives were reflected throughout society.

It is perhaps no coincidence, then, that this flight from marital domesticity coincides with the emergence of "a new genre of bestselling adventure fiction" (Tosh 174). Adventure stories

promoted homosocial bonding and exotic adventure. They were "centrally concerned with the possibility of renewal" (Arata 80) and "possessed therapeutic value" (Arata 92). While depicting masculine heroes unchained by domestic bonds, these stories "formed part of 'a men's literary revolution' against the novel of (feminine) domestic realism" (Arata 92) and created a "sharp distinction [...] between men's and women's writing- sustained by [...] Conan Doyle himself" (Tosh 174). Not only were men trying to actually escape their domestic roles, but they were also doing so through literature. They saw characters in adventure stories as heroic and idealistic; these were the kind of men they longed to be. In these stories, support and companionship were gained through male friendship rather than marriage.

In the *Sherlock Holmes* canon, the traditional domestic sphere plays a very small role. Although he marries Miss Mary Morstan, Dr. John Watson is not always dutiful and attentive. He is constantly away from home, assisting Holmes with the solution of cases. Dr. Watson also shows very little interest in producing children to carry on his name. His inattentive behavior as a husband reflects the flight from domesticity. Following his marriage, he continues to live a life of bachelorhood. Despite his marriage to Mary and his medical practice, what makes Watson most valuable to society is his role as a professional in Holmes's consulting detective work. On the other hand, Holmes has no domestic ties. He remains unmarried and his only connection to society is his relationship with John. His domestic sphere is 221b Baker Street, which is both his home and place of business.

Lastly, in the late nineteenth century, there was a "perception that the home was a feminine—even a feminized—sphere" (Tosh 179). This was in dramatic contrast to the earlier nineteenth century ideas that a man should be in charge of his home life, as his authority there is reflective of his role in society. But for Conan Doyle, the home became a place for business and

professionalism. 221B Baker Street became the heart of his adventure stories, a genesis of professional bonds. It is the flat at 221B that brings Holmes and Watson together, and it is this same location that keeps their business thriving. In these stories, the home becomes a masculine sphere and a place for business, contesting the idea of the home as a feminized, domestic sphere.

The stories that Conan Doyle produced were most certainly a product of this flight from domesticity. They were multi-faceted. For men, these stories offered adventure and masculine heroes while showing the importance of homosocial bonding. In an era that would see the imprisonment of Oscar Wilde for homosexual activity, there was increased pressure for men to engage in homosocial bonds that did not support homosexuality. These stories tried to quell fears about men who relied on homosocial companionship, using Holmes and Watson as socially acceptable, even admirable, examples of male friends. Although the topic of homosexuality is not addressed within the original texts, it is directly attended to in *Sherlock.*

Sherlock incorporates references to Sherlock's and John's sexuality throughout the series. These references are a product of both cultural criticism and fan desire. In fandom, the relationship between Sherlock and John is often envisioned as a love affair, escalating to much more than a homosocial bond. Through comedic strategies, the writers have addressed these visions directly in the show. For instance, shortly after meeting, Sherlock and John attend dinner together. The waiter lays out a candle and refers to John as Sherlock's "date" ("A Study in Pink"). Following this moment, a discussion takes place between the two men regarding their sexualities:

> SHERLOCK. Girlfriend, no. Not really my area.
>
> JOHN. Oh, right. Do you have a boyfriend then? Which is fine by the way.
>
> SHERLOCK. I know it's fine.

JOHN. So you've got a boyfriend.

SHERLOCK. No.

JOHN. Right, okay. You're unattached, like me.

SHERLOCK. John, I think you should know that I consider myself married to my work. And while I'm flattered by your interest, I'm really not looking for anything.

JOHN. No. No. I'm not asking for, I'm just saying, it's all fine. ("A Study in Pink," transcription mine)

This exchange marks the beginning of continual references to a sexual relationship between the two men. This notion comes full circle at the end of Series Two, when the two men are running from the police, while handcuffed together. Sherlock tells John to take his hand, to which John replies "Now people will definitely talk" ("The Great Game," transcription mine.) These references to their sexuality are a reflection of fans' influence over the adaptations, while reflecting our own society's anxieties over homosocial bonding. Our views, however, —much unlike the Victorians— are more accepting of close male friendship and less concerned with the "threat" of homosexuality. As a society, we have adopted the idea of a "bromance."

The bromance is a term referring to a close, platonic bond shared between two men. The relationship between Sherlock and John in *Sherlock* is easily categorized as a bromance. Their relationship is very intimate, yet platonic. Unlike at the turn of the century, however, bromances do not necessarily preclude the institution of marriage. As Tosh remarked, men can choose to continue a bachelor style of living after marriage. Despite the companionship they have in the form of their wife, men will continue their bromances; much like their Victorian counterparts favored homosocial bonding. Within the relationship of Sherlock and John, we see why these

two men need each other. This becomes evident throughout the series, particularly in John's dating life.

Unlike Watson in the original stories, John remains unmarried throughout *Sherlock*. And although he attempts to find an emotional connection with various female characters, he always ends up with Sherlock. In "A Scandal in Belgravia," John hopes to impress his newest girlfriend at a Christmas party. However, he is abruptly called away to assist Sherlock in an investigation to which his female interest retorts, "You're a great boyfriend. [...] And Sherlock Holmes is a very lucky man [...]. It's heartwarming. You'll do anything for him" ("A Scandal in Belgravia, transcription mine). Although this is just one instance, this is a common occurrence throughout the series. Despite his best efforts, John is unable to make a connection that can eclipse his friendship with Sherlock. His professional bond is more important than the romantic, and potentially domestic, ties that he could possibly create through his relationships with women. John's focus rests in professionalism, as he sees this as central to his role in society. There is a mutual reliance between Sherlock and John, where one cannot function in society without the other.

BBC's *Sherlock*

When the BBC first aired *Sherlock* in July of 2010, co-creators Steven Moffat and Mark Gatiss were surprised with how well the show was received. Reflecting on the show's success, Moffat recalls, "We thought it would be like an audience of four million and an obscure award at a Polish festival or something like that. It happened so completely suddenly. We barely finished the show and it's this enormous hit. There seemed to be no intervening moment of escalation" (Moffat, Interview, transcription mine). Neither Moffat nor Gatiss could have predicted the show's success. *Sherlock* reached international acclaim, sparking an Internet

"#believeinsherlock" campaign and capturing audiences across the globe. Both Moffat and Gatiss claim that the show was written with one purpose in mind: expressing their love of the Sherlock Holmes canon. Moffat remarks, "We write *Sherlock* to entertain each other," while Gatiss claims that he does it to "please the eight year old version of [himself]" (Moffat, Interview, transcription mine). For these men, writing what they call a "Modern Sherlock" was something they wanted to do for quite some time, and the BBC instantly accepted the idea. With this passion for the original Holmes canon, and in some ways these "new characters," both Moffat and Gatiss brought a contemporary Sherlock Holmes to the screen, with successful incorporation of the male friendship between Holmes and Watson.

As an adaptation, *Sherlock* incorporates literary criticism about the original texts into the series itself. In *The Sign of Four*, Watson briefly observes, "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" (Conan Doyle 44). Watson recognizes that Holmes has the potential to be a powerful criminal. However, besides this brief contemplation, neither Watson, nor any other characters for that matter, refers to Holmes's criminal potential. *Sherlock* takes this brief moment and makes it a central issue throughout the series. While John himself never questions Sherlock, other characters explicitly express their concerns about Sherlock's involvement with criminal acts and his potential degeneracy. This notion stems from decades of criminal science research, including research conducted by Cesare Lombroso and Max Nordau. In many ways, Sherlock fulfills the attributes regarding the idea of a criminal. Some of these attributes include Sherlock's view of others as inferior and his often lack of conscience. The show, unlike the stories, emphasizes these degenerative tendencies with the use of characters like Irene Adler and Jim Moriarty. However, unlike Adler and Moriarty, Sherlock never acts on

them. Arguably, what sets Sherlock apart from these criminals is his friendship with John. Likewise, Sherlock gives purpose to John's existence, preventing him from falling into social degeneracy.

For Moffat, this is the one aspect of the Holmes stories that trumps the rest. It's not the detective stories, nor is it Holmes's superior intellect. Above all, it is the friendship that Holmes and Watson share that makes the stories truly captivating:

> Under the surface—the detective stories are the surface—is the story of the greatest friendship ever. Because it's a male friendship, they simply never talk about it [...] I find joy in writing this, in writing the friendship. It's subtext, but it really is right to the top level of subtext and just in those two men, and the fact that they endure each other." ("A Study in Pink" Commentary, transcription mine)

The male friendship is vital to the success of the series. For John, the relationship offers rehabilitation, an introduction back into society, adventure, and safety from social degeneracy. John prevents Sherlock from succumbing to criminal degeneracy. He offers humanizing companionship, often reminding Sherlock of the consequences associated with his detective work and providing a model for stable sociability in society.

In the show, Sherlock and John meet much like they do in the original texts. John, having just returned from war in Afghanistan, is introduced to Sherlock by a mutual acquaintance. In the stories, despite the century gap, Watson has also just returned from war in Afghanistan. Although much time has passed, there is no need to change the location of the war, thus bridging another gap between original text and adaptation. Sherlock instantly reveals his intellectual genius through an analysis of John. Upon viewing the infamous 221b Baker Street, both men

agree to be flat mates. This is the beginning of their friendship. Throughout the rest of the series, John accompanies Sherlock on all of his cases, blogging about the happenings consistently and defending Sherlock's honor against those who try to tarnish his name. The loyalty between these two men is carefully crafted throughout the series, representing the friendship from the original stories, with much greater emphasis on the reasons why these men need each other.

Dr. John Watson

Dr. John Watson is a man haunted by his past in Afghanistan. "A Study in Pink," the first episode of Series One, opens with a representation of John's nightmare and him waking in a cold sweat. The viewer can see the panic and horror in John's eyes, only to be followed by John locking away a pistol in his drawer. Cutting to the next scene, John is meeting with his psychiatrist, where he appears to be a broken man in need of regeneration. When questioned about why he hasn't started blogging, John remarks, "nothing happens to me" ("A Study in Pink"). He also witnesses his psychiatrist noting that he "still has trust issues" ("A Study in Pink"). We see that John is a man troubled by his past, trying to reenter society after being away at war. He has no purpose in life and needs to find reasons to carry on. These are the kind of men most at risk for degeneracy, who are the perfect candidates for adventure stories (i.e. the Holmes cannon). Stephen Arata writes that these adventure stories were "centrally concerned with the possibility of renewal" and, citing David Trotter, they take "exhausted, purposeless men...whom we expect to degenerate or wither away, and transposes them to a new territory, the frontier, where a more vigorous identity can be created" (Arata 80). John is both exhausted and purposeless upon his return from Afghanistan. With no job, little money, and the need for new housing, John needs a change, an adventure. And for him the adventure, the "frontier," is the city of London, where he is able to create a new identity through his friendship with Sherlock. This

opening context also gives John a comparative identity. It shows that he was someone before he met Sherlock, and it isn't until Sherlock's "death" at the end of Series Two that he'll ever be that way again.

In many ways, it is Sherlock who saves John from idle living, with the most tangible evidence being John's blog. In "A Study in Pink," John's psychiatrist recommends that he keep a blog, recording all of his daily activities. John remarks that nothing happens to him, thus he has no purpose for the blog. However, enter Sherlock, and everything changes. By the beginning of Series Two, John's blog is an internet success, reaching 1,895 views overnight. The friendship between these two men and John's role in accompanying Sherlock gives his life purpose. He represents Sherlock to the public, sharing all of the cases and their details. For John, the relationship with Sherlock is rehabilitative. He uses his blog and role in solving cases as a way to reenter society after returning from war. Using the cases, John finally has a perspective for not only his blog, but his personal life as well.

After meeting Sherlock, John also undergoes both physical and psychological changes. Physically, John loses his limp. John was wounded in action while in Afghanistan, a wound that Sherlock claims is psychosomatic when the pair first meet. For John the wound is very real; that is until the thrill of following Sherlock on an investigative lead takes hold, and he forgets about his impairment. From this moment on, John is able to walk on his own, with neither neither limp nor cane. Along with his physical change, John undergoes a psychological change from the first series of *Sherlock* to the final episode in Series Two. While visiting Sherlock's grave in "The Reichenbach Fall," John remarks in a very emotional apostrophe,

> You told me once that you weren't a hero. There were times I didn't even think you were human, but let me tell you this. You were the best man, and

> the most human-human being that I've ever known and no one will ever convince me that you told me a lie. I was so alone, and I owe you so much. Please there's just one more thing, one more miracle, Sherlock, for me. Don't be dead. ("The Reichenbach Fall," transcription mine)

Here we see the depth of John's relationship with Sherlock. He refers to Sherlock as "the best man," and refuses to believe that Sherlock is anything less than that. We also see here the psychological change in John, and his affirmation that his change is in great part a result of his relationship with Sherlock. John states that he was "so alone" and owes so much to Sherlock. It was this relationship and the adventure that it offered that kept John from leading an idle life. With Sherlock around, John resisted social degeneracy through his role as a professional and was deterred from falling into degeneracy through his work with Sherlock. Although it was Sherlock who held the title of consulting detective, John was also a crucial part of the business that Sherlock conducted. After all, it was his blog that brought new clients to 221b Baker Street. His work as a professional, assisting Sherlock in his detective work, serves as John's contribution to society. He is able to find value in his idle life and become more than a burden to society. Both his blog and his role in case solution occupy his time, preventing a fall into social degeneracy and idle living.

Also important to note is that after meeting Sherlock at the beginning of Series One, John never again met with his psychiatrist. It isn't until Sherlock "dies" that we see John revisiting his psychiatrist. She asks the reason for his sudden return and he attributes it to the death of his best friend, Sherlock Holmes. Because of Sherlock's "death," John has lost his adventure, his reason for blogging, and his best friend. Essentially, John has lost his identity —an identity that Sherlock helped him create. Lastly, John has lost his role in the professional sphere. He can no

longer blog about Sherlock's cases and assist in their solutions. He has been torn from professionalism and following Sherlock's death, he recognizes the consequences of this loss. There are many reasons for John's homosocial bond with Sherlock. He relies on this friendship for adventure and, with Sherlock, he feels a sense of identity. He has the ability to rehabilitate both his physical and psychological wounds. Because of this relationship, he needs neither cane nor psychiatrist.

Sherlock Holmes

Just as Sherlock is the reason for John's identity, John also offers Sherlock prevention from degeneracy. The difference, however, is that Sherlock is at risk for criminal degeneracy. In his book, *Degeneration,* German physician Max Nordau explores the characteristics that define a criminal. He describes the "degenerate" as

> necessarily egotistical and impulsive [...]. His excitability appears to him a mark of superiority; he believes himself to be possessed by a peculiar insight lacking in other mortals, and he is fain to despise the vulgar herd for the dulness and narrowness of their minds. The unhappy creature does not suspect that he is conceited about a disease and boasting of a derangement of the mind. (19)

Sherlock is the epitome of Nordau's degenerate. He is both egotistical and impulsive, often being reminded by John the reason for his presence. He shows excitement at the start of a new case, with John serving as his moral balance. As his humanizing companion, John reminds Sherlock of the moral consequences of his work. One of Sherlock's most defining attributes is his detestation for what he sees as inferior human beings. On many occasions, Sherlock remarks that it must be so boring not being him and wonders at what it must be like in other people's heads. One of Sherlock's most infamous lines, in both the original texts and the series, is his claim that John

"see[s] but do[es] not observe" (*A Study in Scarlet* 5). He believes that people see things at a surface level, but do not have the capacity to fully comprehend what exactly they are seeing. They do not observe their surroundings and take into account all of the details as he does. Recalling Nordau's research on criminals, Sherlock does not believe that he is conceited or wrong in his actions. He believes that his superior intellect and skills of deduction are worthy of such a personality. He often criticizes the Scotland Yard officers for not having the ability to live up to his skills. Based on the research of Max Nordau, Sherlock is a prime candidate for criminal degeneracy.

Sherlock's potential for criminal degeneracy raises suspicions amongst others whom he encounters. Police Sgt. Donovan says of Sherlock to John, "You know why he's here? He's not paid or anything. He likes it. He gets off on it. The weirder the crime, the more he gets off. And you know what? One day just showing up won't be enough. One day, we'll be standing around a body and Sherlock Holmes will be the one that put it there [...] Because he's a psychopath. Psychopaths get bored" ("A Study in Pink," transcription mine). She warns John to stay away from the likes of Sherlock. His love of crimes and his ability to solve them raises concern about his involvement. She questions his actions and resources when solving crimes around London. Nonetheless, her suspicions are wrong, as Sherlock never gets involved with criminal activity. When refuting claims that he is a psychopath, Sherlock actually identifies himself as a "high-functioning sociopath" ("A Study in Pink," transcription mine). A sociopath is a person with a personality disorder manifesting itself in extreme antisocial attitudes and behavior and a lack of conscience (*New Oxford American Online Dictionary*). This is a stark contrast to a psychopath, who suffers from chronic mental disorder with abnormal or violent social behavior (*New Oxford American Online Dictionary*).

Although there is a distinction between sociopathic and psychopathic behavior, there is a correlation between sociopathic and criminally degenerative qualities. Both tendencies express themselves through antisocial behavior and a lack of conscience. For someone like Sherlock, having such strong intellect, lack of conscience can be dangerous. The danger is further imposed in Sherlock's role as a consulting detective. Lacking a conscience could mean potential outburst of criminal degeneracy by Sherlock. However, John augments this deficiency with his social skills and morals. Sherlock's sociopathic behavior also affects his relationships in his professional role. Sherlock is unable to communicate and work well with members of the Scotland Yard. He often becomes frustrated with their assistance, commenting that he cannot think when they are present. Sherlock makes no effort to share in professional bonds with anybody besides John, and occasionally Detective Inspector LeStrade. In fact, Sherlock claims to have only one friend in the world: "I don't have friends. I've just got one" ("The Hounds of Baskerville," transcription mine). This is important as it emphasizes the importance of John in Sherlock's life. If male friendship between professionals is what prevents degeneration within society, then it is Sherlock's relationship with John that helps him resist, as this is the only friendship that he has. John provides a humanizing balance to the sometimes over-rational mind of Sherlock.

Referring to his original character, Arthur Conan Doyle once said, "Holmes is as inhuman as a Babbage's Calculating machine" (qtd. in Green xv-xvi). Conan Doyle meant for Holmes to be both more and less than a man all at once. Holmes is less than a man, in that he is equivalent to a calculating machine and yet he is more than a man because his intellect is that of a machine, whose only duty is to calculate and analyze. This is also the person that is reflected in *Sherlock* and through John, this calculating man-machine is balanced. John is also able to assist

Sherlock in solving certain aspects of the cases, proving that his knowledge is just as important as Sherlock's. In Series One Episode Three, "The Great Game," John criticizes Sherlock for not knowing anything about the solar system. Sherlock defends himself by asserting that this type of knowledge is "not important" ("The Great Game"). He remarks, "Ordinary people fill their heads with all kinds of rubbish. And that makes it hard to get at the stuff that matters [...]. All that matters to me is the work. Without that, my brain rots" ("The Great Game," transcription mine). Here we see Sherlock's deep-rooted connection to his detective work. For him, it is all that matters. This scene is also another example of Sherlock's sense of his own superiority. He refers to others as "ordinary people," while placing himself above all the "rubbish" that fills their heads. But what is most important here is that Sherlock is wrong. Later in this same episode, it is knowledge of the solar system that helps Sherlock to solve his case and save the life of a child. The only reason for his solar system knowledge is because John brought it to his attention. It was John's criticism of his knowledge that led Sherlock to develop and acquire information about the solar system. This happens again in the same episode; only it is John's knowledge of television that sparks Sherlock's investigation. John is able to identify a picture of a talk-show host and with this identification, Sherlock is able to pursue an investigative lead. John stabilizes Sherlock's rational mind and often-inhuman nature.

Jim Moriarty

The best example of Sherlock's need for his relationship with John comes in the form of Sherlock's greatest adversary, Jim Moriarty. In many ways, Moriarty is Sherlock. Moriarty matches him in terms of intellect and genius and makes his living in a similar fashion. Sherlock is the only consulting detective in the world, while Moriarty is the only consulting criminal. The striking difference between the two men is John; Moriarty does not share a homosocial bond in

the way that Sherlock and John do. In "The Reichenbach Fall," Moriarty acknowledges that he and Sherlock are the same, saying, "You need me or you're nothing. Because we're just alike, you and I. Except you're boring. You're on the side of the angels" ("The Reichenbach Fall," transcription mine). For Moriarty, the difference between Sherlock and himself is the "side" that each chooses to work for. Being a psychopath, Moriarty has chosen to oppose the "angels" as a consulting criminal. On the side of the "angels" is someone like John, who has strong moral values and a very humanized nature. Sherlock, as a sociopath, teeters the line between Moriarty and the angels, but his relationship with John keeps him on the side of the "angels," a relationship that Moriarty lacks.

Unlike Sherlock, Moriarty has no bonds with humanizing and moral people like John. Instead, he works a web of criminals, never bonding with any of them. People are merely used by him to conduct business. Moriarty remarks, "Aren't ordinary people adorable? Oh, you know. You've got John. I should get myself a live-in one" ("The Reichenbach Fall," transcription mine). Moriarty and Sherlock share the view of others as ordinary in comparison to their superior selves. This idea resonates with the criminal degenerate as defined by Max Nordau. Like Sherlock, Moriarty feels he has a "mark of superiority" and believes that he is "possessed by a peculiar insight lacking in other mortals" (Nordau 19). Also important here is Moriarty's remark that Sherlock has John, as he goes on to say that he should "get [himself] a live-in one" ("The Reichenbach Fall"). Moriarty sees John as constituting the difference between Sherlock and himself.

Moriarty represents Sherlock without John. He is an example of what Sherlock has the potential to become without the bond he shares with John. In the original texts, Moriarty is not triangulated with Holmes and Watson in this way. The show emphasizes the potential in

Moriarty's character, using him to highlight the importance of the relationship between Sherlock and John. *Sherlock* plays with ideas of criminality relating to Sherlock, while someone like Moriarty fuels these suspicions.

Conclusion

Since they were first published in 1887, the Sherlock Holmes stories have sparked a number of adaptations, yet what is most fascinating about the BBC's adaptation with *Sherlock* is its integration of literary criticism and masculine friendship. While creating a ternary between Sherlock, John, and Moriarty, *Sherlock* underlines the relationship between degeneracy, friendship, and professionalism. For Sherlock and John, professional friendship is what deters them from either criminal or social degeneracy, respectively. They are able to use their roles as detective and blogger in the professional sphere to eliminate the need for degenerate actions. Moriarty, on the other hand, has neither friendship, nor a place in the professional landscape. As a consulting criminal, he does not bond with anybody and works solitarily. He exemplifies the threat that masculinity faces without professional friendship.

Sherlock Holmes and John Watson share an interdependent homosocial bond, while still maintaining their masculine identities. They are productive in society, mostly because they have each other. Sherlock is driven away from the world of criminal degeneracy because of his humanizing companion, John. Likewise, John is kept from an idle life of social degeneracy because of the excitement and professionalism that Sherlock offers. At the turn of the century, the stories of Holmes and Watson offered a heroism and adventure that supported the flight from domesticity. Men could use these two characters as examples of socially functioning men who do not rely on marital companionship. Today, Sherlock and John share what some would call a "bromance," offering their contemporary audience a re-envisioned heroic friendship. They too

are examples of men who can function successfully in society thanks to an interdependent reliance on each other. In *Sherlock*, we get a clear example of the man Sherlock would be without John, an example that is found wanting in the stories. Jim Moriarty is the psychopath to Sherlock's sociopath. He has the highly superior intellect that Sherlock finds stimulating, yet he does not offer the balance that someone as moral and humanized as John does.

There are many ways one can study *Sherlock Holmes* and its array of adaptations. However, the friendship between Holmes and Watson proves to be the crux of the stories, especially when using the BBC *Sherlock*. These stories, and *Sherlock*, argue a case for the role of professional male friendship as a deterrent to both social and criminal degeneracy. This friendship offers fans a sense of consistency in an uncertain world.

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