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## Debunking the Detective:

A Comparative Study on the Narratives Found in *The Blanched Soldier*, *The Lion's Mane* and *A Study in Scarlet* by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle

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## **Abstract**

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle wrote 56 short stories in the Sherlock Holmes series, yet only two are told from the narrative perspective of Holmes himself. I attempted to compare and contrast Holmes' narration in *The Blanched Soldier* and *The Lion's Mane* with Watson's narration in *A Study in Scarlet*. I explored narratological theories and previous research done on Watson's narration in order to find an explanation to why Watson's narration seemed to be the more successful narrative. I found that Watson as a character possesses characteristics which make him more suitable for the role of narrating while Holmes, though not an unsuccessful narrator, cannot recreate the balance between the questioner and the storyteller on his own.

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## Introduction

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle has created a detective story that is not only a medium of entertainment but a pioneering work which takes the first step in applying actual science and forensics to detective fiction. O'Brien states that Sherlock Holmes was “at the forefront of innovation in solving crimes using fingerprints, dogs, and the idiosyncrasies of typewriters” (O'Brien). The Sherlock Holmes stories were not only prominent literature in the advancement of detective science, but also complex works which depict characters known across the world.

It is hardly surprising that the Sherlock Holmes stories, with their many movie and tv-show adaptions, have been able to stay culturally relevant. However, the literary complexity of these stories should not be underestimated. Metress argues that it is Conan Doyle’s skilled authorship that has created this popularity. He says, “It is because Conan Doyle is both diplomat and detective, both concealer and revealer, that readers have continued (...) to open up, the pages of his fiction” (48). There has been a substantial amount of research done, focusing on various character aspects. However, though the area of narratology has not been overlooked, there is a lack of comparative research with the focus on the narrators of the Sherlock Holmes stories. In existing research, the fact that there is another narrator, beyond Watson, seems to have been ignored. This additional narrator is no other than Sherlock Holmes himself. Out of the 56 short stories, Holmes narrates only two, “The Lion’s Mane” and “The Blanched Soldier”.

The aim of this essay is to investigate not only why Watson’s narrative seems to be the more successful one, but also why Holmes’ narrative appears to have been rather unsuccessful. Doyle only used Holmes’ narrative in two short stories and he also openly criticized Holmes’ narrative. Doyle writes about “The Lion’s Mane” in his essay ‘How I Made My List’, published in *The Strand Magazine* in 1927: (“The Lion’s Mane”) “is hampered by being told by Holmes himself, a method which I employed only twice, as it certainly cramps the narrative”.

There have been 4 novels and 56 short stories in the Sherlock Holmes series. I will compare Holmes’ narrative in “The Lion’s Mane” and “The Blanched Soldier” with Watson’s narrative. In order to narrow down the field of research, I will only analyze Watson’s narrative in *A Study in Scarlet*, which includes the first ever meeting between Holmes and Watson. This is important, not only since it displays how Watson views Holmes but also because it shows how Holmes is depicted to the reader through Watson’s narrative. I will first present Watson and Holmes as narrators by looking at previous research on narratology in the Sherlock Holmes stories, while mainly focusing on the characteristic disposition of Holmes and Watson. I will then analyze the areas in which the narratives differ in sense of point of view and reliability in order to enable a comparison and contrast between Watson’s and Holmes’ narrative. I claim that, in contrast to Holmes’, Watson’s narrative is more successful, not only because of Watson possessing character traits which make him

more suitable for narrating, but also because of the disposition of Holmes' and Watson's relationship enabling Watson's narrative to function.

## The Science of 'Revealing and Concealing'

In the Sherlock Holmes stories, suspense is a vital ingredient for catching the reader's attention. According to Bennett and Royle, readers "tend to want to resolve suspense" (277). But how is this created? Metress claims that the relationship between Holmes and Watson can be likened to that of the "detective and the diplomat" (45), with Holmes wanting to conceal the story while Watson wants to display it. This characteristic property of Watson gives him a predisposition which perhaps could be argued to make him more suited for narrating a suspenseful story. Metress further argues that the reason the Sherlock Holmes stories are as successful as they are, is because they simultaneously reveal and conceal the anxieties intimidating late-Victorian England (46). In his opinion, Conan Doyle succeeds in revealing the disorientation that supports the weak social order at the same time as hiding impulsive passions underneath the reassuring exterior of the aristocrat (48). Thus, one might think that Watson possesses the role of a grounded character, while Holmes is the untamed aristocrat.

Holmes' narrative has to function without Watson. Not only because Watson is not the narrator but also because he does not make an appearance in "The Lion's Mane" nor in "The Blanched Soldier", thus he cannot function as a second narrator either. Watson is only mentioned when Holmes is speculating over how Watson could have made the story better, had he been there to tell it or simply been a part of it: "... had he but been with me, how much he might have made of so wonderful a happening and of my eventual triumph against every difficulty!" (Doyle, "The Lion's Mane", 1039). This is also expressed in "The Blanched Soldier": "By cunning questions and ejaculations of wonder he could elevate my simple art, which is but systemised common sense, into a prodigy" (Doyle, 969). Here we can see that Holmes himself recognizes that his cleverness is portrayed in a much more noticeable way from Watson's narrative perspective than it is from his own. So he does not only claim that Watson is the better narrator but also that he, as a character in the story, helps to promote Holmes' own genius.

Holmes' narrative functions by him letting the reader follow his thought process while solving the case as well as his recollections of the events. Holmes' analyzes of the cases are mostly presented in long paragraphs, where he explains to the reader the deductions he makes in order to solve the case. Holmes' narrative thus tends to become one-sided in that Holmes is retelling the events and solving the case at the same time as trying to function as a narrator. His narrative can be confusing to the reader in the sense that he, in the paragraphs explaining his thought process, gives the reader much information in relatively little time. As a result, the reader is not given time to process his thoughts.

As a result of having direct access to Holmes' mind, the reader sometimes knows more than other characters in the story. In this sense, Holmes is not holding back information from the reader as much as he is from the other characters. Once the reader feels his knowledge is sufficient to continue the story, the other characters are at times left with questions which the reader has already been given the answer to through Holmes' narration. The need for a questioning character is thus eliminated since the questions have already been answered. As a narrator, Holmes reveals his thought processes, which he is not in a habit of explaining normally when Watson is the narrator. He does, however, conceal some of his thoughts as the conclusion of his deductions is not revealed until the end. This effort to build suspense climaxes at the end of the story when the mystery is solved. The way which Holmes chooses to explain some things but still keeps vital information to himself helps, not only to create suspense but also to create reader frustration. With Watson not being there to share the frustration, the reader is left to speculate on his own about the information Holmes gives the reader.

Krasner claims that while Holmes' mind goes to other places, Watson's narrative perspective helps to keep a level of materiality and familiarity (426). Similarly, Frank argues that Doyle has made Watson into a "man in the street" (176) in his accounts of Holmes' investigations. If we consider these facts, Watson appears to be the more sensible character. In addition to this, it is then possible to see how Watson has the function of being a responder to the strong sweeping current of thought that was produced by the philosophers at the time of late-Victorian England (Frank 176). Watson might have been equally confused about Holmes' mental capacity as he was about the new world views that he represented. Watson is, like the Victorian reader at the time, perplexed by the new concepts of crime detecting science and elements of spiritism. Krasner argues that it is when Holmes shows his brilliant talents that Watson directs the attention to something materialistically mundane (426). It is in this sense that Watson becomes the more grounded character, merely observing as Holmes goes on clairvoyant journeys into his psyche. Holmes is therefore perceived as more mystical and mysterious through Watson's narration than he does through his own. Holmes is first described to Watson by Stamford as someone who cannot be defined: "It is not easy to express the inexpressible, (...) Holmes is a little too scientific for my tastes - it approaches to cold-bloodedness" (Doyle, *A Study in Scarlet*, 5). Here we can see that suspicions against Holmes' character are already raised. However, despite this, Watson declares that he would like to meet him. When they meet for the first time, Holmes possesses knowledge of Watson even though they have never met before. This astounds Watson and he later asks Stamford how Holmes possibly could have known all of those things. Stamford explains to him that no one knows, to which Watson responds,

“Oh! a mystery is it?” (...) “This is very piquant. I am much obliged to you for bringing us together. ‘The proper study of mankind is man,’ you know” (Doyle, *A Study in Scarlet*, 7).

Here it is quite clear that Watson views Holmes as a mystery, a riddle to be studied and solved. Smajic claims that the real mystery in the Sherlock Holmes stories has always been Holmes himself (132). As the story goes on it becomes clear that Watson, while telling a story, has devoted his narrative to the study of Holmes. He devotes paragraphs to describing Holmes’ habits and peculiarities in life and declares that his interest in Holmes has increased and deepened as the weeks have gone by. It is through Watson’s enthusiasm that the reader can come to relate to Watson. Since it is the narrator’s wish to solve the mystery of Sherlock Holmes, the reader is thus also engaged in this quest.

According to Krasner, although many critics are confused by the recognition of the Sherlock Holmes stories, it has been concluded that they seem to have gained their popularity because of their involvement with Victorian cultural anxiety (424). In Victorian times, intellectual labor was considered to be suspect by people in the middle class. Watson is also a middle-class Victorian who craves a more secure and solid world (Krasner 426). Holmes’ intellectual work can be interpreted as being incomprehensibly mysterious, as displayed by Holmes’ own description of it:

“Personally, I had gone over the whole ground again, both physically and mentally, but with no new conclusions. In all my chronicles the reader will find no case which brought me so completely to the limit of my powers. Even my imagination could conceive no solution to the mystery” (Doyle, “The Lion’s Mane”, 1045).

It is clear that there is something about Holmes’ work that can be considered elusive and perhaps even likened with sorcery, as can be seen from this sentence, “For heaven’s sake, Holmes, use all the powers you have and spare no pains to lift the curse from this place, for life is becoming unendurable” (Doyle, “The Lion’s Mane”, 1048). Holmes is spoken of as a being with powers that can lift curses. These sort of comments by other characters create a distinguishable aura around Holmes which gives the reader the feeling of Holmes being a superior being. However, since the reader has access to Holmes’ thought process through his narration, the feeling of him being mythical dissipates and he regains character substance which grounds him as a person. He is, in this way, made into a real and understandable character. An example of this is when Holmes explains how he conducts his analysis: “I now proceed, using my familiar method of logical analysis, to narrow down the possible solutions” (Doyle, “The Blanched Soldier”, 964). Holmes describes his thought process as logical and proceeds to walk the reader through the various stages of solving a case. The

only problem with this sentence is that what is logical to Holmes might not be logical to the reader, or Watson. Although Holmes' work could be seen as calculative and reality based, the reader, like Watson, cannot solve the mystery before Holmes. So, what creates appreciation of Holmes' genius is not so much his conclusions by themselves since they are intricately and logically explained but rather that the reader cannot access this results of this process until the end when it is complete. From Watson's perspective it might then seem as if Holmes has managed to solve the case all at once. However, since the reader has gained access via Holmes' own narration, to the explanations behind his deductions. This means that the reader sees the process of elimination and thus the spiritual superiority or aura around Holmes is demystified.

Watson does express concerns about the obscurity of Holmes' work: "I confess that I was considerably startled by this fresh proof of the practical nature of my companion's theories. My respect for his powers of analysis increased wondrously" (Doyle, *A Study in Scarlet*, 13). Although he is startled by the fact that a person can use information in this way, he is equally intrigued and interested. As narrators, Holmes and Watson are both as much of a detective as the other, but with different goals in focus. Holmes wants to solve crimes, finding satisfaction only when the mystery is solved. Watson, however, sees Holmes as the mystery and thus devotes his narration to partly telling the story of the crime but also as a tool to study Holmes. In this way, Holmes is the real mystery of the text in Watson's narration.

## Creating Suspense Through Frustration

Smajic refers to the "Watsonian sidekick" (72) as a failure to solve the problem that the detective solves and emphasizes that this is not a consequence of poor vision but a failure to understand what one sees. Thus Watson fails to see that which Holmes does and can, like the reader, observe Holmes in order to understand his inner mental workings. According to Krasner, the stories are not constructed with Holmes' detective work in main focus but rather with a focus on Watson's dissatisfaction when failing to understand his detective work (425). Since Holmes does not always speak or explain his thought processes, Watson has to portray Holmes from the outside (Krasner 425). He further argues that Watson's narrative frustration comes from his inability to access Holmes' mind, thus creating a mental distance, despite being physically close (425).

When Watson is narrating, he is the reader's main informant, the person who both tells the story and holds back the details. It would then perhaps be possible to see how Watson and Holmes mirror this relationship within the story. The narrative frustration created within the story exists between Watson and Holmes and the exterior frustration is created between Watson and the reader (Krasner 435). As a result, the reader shares Watson's frustration of wanting to know and understand the intricate workings of Holmes' mind and is additionally frustrated by Watson's inability to see that

which Holmes sees. Smajic explains that the difference between Holmes' and Watson's minds could be likened to the difference between seeing and observing. He claims that in the latter, one must know what to look for and what one is looking at (123). He is thus arguing that what separates the two characters is their amount and range of knowledge, as well as their ability to apply it to what they see. This means that when the pair observes a crime scene, Watson is sometimes blind to things which are obvious to Holmes. As a result, the reader cannot see these hidden things either and is left with unanswered questions.

Through Watson's narration, the reader is given two stories. Firstly, the solving of the crimes, but also the question of how Holmes managed to solve it. Since the reader, through Watson's narrative, cannot know how Holmes reaches his conclusions, the reader shares the will to know. The way in which Holmes' thought process is explained through Watson's narration is similar to the way it is done in Holmes' narration, by using long paragraphs which give explanations of the deductions. Watson describes Holmes in his investigation with all of the strange things he does. Yet, although he explains what Holmes does, he never provides an answer to why Holmes is doing something. This leaves the reader wondering, probably much like Watson himself. Holmes then proceeds to present his deductions as results of his investigation. After Watson has been sufficiently astounded he asks Holmes to explain himself. However, Holmes does not like to explain his thought process. He shows the source of his unwillingness to explain by saying, "You know a conjurer gets no credit when once he has explained his trick and if I show you too much of my method of working, you will come to the conclusion that I am a very ordinary individual after all" (Doyle, *A Study in Scarlet*, 21). From this quote we can see that Holmes thinks that if he explains himself, he also appears less remarkable. Here we can also observe that Holmes does not think of himself as being extraordinary. By likening himself to a conjurer he explains to Watson that the only reason Watson finds his work remarkable is because he does not know how Holmes reaches his conclusions. Even when Holmes explains his deductions in a logical way, it is still in a sense non-logical to think that one person could perceive that much information at once. The fact that the reader knows and understands as little as Watson does as narrator only increases the suspense of wanting to find out how Holmes solved the case. Watson thus asks the questions that the reader would like to ask and in this way conveys an exciting story which keeps the readers frustrated. However, this frustration is satisfied in the end when the questions are answered. To contrast this with Holmes narration, the reader does not have nearly the same amount of questions when being told the story from his perspective.

The narrative frustration changes as the role of narrator is given to Holmes instead of Watson. Although the reader can share Watson's frustration in not being able to quite understand Holmes or acquire all of the information, the reader is still frustrated with Holmes as a narrator but in a different way. Holmes' narrative gives the reader access to his thought process and reasoning

while solving a case. However, although the reader gets access to more information than he would have, had Holmes not been narrating, there are still restrictions as to how much information the reader is allowed to get. The difference between the frustration created by Watson's narrative and Holmes' is that, in Watson's narrative the frustration can be argued to be experienced simultaneously by Watson and the reader. Thus Watson works as a representation of the reader's frustration as well as an inquirer to solve this frustration. However, in Holmes' narrative there is only one character which the reader can focus his frustration on, that is, Holmes as a narrator. Although Holmes' narrative can lessen the reader's frustration by offering more information, it can not be dispersed since the reader must now on his own process that information, without the help of Watson.

There can be more than one narrator, working on different levels, and the primary narrator is the narrator who tells the main story (Jong 20). Jong further explains that it is common that this primary narrator is complimented by another character who shares his story about an event, using direct speech. This is the secondary narrator (20). This happens, for example, whenever Holmes explains to Watson how he solved the case. Although it is important to remember that Watson is the primary narrator and ultimately the one retelling Holmes' words, it is fair to claim that Holmes becomes the secondary narrator when he performs his analysis of the case. In this way, we can claim that Holmes still has a role as narrator even when Watson is narrating. Watson is then technically assigned the role of in-text narratee. Prince claims that even if the narratee is not specifically singled out by 'you', that is to say, directly addressed or referenced to, the narratee may still be a participant in the story which is told to him (20). He further explains that the narratee can be a character and this character might in addition play a number of other roles and can also function as the narrator (21).

According to Prince, the narrator can misjudge the narratee-character's abilities when it comes to knowledge and personality. The reader can then find out that the narratee-character might not be what the narrator described (21). Hühn claims that there are three important aspects to consider when picturing the narrator. That is, status, contact, and stance (360). He declares that status regards the speaker's relation to the speaking activity, such as social identity, range of knowledge and intellectual and moral trustworthiness (360). Contact encompasses the narrator's relationship towards the narratee. Thus it is important to consider the following aspects of that relationship: intimacy to formality, the narrator's attitude towards the narration, the level of confidence or hesitation and whether a consciousness of the narration activity exists or not (Hühn 361). Stance involves the teller's relationship to the characters he is narrating. This is defined by how the narrator maintains their language, spatio-temporal perspective and values (Hühn 361).

The primary narrator in *A Study in Scarlet* is, as previously stated, Watson. Holmes does, by speaking about his deductions and theories, at times take up the majority of the dialog. In this way, Holmes becomes the secondary narrator. Watson, as a narrator, is in a habit of constantly

describing Holmes. By letting Holmes become a second narrator, Watson is as a character an observer of Holmes himself. Although Watson's descriptions of Holmes are numerous, Holmes does not spend much time in his own narrative talking about Watson. This is hardly surprising, considering that Watson is not a part of the story in either of the two stories he narrates. He does, however, give some description of Watson, as a character, in "The Lion's Mane" and as a narrator in "The Blanched Soldier". "(...) Watson has some remarkable characteristics of his own to which in his modesty he has given small attention amid his exaggerated estimates of my own performances" (Doyle, "The Blanched Soldier", 958). Here he claims that Watson, in his narrative, exaggerates Holmes' abilities to solve a case. Holmes also accuses Watson of not presenting the facts in a sufficient way and writing for the reader's approval rather than strictly narrating the events themselves, which can be seen in the following sentence: "(...) I have often had occasion to point out to him how superficial are his own accounts and to accuse him of pandering to popular taste instead of confining himself rigidly to facts and figures" (Doyle, "The Blanched Soldier", 958). This shows how Holmes views Watson's authorship and narrative. Not only does Holmes point out flaws in Watson's narration but he is also forced to admit that it is not as easy as he first might have thought to write an entertaining detective story. Despite of criticizing Watson's narrative, Holmes also shows that he understands that there is more to narration than just recounting the events and stating the facts, as we can see from the following sentence: "I am compelled to admit that, having taken my pen in my hand, I do begin to realise that the matter must be presented in such a way as may interest the reader" (Doyle, "The Blanched Soldier", 958). Here, similarly to the previous quote, Holmes ponders over the difficulty of narrating. By doing this and addressing the reader he is not only establishing himself as a conscious narrator but also his attitude towards the narration.

If we were to compare Holmes and Watson as characters in each other's stories with the picture we have of them as narrators, we notice that Watson is not as prominent as Holmes despite being the narrator in *A Study in Scarlet*. The analysis of Holmes in Watson's narration shifts the focus away from himself. This characteristic property of Watson is recognized in Holmes' narrative as well. As can be seen in the previously quoted sentence Watson has "remarkable characteristics of his own" (Doyle, "The Blanched Soldier", 958) that he does not pay any attention to. Holmes also mentions that "The good Watson had at that time deserted me for a wife, the only selfish action which I can recall in our associations" (Doyle, "The Blanched Soldier", 958). Although these examples speak of Watson as a good person, they are, because of their nonchalant nature, perhaps even more telling about the character of Holmes. Holmes as a narrator is still very much the same analytical and logical detective that we are told of from Watson's narrative. One major difference, however, is the credit which he awards himself. In his own narrative he has no problem admitting his own faults nor does he credit himself for being clever and able to solve the case faster than anyone else. It has already

been established that Watson has a way of elevating Holmes' cleverness. Thus, Holmes' diminished ego might be a result of the fact that Watson is not a part of the story.

Holmes keeps close narrative contact with his readers. He is aware of Watson's narrative and references to it by criticizing his authorship as previously mentioned, explaining to the reader that he himself will now be the narrator and tell his own story. Holmes does at one point even reference the reader by addressing him as 'you', which the following sentence demonstrates. "You will know, or Watson has written in vain, (...)" (Doyle, "The Lion's Mane", 1046). This is an example of how Holmes has an intimate narrative relationship to his readers. This relationship is also noticeable when considering the fact that Holmes does not seemingly leave anything out of the narration, at least as far as the reader will be able to tell. He is very conscious of the narration activity and is also a confident narrator. Even though he confesses that the act of narration has proven to be more difficult than he expected, he does not express any hesitation in his narration towards the reader or that which he is telling. Although this gives the reader the impression of a trustworthy narrator with a mind of his own, it is worth mentioning that he does keep a rather formal tone when he speaks. This is noticeable in the way which he recounts events as precise facts and gives the reader the sense that he is credible and knowledgeable.

## The Reliability of the Narrative

There are many things in any given narrative which affect the way we interpret the narrator. We can for instance learn more about Holmes and Watson by thinking about their ability to narrate, that is, the articulateness of the narrative. It is the stylistic choices that help the reader to characterize the speaker's discourse and mind (Hühn 361). The differing point of views of Watson's and Holmes' narratives can perhaps be argued to be what separates the two narratives the most. Comparing the narratives' point of views will help to characterize Holmes and Watson as narrators. What is then concluded about the narrator has a great influence on whether or not we deem him credible enough to accept his narration (Hühn 361). Thus, analyzing this will also allow us to see how Holmes and Watson alter the reader's experience, in the sense of whether or not we consider them reliable as narrators.

The reliability of the narrative, the distance and narrative speed all affect the reader's perception of the narrative (Prince 60). The speed of a narrative can be defined as the relationship between the duration of told events and the length of a narrative (Prince 55). This is important to mention as it is one of the few aspects of narration which does not change when comparing Watson's narrative to Holmes'. In fact, the speed of the narratives is somewhat equal. Having established that the speed will not affect the reader's perception of the two narrators in different ways we need to consider the fact that the narrator also has a certain distance from the events he narrates (Prince 12).

There could be a physical distance in which the distance is temporal, an intellectual distance or a moral or emotional distance (Prince 13). Watson's and Holmes' narrated stories both exist in the past; thus, the temporal distance of their narrations is similar. However, the distance the narrator has from what he is telling can affect our emotional commitment to and intellectual admiration of the characters (Prince 13). Thus, we will consider the intellectual, moral and emotional distance of the two narratives later in this chapter.

Personal opinions about the characteristics of the narrators may vary greatly but if the narrator is considered unreliable, the reader is then forced to reinterpret previous statements in order to find out the truth about the told events (Prince 13). The narrator could also be described as the one who has the influence to tell his biased or tinted version of a story. This causes the narrator to become an agent of perception who can tell whichever aspect of the story he chooses (Bal 19). According to Hühn, if the narrator character is experienced by the reader as unreliable, this diverts the reader's focus from the story to the teller and the telling. Thus attention is taken from the facts themselves to the circumstances of informing and the person who conveys the events (360). Therefore it is essential to define Holmes and Watson in order to see how they affect the reliability of the narration. Hühn claims that we can define the narrator by considering what kind of knowledge he possesses, his reliability, articulateness and what his attitude is towards that which he narrates (358).

In order to consider how we perceive these different narratives it is important to consider the credibility of the narrator. As previously argued, neither of the narrators show signs of being unreliable narrators. There is, however, evidence of there being differences in the way which things are interpreted. An example of this is the previously mentioned different ways which Holmes and Watson view Holmes' deduction skills. It is fair to claim that Dr. Watson can be experienced as an empathetic man, perhaps even more so because of the stark contrast that is created by his friendship with Holmes. Holmes himself seizes the opportunity to declare his unemotional affiliations by saying: "...if I burden myself with a companion in my various little inquiries it is not done out of sentiment..." (Doyle, "The Blanched Soldier", 958). This touches upon an area in which the two narrators differ greatly, the emotional distance towards that which is narrated.

Holmes has been described as both cold and logical. He also seems to be lacking some of the natural responses which an emotionally upsetting situation normally would evoke. In "The Lion's Mane", Holmes sees one of his friends dead on the ground and his reaction is to start looking for clues as to who the killer could possibly have been while other people around him are horrified. "My companion was paralysed by the sudden horror of it, but I, as may well be imagined, had every sense on the alert" (Doyle, "The Lion's Mane", 1040). It is useful to compare this to when Watson first sees a dead body together with Holmes in *A Study in Scarlet*. Watson becomes rather floored by the sight. "All these details I observed afterwards. At present my attention was centred upon the

single, grim, motionless figure which lay stretched upon the boards (...)” (Doyle, *A Study in Scarlet*, 16). Here we can see the differences in the two narrator’s emotional distance. After confirming that the man is indeed dead, Holmes starts to look for clues. Although the dead man was a friend of Holmes’ he does not seem bothered by the sight or the event itself. Nor does he express any sort of sentimental speculations or feelings to the reader. Watson, on the other hand, reacts the opposite way. He cannot observe anything other than the dead body, yet he did not know the person. Watson seems to exhibit a slightly more normal response to unexpectedly seeing a dead body. Therefore, we can claim that by exhibiting a more relatable reaction, Watson enables the reader to feel an emotional commitment to him. However, since Holmes shows a great emotional distance he does not have the capacity to make the reader feel sympathy for him, however this does not impede the reader’s ability to admire his intellect.

The intellectual distances that the two narrators possess are different. Holmes as a narrator is able to explain the things he sees and how he interprets them and can also show the reader how he is able to conclude that which he does. Watson on the other hand, though clever, does not possess the same intellectual abilities that Holmes does. In his narrative, he cannot himself explain to the reader how the case is solved, but rather retell Holmes’ explanation. It can be said that though the reader might be able to relate to Watson, he can only admire Holmes.

Intellectual capacity is not the only relevant factor when comparing intellectual distance. The narrators also possess different amounts and ranges of knowledge. Holmes only gathers knowledge which he believes might be useful for solving future or present cases which he explains in the following sentence: “(...) I hold a vast store of out-of-the-way knowledge without scientific system, but very available for the needs of my work” (Doyle, “The Lion’s Mane”, 1046). This means that in order for Holmes to solve the case by the process of deduction, he needs to have a sufficient amount of information which can help him to interpret what it is he sees. Through this sentence it is also established that Holmes possesses particularly unusual knowledge. However, the following quote, expressed by Watson, shows that Holmes at the same time lacks the most basic common knowledge. This also makes Watson confused. “His ignorance was as remarkable as his knowledge” (Doyle, *A Study in Scarlet*, 8). The amazement Watson expresses here about Holmes’ limited knowledge is apparently so profound that he composes a list called “Sherlock Holmes - his limits” (Doyle, *A Study in Scarlet*, 9) and presents it to the reader. Through this, the reader might be able to determine that Watson could be a slightly more reliable narrator regarding the facts of everyday life and common sense. The very precise knowledge that Holmes makes a point of knowing is also reliable but puts the reader in the position of questioning his view on the events told.

Watson can thus be described as the more reliable narrator when it comes to presenting the story as it happened with the expected emotional and logical human responses. In this way, the

reader must be aware that Holmes' narration, though factually correct, is his tinted version of the story. This forces the reader to reconsider, not the value of what Holmes chooses to narrate, but rather what he chooses to not narrate. It also allows the reader to speculate that he might only narrate the events which he feels will be beneficial for presenting the case. Thus leaving out details which would have been included, had Watson narrated the story. These details could be things like emotional responses or maybe even speculations made by using common knowledge. Holmes as a narrator cannot include these, since we know that he is either as a character ignorant of such things, or as a narrator, unwilling to include them in his narration. Either way, it can be argued that determining the reliability of Holmes' narrative might not be done by questioning the knowledge that he does possess, but rather to question the lack thereof.

## A Shift in Point of View

The point of view of the narrative affects the reader's perceptions and interpretations of the story, enabling the reader to decide if the narrated events are true or not (Prince 54). Both Holmes' and Watson's narrated stories use a fixed internal point of view which means that the story is presented on the basis of one character's feelings, perceptions and knowledge (Prince 51-2). As in the stories told by Holmes and Watson, the narrator's knowledge of other characters can be restricted to their sense impressions and external information. This, however, does not mean that the narrator is not keeping information from the addressee (Hühn 358).

The concept of narrator stands for the inner-textual speech position from which the narrative discourse derives. It is also this position that creates references to characters and events that the chosen discourse is about (Hühn 351). A narrative in a story might refer to other stories, comments on narrators and narratee, or perhaps even discuss the narration itself (Prince 115). Considering that the Sherlock Holmes stories are autobiographical, the narrator's self-awareness of creating a narration is evident on both Watson's and Holmes' accounts. Furthermore, they are both narrators who are characters in the stories they narrate. This creates a homodiegetic narrative which means that the reader can find out more about the narrator through the story itself, as well as the narration of the story (Phelan 38).

According to Prince, the meta narrative is useful in the sense that it can slow down a narrative's speed and is thus affecting the narrative's rhythm. The meta narrative then constitutes an interpretation of given information and can help to define and explain the narrator and his relationship to the narratee (Prince 117). The amount of explaining the narrator feels is sufficient to give the reader is also a strong indication of what the narrator thinks of his narratee (Prince 125). If there are comments that the narrator makes which are beyond the story told, this is a good source for finding out who the narrator is and establishing what kind of character we are dealing with. Comments like

these can be summaries, analyzes or generalizations (Hühn 358). The comments of the narrator's meta narrative add to his or her character's complexity, thus affecting the reader's perception of the narrator and helping to answer the reader's questions about how some of the told events should be interpreted (Prince 126). However, it is important to remember that the reader can be given false facts if the meta narrative is untruthful (Prince 127). The narrator's attitude towards what he tells is noticeable in the way in which he describes the events or characters. This can help the reader not only distinguish what he thinks about the matter but also to characterize the narrator (Hühn 361). According to Barthes, it is easier to detect signs of the narrator in a text than it is to detect signs of the reader. However, if the narrator presents information which he already knows a "suspension of meaningful dimension" (206) occurs. This can be seen as evidence of the reader (Barthes 206) since there is simply no point for the narrator to recite facts which he already knows unless it is done for the sake of clarifying the told events to the reader. Prince claims that the amount of relevant questions the reader has to ask varies greatly depending on the narrative (110).

Both Watson and Holmes tell similar stories, yet from different point of views and perceptions. It has been concluded that though neither of these characters can be deemed unreliable, there is certainly a strong tendency for them to tell a version of the story which is tinted by their point of view. This is a result of the fact that their narratives are fixed internal point of views. By analyzing this and meta narrative we can see how they both influence the events told in the stories and how this affect the readers perception of the told events.

Holmes has, as previously argued, a clear tendency to comment on the narration itself. This is one of the clear signs of meta narration. In this way, Holmes is very much aware of the act of his narration. Watson is also aware, though he does not speak to the reader in the same fashion as Holmes does, nor ponder the activity of narration itself. In the very beginning of *A Study in Scarlet*, it says: "Being a Reprint from the Reminiscences of John H. Watson, M.D., Late of the Army Medical Department" (Doyle, *A Study in Scarlet*, 3). The fact that it says "the reminiscences" of Watson means that we can conclude that Watson, as a character within the story, was aware of the act of the narration in the sense that he tells and reflects on past events with the intention of wanting his story to reach an audience. Furthermore, as stated earlier, the narratives are homodiegetic since Holmes informs the reader about the act of narration through the story, as he discusses both Watson's and his own narration.

Holmes' meta narrative mostly consists of him explaining his thought process while solving the case, yet he claims that "The narratives of Watson have accustomed the reader, no doubt, to the fact that I do not waste words or disclose my thoughts while a case is actually under consideration" (Doyle, "The Blanched Soldier", 965). This statement is true, but when Holmes himself functions as a narrator it is the opposite. The goal of Watson's meta narrative is to tell the

story of solving a case. But rather than to try to solve it himself in his meta narration, he is instead trying to analyze Holmes as a character.

Holmes gives the reader a great deal of information in his meta narrative, turning his conversation inwards towards the reader rather than outwards to another character. It is through Watson's narrative that we get access to all of the external things surrounding Holmes which we would otherwise not have seen. That is, his appearance, manners and habits. Contrastingly, through Holmes' narrative we are told what goes on inside Holmes' head, how he thinks and reasons. In this way, Holmes' meta narrative interprets and analyzes information both for himself and the reader.

If we consider how Watson and Holmes view their narratees, we can look at how much explaining the narrator does to the narratee. The reader is more evident in Holmes' narrative in that there is a more frequent suspension of meaningful dimension. This occurs whenever Holmes addresses the reader or references previous narratives. It becomes obvious that Holmes thinks of the reader as someone who is familiar with some of the other Sherlock Holmes stories and with Watson. This can be concluded since there would be no other reason for Holmes to refer to either of these things since they have no bearing on the telling of the detective story. We do not get to experience exactly what Watson thinks of his narratee and certainly not to the degree we do in Holmes' narrative.

If we view Watson as a narratee-character in his own narrative, Holmes, as a second narrator, treats him similarly to the way he treats his own narratees in his own narrative. One big difference, however, is the amount of relevant questions the reader, or narratee, feels the needs to ask. Holmes does a great deal of explaining in both narratives, showing that he recognizes the fact that the narratee is not as clever as he is or simply that the case is complicated and needs explaining. If we would compare Watson as narratee-character to the narratee in Holmes' narrative, i.e. the reader, we would notice a difference in the amount of questions that needs to be asked. Watson has a tendency to beg Holmes for an explanation to his deductions. He, as a narratee-character needs to question Holmes in order to get answers. When Holmes himself is the narrator, there is not a very big need for the reader to question things since Holmes asks the questions himself and subsequently provides the answers. Once the need for questions arise, Holmes goes ahead and asks these questions to himself as self speculations or rhetorical questions. This means that there is not the same need for questions to be asked as there is in Watson's narration. This is an interesting concept to consider when comparing the two narratives. The basic function of Watson's and Holmes' relationship is that there is a need for complicated matters to be explained. This occurs, as previously mentioned, through the frustration of Watson not understanding Holmes' thought process, causing him to question things. The role of explaining then falls on Holmes. Thus, with the narrative being from Holmes' point of view, there is a shift in how the narrative functions via the use of characters with different characteristics. This affects the reader's experience since the quick explanation, though satisfying at

the time, dulls the mystery. The suspense and narrative frustration is not the same when most things are explained to the reader straight away instead of being found out by Watson.

## Conclusion

It has been declared that one of Watson's most useful characteristics as a narrator is his ability to praise Holmes' achievements as a detective. It is in his excitement and engagement in solving the mystery of Holmes that he succeeds in captivating the audience and gaining the reader's approval. Watson is also the more grounded character, creating a contrast to Holmes and thus enriching the mystery around him. Watson and Holmes are both detectives in their own ways. Watson does not want to study the crime committed as much as he wants to study Holmes by analyzing how he solves the case. When comparing Watson as a narrator to Holmes, many differences were noticeable. The suspense created in Watson's narrative differs from that created in Holmes' narrative. Holmes as a narrator likes to display all of the information to the reader, except for the final solution to the case. This creates frustration and consequently suspense, but not at all in the same way as suspense is created in Watson's narration. Through Watson's narration we get to also listen to the narration of Holmes as a second narrator. From this perspective, though a big part of the dialog is made out of Holmes' explanations, Watson is still essential to the narrative. Not only is he the character that analyzes Holmes but he is also the questioner who makes Holmes explain his deductions.

In Holmes' own narration, we have direct access to Holmes thought process and there is thus no longer any need for a questioning character. Having direct access to Holmes' deductions dissipates the mystique around him since the reader is no longer forced to wait to find out how Holmes came to a certain conclusion. Although this makes Holmes into a more substantial character, it simultaneously lessens some of the suspense and excitement of reading. There are not differences in how reliable the narrators are but rather how much analysis must be applied on what they choose to convey to the reader. Watson is, in contrast to Holmes, considered a compassionate man who can be expected to possess about the same amount and range of knowledge as most people. Holmes, however, though possessing very specific knowledge, lacks common knowledge. It is the lack of common knowledge and emotion that makes Holmes into a slightly less trustworthy and sympathetic character than Watson. Finally one can say that it is not that Holmes' narrative does not function without Watson, but rather that the disposition of their relationship enables the structure of Watson's narrative to work better.

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