



Revisiting Sherlock Holmes Outside The Doyle Canon

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ABSTRACT

Sherlock Holmes, the widely popular fictional detective was an outstanding creation of the Scottish author Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. The 'Sherlock Holmes phenomenon' began with Doyle introducing Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson to readers in his first detective novel 'A Study in Scarlet'. Doyle's great canon comprised his original works, the four novels and fifty six stories he has written on Holmes during his lifetime. The overwhelming popularity of Sherlock Holmes however did not diminish even after Arthur Conan Doyle's death in 1930. In fact, driven by popular demand the character of Sherlock Holmes began to reappear in the works of other authors. Surprisingly, Sherlock Holmes continues to live for over a hundred years even after Doyle's death. A great number of authors have followed Doyle's footsteps in writing non-canonical tales based on the Holmes and Watson in their writings. This paper, explores the uniqueness and growing popularity of these later works and how different they are from the original Holmes stories. Although different from the original Sherlock Holmes tales many of these stories written by other authors are unique that makes them immensely enjoyable to the modern reader. The paper will give an understanding of how these later versions have recreated the original Holmes stories in such a manner that an avid reader of Sherlock Holmes finds them extremely gratifying.

Key Words - pastiche, canon, alternative Holmes, contemporary, humanity

Sherlock Holmes was first introduced to the world by its creator Sir Arthur Conan Doyle in 1887 in his first detective novel **A Study in Scarlet**. With Doyle's death in 1930 the curtain however did not drop on the world's most popular fictional detective. Arthur Conan Doyle died but his creation Sherlock continued to live vigorously in the writings of other authors, in the pastiches and in the stories outside the Holmes canon. In fact, the popularity of Sherlock Holmes has become so phenomenal, that there has hardly been a year in the twentieth century in which new short stories or novels on Holmes did not emerge. So hundreds of stories on Holmes began to be published, some of them written by authors well-known for their works in other literary fields. The admiration for the Holmes tales largely popularized the non-canonical pastiches, stories that

attempted to replicate or contest the great Sherlock Holmes. The character of Sherlock Holmes and Watson stayed on in the imagination of innumerable readers and were brought back to life in the pastiches. A *pastiche is an imitation of the style and content of an original work*. Although original Doyle canon is fascinating, yet some of the most interesting Holmes stories are often found in the pastiches. The reason might possibly be that some of the pastiches are as captivating as the canon stories in addition to being quite contemporary. In fact, there is always a hesitation when it comes to determining the best Holmes stories. To an avid Holmes reader the character of Sherlock Holmes has continued to intrigue the readers even in the pastiches with his razor sharp intellect and keen powers of observation. His eccentricity and socially inept behavior has made him all the more acceptable to readers as they follow him, up, close and personal in his attempt to solve a case..

There is something remarkable about the pastiches that we miss in the original Holmes stories. Arthur Conan Doyle did not delve into the mind and psyche of his fictional sleuth as some of the later writers did in their tales on Holmes. The stories in the pastiches somewhat have a much greater emotional resonance. Above all there is a touch of humanity that complements the erudite detachment of Sherlock Holmes in these later versions. The tales of Sherlock Holmes have been hugely popular to global readers both old and young. Traditionally the canon of Arthur Conan Doyle that comprises of four novels and fifty-six short stories were written between 1887 and 1927. Holmes's popularity and fame rose to such heights that many started believing that Sherlock Holmes was a real individual and not a fictional character. The fascination was so intense that characters and stories written on Holmes have left behind a deep and lasting impression on the entire genre of mystery writing and popular culture.

An attempt in exploring the singularity of a few of the Sherlock Holmes stories written outside the original Doyle canon revealed that four of Sherlock Holmes stories written by Doyle himself have surprisingly not been included in his great canon. Doyle's story "The Field Bazaar" published in 1896 in a special issue of the Edinburgh University student newspaper has been kept outside the canon. 'The Field Bazaar' remained outside his great canon as it was considered to be a parody. The other two stories, of Doyle "The Lost Special" and "The Man with the Watches", were both published in The Strand Magazine in 1898. These two stories are mysteries but neither mentions Sherlock Holmes by name. Doyle wrote a fourth story, "How Watson Learned the Trick", which again was excluded from the canon on the grounds of being a parody.

Nevertheless, the non-canonical works or pastiches on Holmes have mostly been out of the ordinary. The pastiches constitute a literary field of great interest, captivating, gripping and immensely enjoyable in their own right. Notwithstanding the fictional context, readers might wonder how Sherlock Holmes stories not written by Doyle could actually legally exist. Nearly all the canonical Sherlock Holmes "books" penned by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle (the fifty-six short story collections and four novels) are in the public domain, and have been so for quite some time. Although the estate of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle did try their best for keeping the characters out of the public domain, they were unsuccessful in extending the copyrights of the stories and books. Consequently in recent times, the estate and its practices had to yield to the demands of the devotees and fans.

These later Sherlock stories by other authors have not always been totally faithful to the original Holmes canon. Some of the traditional pastiches come with new Holmes stories but they try to adhere to Doyle's style, characters and time period so closely that one could imagine those were written by Doyle himself. A few of the pastiches are set in Victorian London although they deviate from the original track. In these later versions, every writer has taken some kind of liberty with the stories, bringing about significant changes in style, characterisation and alteration of scenes. The stories however carry with them certain distinctiveness and include details that readers have come to believe to be a part of the Sherlock Holmes canon.

These alternative Holmes stories nevertheless are a kind of revelation since they provide an innovative and priceless approach to the Holmes literature. So the magic continued as readers loved not only by the plot but by the larger-than-life characters of Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson.

A few of the celebrated Holmes pastiches are mentioned here;

The Seven Percent Solution by Nicholas Meyer is a pastiche that has completely captured the language, backdrop and tone of the original Conan Doyle Holmes' tales so much so that it seems at times Meyer has even bettered on them. This Sherlock Holmes adventure recounts the unique collaboration of Holmes and Sigmund Freud in the solution of a mystery. It's a peek into the mind and history of Sherlock Holmes. Nicholas Meyer's has built around a startling and incredible Sherlockian plot.

Another interesting book to read is *A Slight Trick of the Mind* by Mitch Cullin is about the 93-year-old Holmes in retirement. The year is 1947 and Holmes resides in a remote Sussex farmhouse with his housekeeper and her young son. He tends to his bees, writes in his journal, and struggles with the decreasing powers of his mind. Cullin in this story has tried to shed some light on the human side of Holmes, that includes a sense of regret for his lack of social skills, and a willingness to make up for past mistakes.

The Beekeeper's Apprentice by Edgar Award-winning author Laurie R. King sees a retired Sherlock meeting a teenage detective talent Mary Russell whose mental acumen is equaled to his. This Holmes pastiche is quite entertaining to the readers of Sherlock Holmes.

The emotional impact found in some of the pastiches is undeniable and this uniqueness has drawn most readers to these stories outside the canon. The authors of the pastiches have turned the cold, emotionally detached iconic Sherlock Holmes in the original stories into someone lovable and more human. Holmes has been portrayed in these stories as unassuming, sharp and even loving with all his human limitedness – far from the cold rational character of Holmes Conan Doyle created. In their reinterpretations of the character of Sherlock Holmes these non-canonical versions have etched the character of Sherlock Holmes with shades of humanity, vulnerability, bafflement and even pain. It is the timelessness that has made devotees and scholars turn to these later Holmes stories over and over again.

No pop culture hero has been more popular than the extraordinary Detective and the ethical Doctor; their appeal spans countless cultures across the world and in varied forms of media. The stories of Sherlock Holmes have grown far beyond the limitation of the sixty tales encompassing the canon. That is to say the legacy of Holmes has gone beyond all geographical boundaries and temporal settings. Some of the unforgettable qualities of the original have been retained in the pastiches but the deerstalker hat, the meerschaum pipe and the magnifying glass have become symbolic representations for the very word 'detective'. The 'elementary' appeal of the original Holmes stories has carried on to the pastiches, parodies and adaptations of Sherlock Holmes. These later versions are marvellous, contemporary, adorable and leaves one dizzy with their novelty. They are timeless and the primary reason why Holmes devotees keep yearning for new and fresh Sherlockian adventures of the world.

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