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Jami-Leigh C. Bartschi
Rollins College, jbartschi@rollins.edu

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My Dear Watson:
A Musical Interpretation of Sherlock Holmes's Friendship with Dr. John Watson

A Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Liberal Studies

by

Jami-Leigh C. Bartschi

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Mentor: Dr. Daniel Crozier
Mentor: Dr. Edward Cohen

Rollins College
Hamilton Holt School
Master of Liberal Studies Program *Winter Park, Florida*

NOTE TO THE READER:

For my thesis project, I have written an original musical based on the Sherlock Holmes stories, which focuses on the uniquely beautiful friendship between Mr. Sherlock Holmes and Dr. John Watson. However, in order to respect the estate of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and the characters that this group owns under copyright protection, I have elected not to display this work in the digital world. If you are interested in viewing *My Dear Watson* in its entirety, it is available in the Archives section of the Rollins College Olin Library.

"Sherlock and John: A Redefined Friendship" is an essay that accompanies this musical, and it explores some of the same literary themes as the musical itself. Both focus on the friendship between Holmes and Watson and how the reader must redefine the traditional definition of friendship in order to understand this relationship. "Sherlock and John" is included here. Please enjoy exploring one of the most famous and unusual friendships the literary world has ever known.

SHERLOCK AND JOHN: A REDEFINED FRIENDSHIP

At times, a man's deficiencies do not indicate that he is incapable of playing the game. They indicate that the rules must be changed. Such is the case of Sherlock Holmes and his relationship with his friend and colleague, Dr. John Watson. Holmes and Watson enrich the literary world with one of the most unusual, bizarre, and beloved friendships of all time, and many literary critics and analysts have toiled over this relationship in attempts to unravel it, just as Holmes would solve one of his cases. One of the most common depictions of Holmes's and Watson's relationship is the one-sided nature of the friendship. Many believe that Watson's admiration and loyalty is unreciprocated by Holmes, and Holmes answers this affection with abuse and taunting for his own needs and enjoyment. James Krasner, in describing the frequency with which Holmes keeps Watson, and therefore the reader, in the dark when investigating his cases, writes,

> "Often we glimpse a furious anxiety to know lying behind the placid exterior of the narrator; his frustration is created by his combination of mental distance and physical proximity to Holmes's thoughts, and is passed on to the reader who must rely on Watson's irritatingly mundane capacities for narrative revelation. Nor is Holmes above taking pleasure in Watson's frustration by tantalizing him, and us, with tidbits, and poking fun at his failure to understand" (Krasner 425).

Krasner's unflattering description of Watson's intellectual capacity along with his description of Holmes's enjoyment of watching Watson struggle continues as he reminds the reader that Holmes's desire to keep Watson in the dark occasionally puts Watson in grave danger. Krasner reminds the reader, "In 'The Adventure of the Speckled Band,' Watson sits at Holmes's side, literally and figuratively in the dark, not knowing that a poisonous snake is about to slither toward him because his friend chooses to put him in great physical danger rather than reveal the details of his speculations" (Krasner 426).

Krasner is not the only literary analyst who describes Holmes's and Watson's relationship as a one-sided or even abusive one. James and John Kissane write,

> "It is Watson's regular function to register bafflement in the face of mystery and to express wonder as Holmes solves it. Perhaps it should be emphasized, however, that though Watson is a foil he is not a burlesque character, as the radio and motion picture dramatizations have portrayed him. His bewilderment is intended not so much to reveal him as the butt as to add luster to Holmes and his deductions. If Watson does play Sancho to Holmes's Quixote, the joke, when there is one, is as likely to be directed toward the eccentric knight of the nineteenth century rationalism as made at the expense of his faithful squire. We may patronize him somewhat, but we also take our cue from him on how to react" (Kissane 358).

Peter V. Conroy writes a similarly sympathetic yet critical depiction of Dr. Watson:

> "While competent as a medical man, Watson cannot lay any claim to any great intelligence. Whatever deficiency that may be, he repairs with a warm heart and a deep affection for a loyalty to his friend Holmes, qualities which nonetheless expose him to the charge of being overly sentimental and romantic" (Conroy 36).

Kissane and Conroy provide a much kinder and more forgiving description of Holmes's and Watson's relationship than Krasner, but all of them diminish the friendship to that of a tyrant and his loyal and gullible subject.

Some modern interpretations of Holmes's and Watson's relationship have gone in the polar opposite direction of these more abusive depictions of their friendship and have instead portrayed a more intimate relationship. In the film *The Private Life of Sherlock Holmes,* Holmes and Watson are parodically portrayed as a homosexual couple. Likewise, in response to Guy Ritchie's cinematic interpretations of Sherlock Holmes, *Sherlock Holmes* and *Sherlock Holmes: A Game of Shadows,* numerous members of the

media, including David Letterman, have questioned Holmes's sexuality as the films portray Holmes as a sexually ambiguous character who is clearly jealous of Watson's new wife. This portrayal offers a stark contrast to the clearly asexual character of Sherlock Holmes from Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's stories, but it does provide an antithesis to the more popular portrayal of the friendship between these two characters.

In actuality, we as readers cannot limit ourselves by analyzing Holmes's and Watson's friendship in these traditional terms. If friendship is defined as an emotional bond, and one of the two individuals within that friendship is unable to form an emotional bond with another human being, as Holmes is, then the reader must redefine and expand the definition of friendship to accommodate this untraditional character and his relationship with his friend and colleague. The relationship between Holmes and Watson is complicated. It is Holmes' unemotional nature paired with Watson's fierce loyalty and admiration that creates a new and unique type of relationship. Many would define friendship as an emotional bond; but with Holmes, this is impossible. That does not mean, however, that he is incapable of deeply caring for Watson. It means that the relationship looks different from a traditional friendship. Watson and Holmes' friendship is the depiction of a genuine intimate friendship with an unemotional man.

Sherlock Holmes is, without question, not an easy man to befriend. Many would argue that he is not an easy man with which to associate whatsoever. He does not experience emotion in any sort of traditional way, which makes him seem cold and disconnected to humanity. In *The Sign of Four,* Holmes says, "Love is an emotional thing, and whatever is emotional is opposed to that true cold reason which I place above all things" (*The Sign of Four 183).* Holmes's distaste and unfamiliarity with love is

apparent in "A Scandal in Bohemia," Holmes's famous incident with the infamous Irene Adler. The story reveals that Holmes is capable of being affected by a woman, but not in a traditional romantic way. Watson recounts, "It was not that he felt any emotion akin to love for Irene Adler. All emotions, and that one particularly, were abhorrent to his cold precise but admirably balanced mind" ("Scandal in Bohemia" 187). Holmes is clearly moved by the incident with Irene Adler as the only adversary, other than Moriarty (and even that is arguable), who defeats him. He is impressed by her intellect and her cunning, and he sees much of himself in her. However, it is nothing akin to love, and it certainly bears no resemblance to romance. Even in "The Five Orange Pips," when Holmes's client is found dead at the hand of the opponent he is hired to investigate, Holmes's reaction is not one of sorrow or even remorse. He says, "That hurts my pride, Watson. It is a petty feeling, no doubt, but it hurts my pride" ("The Five Orange Pips" 270). Holmes relates emotional events not to his heart but to his mind, just as he relates his entire life.

Holmes's mistreatment of his own body further indicates that he is a man who lives entirely within his mind. It is common for Holmes to deprive himself of food when working on a case because he does not want to take the time or distract his mind with anything other than his work. In "The Norwood Builder," Watson says, "My friend had not breakfast himself, for it was one of his peculiarities that in his more intense moments he would permit himself no food, and I have known him presume upon his iron strength until he has fainted from pure inanition" ("The Norwood Builder" 32). In "The Mazarin Stone," Holmes defends his choice, of which his friend the medical doctor disapproves in no small way: "Because the faculties become refined when you starve them. Why surely,

as a doctor, my dear Watson, you must admit that what your digestion gains in the way of blood supply is so much lost to the brain. I am a brain, Watson. The rest of me is a mere appendix" ("The Mazarin Stone" 533). The implication of Holmes's self-destructive habits is that he is above human needs, including not only food, but love and belonging, as well, though his association with Watson easily disproves the implication.

Holmes's tendency to poison himself occasionally occurs throughout the stories. Holmes has no scruples about poisoning himself out of curiosity or boredom. Before Watson has even met Holmes, Stamford tells Watson, "I could imagine his giving a friend a pinch of the latest vegetable alkaloid, not out of malevolence, you understand, but simply out of a spirit of inquiry in order to have an accurate idea of the effects. To do him justice, I think he would take it himself with the same readiness" (*A Study in Scarlet 9).* Holmes demonstrates this readiness in "The Devil's Foot," where he exposes himself to a toxin which has already killed several people. Holmes also smokes in great quantities when he is thinking. In *The Hound of the Baskervilles,* when Watson walks in to Holmes's room with a cloud of smoke so thick that he can barely see, Holmes admits to Watson, "My body has remained in this armchair and has, I regret to observe, consumed in my absence two large pots of coffee and an incredible amount of tobacco" (*The Hound of the Baskervilles 593).* Holmes's use of cocaine is well-known, especially in the opening chapter of *The Sign of Four* when he injects the drug to combat the boredom sinking in between cases. Holmes's willingness to poison himself with a variety of harmful substances indicates that he does not even attach sentiment to his own health or existence. The reader is continually reminded that Holmes values his own life

only as a vehicle for solving cases, and he regularly endangers himself for the benefit of that same goal.

Most notably, Holmes does not form attachments with other people, including friends, family, or romantic interests. Holmes admits to Watson, as he recounts a story from his youth, "I was never a very sociable fellow, Watson, always rather fond of moping in my rooms and working out my own little methods of thought so that I never missed much with the men of my year" ("The Gloria Scott" 536). In "The Five Orange Pips," when Watson asks if the man coming to the door is Holmes's friend, Holmes simply responds, "Except yourself, I have none. I do not encourage visitors" ("The Five Orange Pips" 259). Holmes also has no close connections with family or relatives; in fact, Watson lives with Holmes for years before he ever knows that Holmes has a brother:

> "I found myself regarding him as an isolated phenomenon, a brain without a heart, as deficient in human sympathy as he was preeminent in intelligence. His aversion to women and his disinclination to form new friendships were both typical of his unemotional character, but not more so than his complete suppression of every reference to his own people. I had come to believe that he was an orphan with no relatives living; but one day, to my very great surprise, he began to talk to me about his brother" ("The Greek Interpreter" 517).

Holmes's most ubiquitous aversion to companionship is his distaste for romance and his distrust of women. Not only is Holmes's entanglement with the infamous Irene Adler a testament to Holmes's antipathy to romance, but in "The Dying Detective," Doyle further explains Holmes's complicated views of the female sex: "[Mrs. Hudson] was fond of him, too, for he had a remarkable gentleness and courtesy his dealings with women. He disliked and distrusted the sex, but he was always a chivalrous opponent" ("The Dying

Detective" 368). Holmes is not the type of individual to form friendships with anyone, so his friendship with Watson is already a departure from his character. It is, therefore, unrealistic for him to engage in a traditional friendship. His relationship with Watson must fit within the boundaries of his character in at least some respect.

Holmes's propensity toward living within his own mind and his disinterest in forming relationships with anyone could lead the reader to believe that his friendship with Watson is a sham, and Holmes's inclination toward tricking Watson, or at least not being entirely honest with him, would seemingly support that hypothesis. For example, in "The Disappearance of the Lady Frances Carfax," *The Valley of Fear,* and *The Hound of the Baskervilles,* Holmes leads Watson to believe that Watson is investigating the cases, when really Holmes is investigating them, but he is using Watson as a decoy. Watson does become irritated at this, and he remarks, "Then you use me, and you do not trust me!" (*The Hound of the Baskervilles* 664). These are not the only times that Holmes leaves Watson in the dark, however. Perhaps the most deceptive, and surely the most painful, of Holmes's acts of trickery is in "The Empty House" when Holmes, who has just "returned from the dead" after his incident with Professor Moriarty at Reichenbach Falls, appears in Watson's study to admit that he has not been dead but has been in hiding for the past several years. Watson, who has been mourning the death of his friend, discovers that he is indeed alive without his knowledge. In these situations, the reader may conclude that Holmes is merely using Watson for his own selfish needs. However, to the man who lives entirely within his mind and within his detective work, trusting a man to work on a case, if only in merely the public eye, and withholding information in order to protect that man, is the highest form of flattery and affection.

Holmes, in addition to not always being entirely honest with Watson, also frequently insults him. In "The Dying Detective," where Holmes once again tricks Watson into believing that he is dying in order to catch the culprit, will not allow Watson to examine him, explaining to him, "If I am to have a doctor whether I will or not, let me at least have someone in whom I have confidence" ("The Dying Detective" 388). Holmes rarely means anything offensive by these comments, which Watson realizes but often forgets. Watson even admits in "The Disappearance of the Lady Frances Carfax," after another of Holmes's cold and insulting comments, "Holmes' ideas of humour are strange and occasionally offensive, so I took no notice of his ill-timed jest" ("The Disappearance of the Lady Frances Carfax" 405). Holmes himself admits, in his own type of apology, "Don't be hurt, my dear fellow. You know that I am quite impersonal" ("The Retired Colourman" 656). Sherlock Holmes's mechanical brain does not consider the emotional impact of his comments. His thoughts function entirely for the purpose of logical reasoning, and any ancillary results are irrelevant to him. In *The Sign of Four,* as Holmes deduces the story of Watson's deceased brother's tragic life from Watson's pocket watch, Watson becomes insulted. Holmes, with sincerity, apologizes, saying, "'My dear doctor,' he said kindly, 'pray accept my apologies. Viewing the matter as an abstract problem, I had forgotten how personal and painful a thing it might be to you'" (*The Sign of Four* 103). Holmes's intentions are not malevolent or vicious. They are simply products of the calculating mind that controls his every thought and action. Watson, much to his chagrin, even admits, "I was nearer him than anyone else, and yet I was always conscious of the gap between" ("The Illustrious Client" 417).

Despite Holmes's untraditional ways of showing affection for his friend, it is clear that he truly values Watson's company. Many times, the value that Holmes places on Watson's company is in the simple, human form of moral support. Holmes often requests Watson's company on cases or on trips with the pretense that he requires Watson's assistance, though Watson rarely offers any insight that Holmes himself has not already deduced. In "The Norwood Builder," Holmes openly admits as much, saying to Watson, "I feel as if I shall need your company and your moral support today" ("The Norwood Builder" 32). In "The Boscombe Valley Mystery," Holmes thanks Watson for accompanying him, saying, "It is really very good of you to come, Watson. It makes a considerable difference to me having someone with me one whom I can thoroughly rely" ("The Boscombe Valley Mystery" 259). Holmes also asks Watson to accompany him to Europe in "The Final Problem" ("The Final Problem" 558). With his life on the line and obvious, uncharacteristic fear in his demeanor, Holmes earnestly requests Watson's company as he attempts to escape Moriarty. Holmes, as is always the case, is not overly affectionate, but he does demonstrate genuine appreciation for Watson's presence with subtlety, to the point that it becomes apparent that Holmes misses Watson during his absence. After Watson gets married and moves out of Baker Street, Watson returns for a visit, and he notices, "[Holmes's] manner was not effusive. It seldom was, but he was glad, I think, to see me" ("A Scandal in Bohemia" 188). In this subtle desire for Watson's presence, even Watson questions how much Holmes values his presence, but Watson, as well as the reader, cannot help but notice that Holmes continues to request Watson's presence on cases despite rarely using him for his intellectual contributions.

Holmes also values Watson as a trustworthy companion. Holmes, as a detective, places trust in very few people. He lives and works in a world where anyone could be a suspect, and anyone else could be, in his opinion, dimwitted enough to be a liability. He offers trust extremely discriminately. However, Holmes is, most of the time, willing to put his trust in Watson. Holmes makes it very clear to all of his clients that they must put their confidence in Watson if they are to employ Holmes's services. In "A Scandal in Bohemia," the King of Bohemia refuses to speak in front of Watson. Watson offers to leave, but Holmes will not allow it. He says to the king, "It is both or none. You may say before this gentleman anything which you may say to me" ("A Scandal in Bohemia" 191). It is a frequent occurrence that Holmes must defend his friend's presence to his clients, but he always does so successfully because Holmes will not help the client without Watson. Likewise, in *The Hound of the Baskervilles,* Holmes sends Watson to accompany Sir Henry Baskerville back to Baskerville Hall. Sir Henry questions Holmes's decision to send Watson rather than accompanying him himself, but Holmes assures Sir Henry, "If my friend would undertake it, there is not man who is better worth having at your side when you are in a tight place. No one can say so more confidently than I" (*The Hound of the Baskervilles* 608). Holmes's trust in Watson is remarkable and atypical of Holmes's usually skeptical nature. It is a small but significant testament to Holmes's and Watson's friendship.

Holmes, despite what he may tell Watson, also sincerely values Watson's willingness to chronicle Holmes's work. While Holmes frequently complains that Watson romanticizes cases that should be left as cold, hard facts, Holmes also, in some strange way, truly values Watson's writings. He famously admits to Watson, "I am lost

without my Boswell" ("A Scandal in Bohemia" 190). In one of only two stories where Holmes acts as narrator rather than Watson for a case where Watson is not present, Holmes tells the reader, "And here it is that I miss my Watson. By cunning questions and ejaculations of wonder he could elevate my simple art, which is but systemized common sense, into a prodigy" ("The Blanched Soldier" 598). While romanticism is foreign at best and abhorrent at worst to Sherlock Holmes, Watson's admiration of his skill to the point that he seeks to immortalize it in literature is more than just flattering. To Holmes, this is the closest to affection that he can understand. Many marvel at his intellect, but they tend to view him in the way that one would view a computer—a remarkable ability with no humanity attached. Watson, however, not only venerates Holmes's intellect but forms the conclusion that Holmes is a great man as a result of that intellect. Holmes has difficulty in seeing beyond his intellect, so intense admiration of that intellect is the closest to affection that he could possibly understand.

Holmes values Watson not only for his moral support, his trustworthiness, and his propensity toward chronicling Holmes's cases, but he also values him as a flat mate, which, arguably, does not serve the same practical functions that Watson's other roles do. Granted, when Holmes and Watson first meet, they are both looking for someone with which to share the cost of their living quarters because neither is able to afford a place on his own. However, that is not the case throughout the stories, and even long after Holmes is very capable of affording the flat on Baker Street on his own, he still desires Watson's companionship. Holmes is, for lack of a better word, jealous of Watson's marriage, and he says as much to Watson. When Watson tells Holmes that he has decided to wed Mary, Holmes says to Watson curtly, "I really cannot congratulate you" (*The Sign of*

Four 183). While Holmes admits to Watson that Mary is a fine woman, he also admits that he is opposed to the idea of marriage at all. Holmes later tells the reader, "The good Watson had at that time deserted me for a wife, the only selfish action which I can recall in our association. I was alone" ("The Blanched Soldier" 516). In this confession, the reader can see that Holmes views Watson's marriage as an act of Watson leaving him. After Mary's death, Holmes quickly rectifies the situation. Watson discovers, "An incident which only explained itself some years later, when I found that Verner was a distant relation of Holmes, and that it was my friend who had really found the money" ("The Norwood Builder" 21). Holmes is desperate for Watson to remain living with him even when finances are no longer an issue. He values Watson's constant companionship, if for no other reason than to act as a sounding board to this theories, which, to Sherlock Holmes, is possibly as close to affection as is possible.

Holmes also extends a unique courtesy to Watson in that, despite frequently asking for Watson's help, he will not endanger Watson willingly. Holmes endangers himself constantly in his escapades, often without the knowledge of his friend and colleague. He also endangers others; he endangers Mycroft by depending on him while hiding from Moriarty's men after "The Final Problem," he endangers Mrs. Hudson in "The Empty House" when he asks her to move the wax statue of himself to make it appear more lifelike despite knowing that a man would think that is Holmes and make on attempt on its life, and he even endangers his client upon several occasions, most notably in "The Five Orange Pips" when his client is killed in the midst of Holmes solving the mystery. However, Holmes protects Watson from physical danger when it is possible. In "The Final Problem," when Holmes realizes that his "game" with Moriarty has an

inevitably mortal conclusion, Holmes says to Watson, "I think that you had better return to England, Watson" ("The Final Problem" 566). Watson refuses, but even when Watson is called away by one of Moriarty's diversions to get Holmes alone, Holmes allows Watson to depart in order to save him from the danger that Holmes knows he must face himself. At other times, Holmes does bring Watson along in dangerous situations, but in these situations, he displays rare moments of anxiety. In "The Speckled Band," Holmes says before they depart into Dr. Roylott's deadly home, "I have really some scruples as to taking you tonight. There is a distinct element of danger" ("The Speckled Band" 321). Likewise, in *The Hound of the Baskervilles,* Holmes says to Watson as Watson leaves with Sir Henry Baskerville to stay at Baskerville Hall, "It's an ugly business, Watson, an ugly dangerous business, and the more I see of it the less I like it. Yes, my dear fellow, you may laugh, but I give you my word that I shall be very glad to have you back safe and sound in Baker Street once more" (*The Hound of the Baskervilles* 611). In each of these circumstances, Holmes puts himself in the greater danger, and if he does endanger Watson, he does so reluctantly and with great anxiety.

In addition to protecting Watson from physical danger, Holmes also protects him from engaging in criminal behavior that could taint his record, despite the fact that Holmes has no scruples in breaking the law if it means serving justice. In "The Bruce-Partington Plans," Holmes decides to break into Hugo Oberstein's apartment to investigate, but he will not allow Watson to break in with him. He says to Watson, "My dear fellow, you shall keep watch in the street. I'll do the criminal part" ("The Bruce-Partington Plans" 427). Also, in "Charles Augustus Milverton," Holmes decides to break into Milverton's home to recover the letters that Milverton will use to blackmail Lady

Eva Blackwell. Watson tries to talk Holmes out of it, but Holmes has made up his mind. When Watson tells Holmes that he is going with him, Holmes refuses to let Watson go. Only after Watson threatens to tell the police of Holmes's plans does Holmes relent ("Charles Augustus Milverton" 118). In most cases, Watson is more than willing to go to the ends of the earth with Holmes, no matter what the danger, but it is Holmes, who constantly and willingly endangers himself, who is reluctant to allow his friend to accompany him on these dangerous missions. In fact, many times, Holmes is gone for hours or even days at a time without even informing Watson what he is doing, though it is often something hazardous. Holmes, in this way, protects his friend and demonstrates care for his wellbeing though he cannot demonstrate affection.

One of the most seemingly non-sequitur quirks of Holmes's character is his ability on the violin. Holmes' violin is his only way of expressing himself emotionally, and Conan Doyle links Watson with Holmes's violin throughout the stories. Holmes's violin is of paramount importance to him, and it is one of the first things he brings up when he meets Watson. He asks with some anxiety if the violin would disturb Watson (*A Study in Scarlet* 12). It is clear from these first moments that the violin is an important element to Holmes's character. Throughout the stories, Holmes talks about violins when he requires a distraction from his case. In *A Study in Scarlet,* Watson remarks as they talk together, "My companion was in the best of spirits, and prattled away about Cremona fiddles and the difference between a Stradivarius and an Amati" (*A Study in Scarlet* 21). Likewise, in "The Cardboard Box," Watson notes, We had a pleasant little meal together, during which Holmes would talk about nothing by violins, narrating with great exultation how had had purchased his own Stradivarius, which was worth at least five hundred

guineas, at a Jew broker's in Tottenham Court Road for fifty-five shillings" ("The Cardboard Box" 331). Perhaps one of Holmes's most profound reflections of music, however, are in *A Study in Scarlet* when he returns from a concert. He says to Watson, "Do you know what Darwin says about music? He claims that the power of producing and appreciating it existed among the human race long before the power of speech was arrived at. Perhaps that is why we are so subtly influenced by it. There are vague memories in our souls of those misty centuries when the world was in childhood" (*A Study in Scarlet* 33). Holmes is far from poetic or sentimental, but music inspires something unique in him. It is a link to his humanity.

Holmes does more than simply talk about the violin, however. His ability to play the instrument are both as impressive and as unique as he is. Watson describes his unusual talent in *A Study in Scarlet*:

> "I see that I have alluded above to his powers upon the violin. These were very remarkable, but as eccentric as all his other accomplishments. That he could play pieces, and difficult pieces, I knew well, because at my request he played me of some Mendelssohn's *Lieder,* and other favorites. When left to himself, however, he would seldom produce any music or attempt any recognized air. Leaning back in his armchair of an evening, he would close his eyes and scrape carelessly at the fiddle which was thrown across his knew. Sometimes the chords were sonorous and melancholy. Occasionally they were fantastic and cheerful. Clearly they reflected the thoughts which possessed him, but whether the music aided those thoughts, or whether the playing was simply the result of a whim or fancy, was more than I could determine. I might have rebelled against these exasperating solos had it not been that he usually terminated them by playing in quick succession a whole series of my favorite airs as a slight compensation for the trial upon my patience" (*A Study in Scarlet* 16).

Holmes does not show emotion openly, and many would argue that he does not show it, or even feel it, at all. However, Watson, who has the opportunity to get to know Holmes more intimately than others, notices his unique style of playing the violin and makes a deduction based on that style. He realizes that Holmes's selections on his instrument reflect his emotions in ways that he cannot openly express them or even feel them otherwise.

Conan Doyle frequently links Holmes's expressive abilities on the violin with Watson as Holmes plays for his friend in an effort to relax him. After their first adventure together, Holmes says to Watson, "Now, Doctor, you are looking done-up. Take my advice and turn in" (*A Study in Scarlet* 37). He then plays the violin to soothe Watson and put him to sleep. Likewise, in *The Sign of Four,* Holmes attempts to relax Watson again, saying, "Look here, Watson, you look regularly done. Lie down there on the sofa and see if I can put you to sleep" (*The Sign of Four* 147). He then plays a relaxing air for Watson. Holmes uses his violin to relax his friend amongst the stress that his profession creates for Watson. He is not able or willing to express friendship in normal ways, but this small act is as close to affectionate as Holmes is capable of doing.

Watson even compares himself to Holmes's violin. In "The Creeping Man," Watson says,

> "The relations between us in those latter days were peculiar. He was a man of habits, narrow and concentrated habits, and I had become one of them. As an institution I was like the violin, the shag tobacco, the old black pipe, the index books, and others perhaps less excusable. When it was a case of active work and a comrade was needed upon whose nerve he could place some reliance, my role was obvious. But apart from this I had uses. I was a whetstone for his mind. I stimulated him. He liked to think aloud in my presence. His remarks could hardly be said to be made

> to me—many of them would have been as appropriately addressed to his bedstead—but none the less, having formed the habit, it had become in some way helpful that I should register and interject. If I irritated him by a certain methodical slowness in my mentality, that irritation served only to make his own flame-like intuitions and impressions flash up the more vividly and swiftly. Such was my humble role in our alliance" ("The Creeping Man" 601).

Watson's description of his half of the friendship is somewhat melancholy, but it is, from Holmes's prospective, very flattering. Holmes's violin is an expression of his heart, or what he has of one, anyway, so for him to link Watson with his violin is expression of his heart, as well. Watson, like the violin, is a channel through which Holmes can feel, if in a unique way. Watson also notices that Holmes uses him as a sounding board for his thoughts. This should also be considered a compliment as Holmes's mind is his most valued element of his character. From Watson perspective, and from the reader's perspective, this description can be depressing and discouraging, but from Holmes's perspective, it is the highest praise.

One of the most touching and most sentimental demonstrations of Holmes's friendship with Watson is in Holmes's final moments (or so he believes at the time). In "The Final Problem," when Holmes is certain that he is going to die at the hand of Moriarty, Holmes begs Moriarty to allow him to take a moment to write a letter to Watson. In this letter, he informs Watson that this outcome is agreeable to him because of the benefit that losing Moriarty brings to society, despite the high cost that Holmes must pay for this outcome. He tells Watson, "I am pleased to think that I shall be able to free society from any further effects of his presence, though I fear that it is at a cost which will give pain to my friends, and especially, my dear Watson, to you" ("The Final

Problem" 561). It is important to Holmes that Watson know his intentions as well as receive his condolences. Holmes, throughout the stories, cares little about his own health or safety. However, this final sacrifice—his own life for the sake of humanity—is, in fact, the greatest act of love that a man can offer, and it is in that moment that he thinks of his friend and the emptiness that he will be leaving behind for him.

A friendship that includes an unemotional individual requires concessions and a redefinition of friendship from both parties, and it is arguable Watson who makes the greater concessions since he is capable of a traditional friendship and must alter that which is comfortable for him to fit his relationship with Holmes. The question that the reader must first ask, given this unusual relationship, is what Watson would want to be friends with Holmes in the first place. In *A Study in Scarlet,* they meet through their mutual acquaintance, Stamford, and immediately decide to move in together. While both of these characters are in need of a flat mate for financial reasons, the reader also knows that this immediate trust and, daresay, delight in one another's company is inconsistent with either character. It is also immediately obvious that they are very different from one another. Therefore, why would they so quickly decide to move in together? While financial hardship is Watson's expressed reason, Watson is more than just financially desperate. Watson is, clearly, alone. He remarks to Stamford that he has no family, and he says, "I would prefer having a partner to living alone" (*A Study in Scarlet* 8). Watson clearly seeks companionship if he is willing to move in with an obviously eccentric stranger whom he has just met. However, it becomes clear throughout the stories that Watson is not a man with many friends and does not appear to require a great deal of social interaction. Holmes remarks in *The Hound of the Baskervilles* that Watson is "not

a man with intimate friends" (*The Hound of the Baskervilles* 592). It is true that Watson makes very few references to any friends outside of Baker Street, and any that he does mention are generally acquaintances or other physicians with whom he works. Watson, therefore, seeks not only any companion but one with whom he truly connects, which he, surprisingly, finds in the unlikely character of Sherlock Holmes.

In addition to feeling loneliness, Watson also feels that his life is boring and unfulfilling at the time that he meets Holmes. He has just returned from the war in Afghanistan, and while he tells Stamford that he seeks peace and quiet, he actually seeks stimulation. He has no job, his injuries and his nerves make it difficult to pursue any hobbies or interest, and he has no friends or family with whom he can occupy his time. Holmes frequently laments his boredom when he does not have a case to occupy his time or stimulate his mind. In *The Sign of Four,* he famously states, "My mind rebels at stagnation" (*The Sign of Four* 100). However, Holmes is not alone in this phenomenon. Watson also seeks distraction throughout the stories, and this is most apparent when he and Holmes first meet and Watson desperately seeks purpose and fulfillment. Shortly after Holmes and Watson move in together, Watson finds that even though he has a new companion, he spends little time with him, and he still has no way to occupy himself or his mind. He then decides to use Holmes' mysterious nature as his distraction by deducing as much as he can about him. Watson admits, "Under these circumstances, I eagerly hailed the little mystery which hung around my companion, and spent much of my time in endeavoring to unravel it" (*A Study in Scarlet* 14). Before Watson even knows that Holmes is a detective, he seeks the excitement of a mystery. It is, in that sense, unsurprising that he would so readily agree to move in with this clearly eccentric

man when he hardly knows him and Holmes presents himself as a figure who is the complete antithesis of the quiet life that Watson supposedly wants.

Watson's friendship with Holmes cannot simply be out of desperation, however. If he is indeed willing to move in with a complete stranger, as he appears to be, Watson could certainly find a roommate that is better suited for his personality; and if he seeks excitement, a young, intelligent army doctor could, with enough creativity, find it in other ways. Watson's needs and desires extend beyond desperation. There is a void in Watson's life that Holmes himself must fill, and Watson recognizes it immediately upon meeting Holmes. Watson deeply respects Holmes's intellectual abilities, and that respect forms the foundation of Watson's side of their relationship. Their friendship revolves entirely around their working relationship, as is evidenced by the fact that, during the times in the series when Watson is not living or working with Holmes, Watson makes reference to the fact that he rarely sees Holmes. Therefore, their friendship revolves around Holmes's detective work. This is unsurprising given that Holmes's entire life revolves around his detective work, and he is almost incapable of separating himself from it. Even at times when Watson forces Holmes to go on holiday for the sake of his health, as is the case in stories such as "The Reigate Puzzle" and "The Devils Foot," Holmes always finds a case, and without it, he is miserable and lost. The reader does not see Holmes and Watson playing cards, going to pubs, attending parties, or engaging in the typical activities of friends. They work. They solve cases. They may eat at a restaurant or attend a concert to pass the time during the lull of a case, but Holmes's cases are at the heart of their actions, their conversations, and, ultimately, their friendship.

This is only partially as a result of Holmes's workaholism. Watson craves the opportunity to admire Holmes. Watson has no family or friends, and one's immediate thought could easily be that Watson, as a result, craves affection. However, if that were true, he would not choose Holmes as his only friend because he is not a likely source of that affection. Watson craves a role model—a figure of superior intellect with whom he can align himself so he can experience awe and wonder at his abilities. Watson is willing to forgive a multitude of Holmes's sins in exchange for the opportunity to bask in Holmes's intellect. In "The Dying Detective," Watson admits, "I have so deep a respect for the extraordinary qualities of Holmes that I have always deferred to his wishes, even when I least understood them" ("The Dying Detective" 387). It is the very reason that Watson chronicles Holmes's cases, and it is certainly the reason that he gives "preference to those cases which derive their interest not so much from the brutality of the crime as from the ingenuity and dramatic quality of the solution" ("The Solitary Cyclist" 58). Even after the death of his friend—or his presumed death, as the case may be—Watson still holds Holmes's intellect in the highest regard above his other qualities. The words that open "The Final Problem" are as follows: "It is with a heavy heart that I take up my pen to write these the last words in which I shall ever record the singular gifts by which my friend, Sherlock Holmes, was distinguished" ("The Final Problem" 557). Watson here, yet again, equates affection with respect and admiration. He refers to him as his friend, which signals the sentiment that Watson has for Holmes, but it is not Holmes's character that Watson chooses to chronicle in his final account of his friend, but his mind. Watson also parallels sentiment and admiration in the last words of "The Final Problem," which Sir Arthur Conan Doyle intended to be the final words of the final Sherlock

Holmes story. Watson refers to Holmes as "the best and wisest man whom I have ever known" ("The Final Problem" 570). Watson does not separate Holmes the detective from Holmes the man because we have very little evidence to suggest that there is a separation between the two. Watson, therefore, defines his friendship with Holmes according to his admiration of Holmes's skill and his deep respect for his abilities, and it with that admiration that Watson aligns his affection for Holmes.

Watson, however, is not the unemotional figure that Holmes is. Watson does value sentiment, though if he valued it in any great quantity, he would not have befriended Holmes, and he certainly would not have continued the friendship for several decades. Watson clearly values Holmes's rare but profound moments of humanity because every time Holmes does show even the slightest bit of his heart, Watson stops his narrative to call attention to it. One such circumstance when Holmes is briefly moved in an emotional way is when someone genuinely notices and compliments his abilities. Most of the individuals that he and Watson encounter tend to take Holmes's intellect for granted, so when he is offered a genuine compliment, it pleases him in a profound way. In "The Six Napoleons," Lestrade not only thanks Holmes for solving the case, but he expresses that, despite what may be apparent, the official police force is not jealous but proud of Holmes and honored to work with him. In response, Watson notices, "It seemed to me that he was more nearly moved by the softer human emotions than I had ever seen him" ("The Six Napoleons" 141). Likewise, in *The Valley of Fear,* when Holmes is offered a similar compliment, Watson notes, "Holmes smiled—he was always warmed by genuine admiration" (*The Valley of Fear* 159). In "The Crooked Man," Watson emphasizes the brevity of these reactions. He not only notes how short the reaction is,

but he also makes it seem to the reader that he is the privileged individual who has the ability to notice it and be in on this unknown aspect of his character: "His eyes kindled and a slight flush sprang into his thin cheeks. For an instant, the veil had lifted upon his keen, intense nature, but for an instant only. When I glanced again, his face had resumed that red-Indian composure which had made so many regard him as a machine rather than a man" ("The Crooked Man" 492). Watson sees these brief moments at times when the rest of the world does not, and he is encouraged by them as his friend. He does not depend on them on a regular basis, but he will not get that from Holmes. But he thrives on the rarity of them and the fact that he alone is truly aware of them.

The only other times we see Holmes moved to emotion are times when Watson himself is in danger, which speaks volumes of Holmes's character and his friendship with Watson. In "The Devil's Foot," Watson agrees to participate in a dangerous experiment with Holmes, and the two are nearly poisoned to death in the process. Holmes is both terrified and remorseful after the incident, and he gives a offers a rare and genuine apology to Watson: "Upon my word, Watson!" said Holmes at last with an unsteady voice. "I owe you both my thanks and an apology. It was an unjustifiable experiment even for one's self, and doubly so for a friend. I am really very sorry." "You know," I answered with some emotion, for I had never seen so much of Holmes' heart before, "that it is my greatest joy and privilege to help you" ("The Devil's Foot" 435). Holmes endangers himself throughout the stories, and we rarely see a reaction of this sort; but when he realizes that he has endangered Watson, we see a different Holmes—one who exists outside his mind and his willingness to do whatever it takes to solve his case. There are limits to the pains that he will take, and Watson realizes that that limit exists in

himself. One of the most famous moments in any of the stories is in an otherwise rarely mentioned story, "The Three Garridebs." Watson is shot in the line of duty, and, as a result, Holmes attacks the man then rushing to Watson, horrified at the potential result of the injury. When he realizes that the wound is superficial, he is visibly relieved, threatens the barely conscious man who attacked Watson, and warns him of the mortal result if he had killed his friend. Watson offers a well-known description of his friend's concern: "It was worth a wound—it was worth many wounds—to know the depth of loyalty and love which lay behind that cold mark. The clear, hard eyes were dimmed for a moment, and the firm lips were shaking. For the one and only time, I caught a glimpse of a great heart as well as a great brain. All my years of humble but single-minded service culminated in that moment of revelation" ("The Three Garridebs" 562).

Sherlock Holmes, to the world, is a cold-hearted machine, but to John Watson, he reveals himself as being much more than that. He is a protector, a role model, and a companion in life's journey, for better or worse. To Holmes, Watson is more than an instrument used in solving crimes. Watson is the light that illuminates Holmes's brilliance. He is a devoted friend in a world that thinks very little of Holmes's ability to care for anyone. He is a medium for Holmes's untraditional forms of emotional expression. He is a man who does more than admire Holmes's mind—Watson is a man who observes Holmes's heart and reminds Holmes himself that he has one at all.

Holmes's inability to care for Watson in any traditional way is obvious, but Watson's side of the friendship, as a result, must be equally unorthodox. He cannot be drawn to Holmes by what they have in common or the affection or praise that he can get in return from Holmes because those typical elements of friendship are impossible in this

case. Watson is desperate for companionship, to be sure, but if he is looking for a traditional friendship, he could not possibly be so desperate as to settle on Holmes because he will not find it there. He is desperate for lodgings, but if he were looking for a compatible roommate, he could scour the earth and fail to find a less suitable candidate. Watson's needs go beyond the basic desires for shelter and acceptance. Watson craves the unknown and the unexpected. He craves the ability to experience the extraordinary in his depressingly ordinary world. He craves moments of humanity, but only moments, not a lifetime. It is not enough to be handed affection. He wants to work for it. He wants to find it in a vast sea of coldheartedness, and he wants the sole possession of those moments.

The friendship between Watson and Holmes is unusual, to say the least, but it is, indeed, a friendship. It looks different to each man, and it looks extremely different to the outside observer, whether it be the fictional characters in the stories or the reader. However, it is not for either the characters or the reader to judge this friendship according to traditional standards of friendship. These men, from the time they meet, are eternally linked. Even when they are apart during Watson's marriage, during Holmes's supposed death, and after Holmes's retirement, they are still linked, and they are linked to this day. At the end of "The Final Problem," Watson does not describe Holmes as "the wisest man whom I have ever known." He describes him as "the best and wisest man whom I have ever known" ("The Final Problem" 570). Sherlock Holmes is not an easy man to befriend, and he does not befriend others easily, but if Holmes's and Watson's friendship is any indication, the reward is great for that which requires the most effort.

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