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# 'Age Doth Not Wither Nor Custom Stale my Infinite Variety': Surveying the Evolution of Dr. John H. Watson through 70 Years of *The Hound of the Baskervilles* on Screen

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“AGE DOTH NOT WITHER NOR CUSTOM STALE MY INFINITE VARIETY”:  
SURVEYING THE EVOLUTION OF DR. JOHN H. WATSON THROUGH  
70 YEARS OF *THE HOUND OF THE BASKERVILLES* ON SCREEN

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A Thesis  
Presented to  
The Graduate School of  
Clemson University

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In Partial Fulfillment  
Of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Arts  
English

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by  
Ashley D. Polašek  
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## ABSTRACT

The sixty tales that comprise the Sherlock Holmes Canon hold a unique place in the realm of both adaptation studies and culture studies. The stories were originally written at a time concurrent with the birth of cinema; Holmes was part of the vanguard of literary figures to appear on film. Since his first appearance on screen in 1900, Sherlock Holmes, his friend and colleague Dr. Watson, and the adventures in which they figure have been consistently adapted for the full lifespan of the cinematic medium. Despite this rich history, the adaptations have, almost without exception, been scrutinized through the lens of fidelity criticism, a trend that ignores the potential for more revealing scholarship.

This work offers a detailed survey of seven adaptations of Arthur Conan Doyle's *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, spanning seventy years, in order to establish and analyze a pattern in the on-screen presentation of Dr. Watson's character through the shifting dynamics of his relationship with Sherlock Holmes. As it approaches the character of Watson as the on-screen proxy for the viewer, it also draws connections between how he is presented and the audience's views and needs. By placing these films into conversation with one another rather than exclusively with the source text, the study takes an important step away from fidelity criticism and opens the door to a wide range of future fruitful analyses of Sherlock Holmes on screen.

## DEDICATION

This work is dedicated with love and gratitude to the magnificent community of scholars and eccentrics at Holmesian.net. Your humour, insight and support have been invaluable.

Thank you for helping me to escape from the commonplaces of existence!

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

The sixty original Sherlock Holmes stories penned by Arthur Conan Doyle between 1887 and 1927 hold a unique place in the realm of literary and cultural analyses. The stories and the characters that people them have been adapted and appropriated consistently for a full century. They were introduced to the world during the formative years of cinema and the characters began to see screen time while the later stories were still being written. As western culture has evolved, the same stories and characters have been presented in variations made to reflect and appeal to new audiences with new ideas and new conceptions of themselves and their world. Because the same characters have been appropriated, and to a certain degree the same original texts have been adapted and readapted over time, Sherlock Holmes may be pressed into service as a control for examining cultural evolution.

No character has appeared on screen more than Sherlock Holmes; he has had upwards of 200 incarnations on film and television (Davies, *Starring Sherlock Holmes* 196-208). He has figured time and again in dramas, comedies, romances, horror films and cartoons. He has been placed in his native nineteenth century, the time periods contemporaneous with various twentieth and twenty-first century adaptations in which he figures, and the science fiction-inspired future. He has been played by Englishmen, Scotsmen, Welshmen, Americans, Canadians, Germans, and Russians and others to great acclaim. He has been used as a proponent of war, of peace, of empire, of individualism and of justice. He has figured in adaptations of the tales as they were originally written

and been the protagonist of innumerable original works as well as making cameos in countless others. Each time Holmes and the cast of characters that surround him appear they, and the dynamics by which they relate to one another and the environment and circumstances around them, are altered in a myriad of ways to appeal to a specific audience at a specific moment in history. Each adaptation and appropriation, therefore, as it stands in comparison to the original works and the current culture, serves as a snapshot of that culture. Considered as a unified body, these snapshots may be used to trace elements and themes in the evolution of society itself over the past century.

It is possible to study a multitude of subjects through the manner in which they are dealt with in Sherlock Holmes adaptations and appropriations. Changes in society may be tracked through the concrete depictions, or absence thereof, of Holmes' drug use, for example, or the nature of villainy may be considered; the list is extensive. The vast array of Holmes films provides a nearly inexhaustible supply of fruitful material for study. For the sake of clarity and practicality, this study will narrow the focus and analyze seven separate adaptations of *The Hound of the Baskervilles* in film and television with some attention to additional derivative adaptations and appropriations of the same tale in order to study the evolution of the character of Dr. John Watson and his relationship to contemporary culture through the changing landscape of his relationship with Sherlock Holmes. Narratively, Watson operates as the textual surrogate for the reader; therefore he, rather than Holmes, is the mirror that that reflects society. Thus tracking the evolution of his character and role on screen is, to a degree, tracking the self image of the viewing audience as well as the expectations of the filmmakers.



Countless editions exist of the fifty-six short stories and four novels that comprise the Sherlock Holmes Canon; the majority are trade paperbacks and collector's editions. Several scholarly editions are on the market as well; of these, there are two editions that are generally considered the most consulted reference volumes. The first time the stories were released in an annotated form was as William S. Baring-Gould's *The Annotated Sherlock Holmes* in 1967. In it he provides ample notes on historical background, relevant geographic locations, chronological studies and theoretical discussions along with various Holmesian essays. Baring-Gould's edition was long considered the standard for Holmes scholarship but has recently been surpassed by Leslie S. Klinger's 2007 *The New Annotated Sherlock Holmes*. It is worth noting that Klinger's edition, following forty years after Baring-Gould's, is situated through its title in direct reference to the earlier work.

What makes a consideration of these two editions germane to Holmesian adaptation studies is the fact that they are both written within the context of "The Game." While a thorough study of the Sherlock Holmes fan community is a project for another time, it is important to note that it is long-established and the practice of playing The Game is pervasive. Rooted in the foundation of the Baker Street Irregulars, one of the world's most committed Sherlock Holmes societies, The Game dictates that Holmes and Watson be treated as real people rather than fictional creations. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, responsible for penning the stories, is relegated to the position of "literary agent" to "true author" Dr. John H. Watson. Within this construct, Holmesian scholars close read the texts to piece together the gaps in the characters' lives and to explain the inconsistencies

in the stories. Much has been written on the subject of what university Holmes attended, for example, and the debate is ongoing, supported with minutest evidence from the stories to support both Oxford's and Cambridge's claims (Hall 56). Inconsistencies, which may be anything from the location of Watson's war wound to the number of wives he had to the disappearance of his bull pup after a single mention in *A Study in Scarlet* and which were, in reality, the product of carelessness or forgetfulness on Conan Doyle's part, are given extensive treatment in both Baring-Gould and Klinger's annotations in order to justify each one in turn.

Writing scholarly editions of the Canon from within the construct of The Game in turn affects the manner in which adaptations are read. It indicates a preference for scholarship grounded firmly within the source text. By extension, this preference leads to an almost exclusive trend of fidelity criticism in the realm of scholarship on Holmes adaptations, situating each adaptation in reference to the "true" Holmes and Watson. Through this perspective, the adaptations become nothing more than pale imitative representations, the most faithful operating as documentaries, the least faithful as libel against Holmes and Watson. The pervasive notion, vocalized by Nicholas Meyer in a keynote address at a Sherlock Holmes Symposium, is that where Holmes on screen is concerned, he has "never met a Sherlock Holmes movie [he] didn't dislike" mostly as a result of "the gap between our imaginations and the hideous capacity for film to do it all for us, and, in the process, inevitably get it wrong" (Meyers 3, 8). This attitude is problematic as it fails to take into account the richness of each adaptation and the

capacity of the adaptations to allow for greater reflection upon the cultures into which they were released as well as upon the original tales.

Rather than comparing each individual adaptation back to the Canon exclusively, also allowing them to enter into conversation with one another opens fresh avenues for academic exploration, avenues missed by Meyers and scholars who share his slavish dedication to Canonical fidelity. Such dedication is evident in efforts such as David F. Morrill's "Reading the Signs: Some Observations and Aperçus on Film and Television Adaptations of *The Sign of the Four*" in the 2008 Christmas Annual of *The Baker Street Journal*. Though Morrill covers seven adaptations of Conan Doyle's second Sherlock Holmes novel, he details each film only in terms of how it speaks to the novel itself. As such, he neglects to take full advantage of the opportunities that such a series of adaptations, spanning nearly 70 years, might afford if considered outside the narrow realm of fidelity-based criticism.

Embracing a departure from fidelity studies cannot mean turning from the Canon entirely. It would be nearly impossible to engage with adaptations of *The Hound of the Baskervilles* in any meaningful way without reference to the original novel. Though it should not be the end, it is within the source text, then, that an exploration of *Hound* adaptations must begin.

*The Hound of the Baskervilles* was published in 1902 to an eager public. In 1893 Conan Doyle, artistically frustrated with the success of his literary creation, penned what was to be his final adventure, aptly titled "The Final Problem." Holmes and his nemesis, the arch villain Professor James Moriarty, tumbled over the Reichenbach Falls and grief-

stricken Watson was left to tell a bereft public that the story would be the last “in which [he would] ever record the singular gifts by which [his] friend Mr. Sherlock Holmes was distinguished” (Doyle 1: 713). Conan Doyle’s readership, from the Prince of Wales to poor schoolboys, mourned the death of Holmes and though he did so grudgingly and largely for financial reasons, nine years after killing off his most popular creation Conan Doyle penned a new adventure for him. Holmes was welcomed back with enthusiasm, though fans of the Great Detective were disappointed to learn upon the novel’s publication that it supposedly recounted an adventure that took place before Holmes’ apparent demise rather than a resurrection of the character. Such a resurrection would take place a year later but at the time *The Hound of the Baskervilles* was simply a welcome anomaly.

The story is an excellent platform upon which to consider the Holmes-Watson dynamic. Like the vast majority of the tales, it is written from Watson’s perspective, which sets Watson as the narrative surrogate for the reader. Like Watson, the reader is not privy to Holmes’ internal machinations and is allowed to experience the suspense of the building mystery along with the doctor rather than the detective. Holmes prefers to gather all the threads of a mystery in his hands in order to reveal the solution dramatically, as such it is understood that at any given moment he knows more than Watson, and by extension the reader, throughout most of the work. This suspense-building narrative technique is further enhanced in *Hound* by having Holmes absent from the action for the middle third of the story. Despite his physical absence, however, the bond between the doctor and the detective keeps him in the narrative conversation.

Though Holmes does not appear, the narrative continues in the form of Watson's letters to his friend describing the action.

There are several particular textual moments within *The Hound of the Baskervilles* that help establish the relationship between Sherlock Holmes and his friend and colleague, Dr. Watson. Close reading these moments in the source material will provide a base line for studying the varying treatments of the same moments in the adaptations. The first such opportunity for scrutinizing the men's relationship comes with their first interaction, as Watson looks over a walking stick left at their Baker Street lodgings by their future client, the absent-minded Dr. Mortimer. Before the deductive storm even begins, Holmes sets the tone for their conversation by astonishing Watson, asking him what he makes of the stick without turning around to see that the doctor is even looking at it. "How did you know what I was doing? I believe you have eyes in the back of your head" says Watson (Doyle 3: 387). Holmes, dispelling the mystery immediately, responds that the saw Watson reflected in the polished surface of the coffee pot on the table in front of him. This type of interplay, alternately astounding and explaining, is the foundation for their relationship. The fact that Holmes practiced the trick at all speaks to his apparent need to maintain the upper hand, or the dominant position in the relationship. That he explained himself without dragging the exercise out further points to his comfort in the dominant position and, more importantly to the bond between the two men. The exchange can be read as a joke of one friend upon the other or as an exercise between a teacher and a pupil. The text supports both readings. The strength of the teacher-pupil dynamic is further established as the exercise in deduction

gets underway. Holmes asks Watson to deduce whatever he can from the stick about their visitor and as the doctor makes and justifies his inferences, Holmes interjects praise often, showing through positive reinforcement his wish for Watson to improve.

Holmes' praise of his friend ends with a backhanded compliment, one that is vital to an understanding of the dynamics of their relationship:

Really Watson, you excel yourself. I am bound to say that in all the accounts which you have been so good as to give of my own small achievements you have habitually underrated your own abilities. It may be that you are not yourself luminous, but you are a conductor of light. Some people without possessing genius have a remarkable power of stimulating it. (Doyle 3: 389)

Holmes' statement accomplishes several things. It both praises Watson on his deductive prowess and shows an appreciation for his literary pursuits. It proceeds to deny that Watson has any capacity for independent intellectual thought. A conductor of light is, after all, of little value without a vessel that can be illuminated, in this case Holmes himself. It also suggests the symbiosis between the characters; just as Watson provides no light without Holmes, Holmes, presumably conceiving himself as the vessel, cannot be illuminated without a conductor. Finally, it establishes that Holmes believes Watson to possess no genius, but does recognize his own. They therefore have a symbiotic, but hierarchical relationship, both assisting one another but with Holmes clearly in the superior position. After this statement, Holmes tells a confessedly "self-important" (3: 389) Watson that almost everything the doctor said was erroneous. He proceeds to make

his own set of deductions while Watson, never once defending his previous conclusions, chimes in often to concede.

Both Klinger and his fellow Holmes scholar T. S. Blakeney consider the scene representative of the spirit of competition that pervades the friendship between Holmes and Watson. Blakeney also points out that the “double edged testimony to Watson’s assistance is only too typical” and yet “it was a securely-founded friendship which survived this withering frankness of expression” (Blakeney 129). This spirit of competition suggests that while there is a hierarchy in their relationship, each has strengths and qualities to engage and stimulate the other.

There follows a brief glimpse of the closeness of the two men when Watson, conscious of his friend’s habits, goes out to his club for several hours to allow Holmes time to consider Dr. Mortimer’s quandary in isolation. Watson here anticipates Holmes’ response to the announcement that he is leaving for the day unless he can be of service: “No, my dear fellow, it is at the hour of action that I turn to you for aid” (Doyle 3: 422). Watson’s narrative makes it clear that leaving did not merely provide a fortuitous circumstance for his friend to mull over the problem, but actively established the solitary conditions in which Holmes functioned best. This evidence, not only of Watson’s knowledge of Holmes’ needs, but his consideration of them, displays Watson’s independence and self-awareness. As a conductor of light, he knows where and when to apply himself to fuel Holmes’ genius. There is a synergy in their interaction that hints at Watson’s essential function in Holmes’ process.

The emotional connection that is the foundation of their symbiosis is not one-sided. This is made plain through Holmes' recommendation of the doctor as a companion and protector for Sir Henry Baskerville. "If my friend would undertake it," says Holmes with his hand upon Watson's arm, "there is no 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" (3: 454). Holmes' remarks seem genuine enough and the ties to earlier "tight places," which are evidenced in the twenty-six stories published before *Hound*, attest to his sincerity. That he was in earnest is corroborated by Watson's reaction: he was "taken by surprise," and "was complimented by the words of Holmes" (3: 454), he would hardly be likely to be so if he sensed any disingenuousness in his friend.

While Holmes' words ring true, there is no reason to doubt that he does value Watson above other men, it should be noted that his motivation is not pure and honest. Far from trusting to Watson's reports and actions, he leads his friend to believe that he, Holmes, will remain in London and in fact follows the baronet and the doctor to Dartmoor to oversee the case himself in secret. This duplicity further sets Holmes above Watson in the dynamic of their relationship. It speaks to Holmes' nature not as one half of a team, but as a puppeteer, taking advantage of his friend's obvious respect for him to operate in solitude. Though he cares for Watson, an honest feeling that shows in his confession just as Watson prepares to board the train for Dartmoor: "I'm not easy in my mind... about sending you... I give you my word that I shall be very glad to have you back safe and sound in Baker Street once more" (3: 459), he does not consider him an equal.



The next major incident that illustrates the dynamic between Holmes and Watson comes when they next meet, much later in the narrative. Watson has kept Holmes informed of his actions and discoveries through letters to the detective, a narrative device that foregrounds the relationship between them.

The turning point in *The Hound of the Baskervilles* in both narrative and action is the reunion of Holmes and Watson. This centralization of their relationship is suggestive in itself. It speaks to the importance of the men as friends and colleagues, illustrating that the stories are as much about their relationship as they are about the mysteries that form the plot of each adventure. The dynamics that fuel their reunion are highly indicative of their relationship as Conan Doyle conceived it. Because the dynamics shift in each adaptation, it is perhaps the most useful point for judging the evolution of Watson's role.

After being physically absent from the narrative for the full middle third of the novel, Watson discovers Holmes hiding out on the moor. As Holmes had told everyone, including Watson, that he would remain in London, his presence naturally surprises and frustrates the doctor. The first words spoken between the men indicate the affection between them: "It is a lovely evening, my dear Watson... I really think that you will more comfortable outside than in" (3: 548) says Holmes before he enters and sees the doctor. "Holmes! Holmes! ...I never was so glad to see anyone in my life" (3: 550). Following this exuberant greeting, the language continues to be positive on both sides, with Holmes praising Watson's ability to track him, showing even here a desire to train and educate. Watson, for his part, is content with the circumstances until Holmes reveals that he has been in Dartmoor as long as Watson has. "Then you use me, and yet you do

not trust me!” Watson cries bitterly. “I think that I have deserved better at your hands, Holmes” (3: 553).

Holmes’ apology is immediate and his explanation two-fold: firstly that he was brought to Dartmoor partly by his “appreciation of the danger which [Watson] ran” and partly and more vitally, because “[Holmes’] point of view would have been the same as [Watson’s]” (3: 553). It is clear, then, that though Holmes doesn’t consider Watson to be terribly perceptive, he trusts him enough to reach the same conclusions as he does himself. This is high praise indeed from a self-described genius. Holmes had no wish to hurt Watson’s feelings, and indeed, it is only the thought of the “wasted” (3: 554) efforts he made on Holmes’ behalf, the thought of being less useful to his friend, that wounds the doctor’s pride. Holmes is quick to prove that all of Watson’s efforts were not only appreciated, but “invaluable” (3: 553). In his narrative monologue, Watson says that though he was “still rather raw over the deception which had been practiced upon [him], ...the warmth of Holmes’ praise drove [his] anger from [his] mind” (3: 554). The emotional concern is supplanted then by a resurgence of the teacher-pupil relationship: praise is the highest currency that Holmes can use with Watson.

It is important to note that at the end of this exchange, Watson requests full discovery on the case: “Surely,” he stresses, “there is no need of secrecy between you and me” (3: 556). Holmes reveals enough to establish the illusion of full disclosure. He is willing to praise Watson, but he is not willing to make him an equal partner. Watson is useful, even essential, but he sits in the submissive role and seems content to remain there and be of whatever use Holmes deems necessary.

The opening of the climactic eponymous chapter is a reflection by Watson on Holmes' habitual lack of trust:

One of Sherlock Holmes's defects—if, indeed, one may call it a defect—was that he was exceedingly loth to communicate his full plans to any other person until the instant of their fulfillment. Partly it came no doubt from his own masterful nature, which loved to dominate and surprise those who were around him. Partly also from his professional caution, which urged him never to take any chances.

The result, however, was very trying for those who were acting as his agents and assistance. I had often suffered under it.... (3: 581)

Though Watson points out that Holmes' secrecy is difficult to deal with and often directed at him, he nonetheless justifies his friend's nature, to the point of suggesting that the defect might not even be a defect at all. The nature of trust will play an important role in the reading of the men's relationship in several adaptations.

Watson significantly justifies his presence as an essential player in the action on two further occasions. The first is as he, Scotland Yard Inspector Lestrade, and Holmes prepare their ambush for the villain, Jack Stapleton. As Watson "know[s] the lie of the land best" (3: 583), Holmes instructs him to creep forward and report on the goings-on in Stapleton's house. He does this at his peril and succeeds in bringing Holmes the intelligence the detective requires, showing not only his competency and bravery, but more importantly that he has knowledge which Holmes lacks.

The second instance is as Holmes pursues Stapleton across the mortally dangerous Grimpen Mire. Holmes steps off the path and sinks "to his waist... had

[Watson and Lestrade] not been there to drag him out he could never have set his foot upon firm land again” (3: 598). Watson quite literally saves Holmes’ life. Interestingly, Holmes never acknowledges this act, which may indicate either a lack of appreciation, or, more likely in light of the closeness of their friendship, that Holmes had never doubted, in stepping off the path, that Watson would rescue him. Holmes may not trust Watson with all of the information he possesses, but he trusts him with his life.

The final point of interest in the novel concerning the relationship between Holmes and Watson is its ending. The falling action wraps up the mystery and at the close of the piece, both men are home in London discussing the loose ends of the case. The text ends with them putting the case aside to enjoy their camaraderie socially:

And now, my dear Watson, we have had some weeks of severe work, and for one evening, I think, we may turn our thoughts into more pleasant channels. I have a box for *Les Huguenots*... Might I trouble you then to be ready in half an hour, and we can stop at Marcini’s for a little dinner on the way? (3: 612)

Beyond evidence of the teacher-pupil dynamic, beyond the loyal sidekick role, Watson and Holmes are friends. They are social with one another and each is necessary to the other’s emotional health and well being.

It is unsurprising that the Sherlock Holmes stories are Holmes-centric. Holmes can exist outside the narrative; his function does not seem dependent upon Watson. The evidence of this can be found in “The Adventure of the Gloria Scott,” “The Musgrave Ritual,” “The Adventure of the Blanched Soldier” and “The Adventure of the Lion’s Mane,” all original Holmes stories that, though some are narrated to Watson in a frame

story structure, do not include him as a player in the action. Watson, on the other hand, is always interpreted in relation to Holmes. According to Michael Pointer in *The Sherlock Holmes File*, “the whole purpose of Dr. Watson, as created by Conan Doyle, is to provide a foil of reasonable intelligence... to contrast with the super-intelligence of Holmes and to soften the less-attractive features of such a character for us” (95). Watson exists as a filter for Holmes; he serves as a mediator between the Great Detective and the reader. If he is understood to be on a journey, it is not his own, but the readers’, which he assumes and takes by proxy. That said, Pointer ignores the elements of Watson’s character that make him an independent functionary in the tales. His emotional connection to Holmes makes him rounded and three-dimensional.

Though Pointer is correct in his catalogue of foil roles that Watson plays, the doctor’s first and most vital function in Doyle’s work is a narrative function. Simply put, Watson is in the stories so he can tell the stories. In the transition from page to screen, Watson loses his purpose. Thomas S. Leitch reaches the same conclusion in *Film Adaptation and Its Discontents*, stating that “[s]ince no Holmes adaptation makes more than intermittent use of Watson’s first-person narrative voice, Watson is always in danger of becoming a tangential character” (227). In order to be included, new uses for Watson must be found. In fact, before Nigel Bruce appeared in the role for the first time in 1939, the character hardly appeared at all for this reason; it is telling that Bruce is the first Watson-actor to receive billing directly under Holmes. Douglas Wilmer, who played Holmes on television for the BBC in 1964-5, explained the problem that the loss of Watson’s voice caused for those responsible for his series:

Watson could say, in his narrative, “If I didn’t know that underneath that cold and aloof exterior beat a heart as warm and true as,” whatever the line is. But you cannot do this in a dramatization. All you’re left with is the cold and aloof thing and behaving in a dastardly fashion, because you’re seeing Holmes doing it without seeing it through Watson’s eyes, and this is the chief difficulty... Watson softened the impact” (Pointer 59).

As a result of the cinematic silencing of Watson’s narrative voice, filmmakers had to work to justify his role. He was given new functions, new ways to “soften the impact” of Holmes’ cold manner and super-human intellect. Beginning with Basil Rathbone and Nigel Bruce’s *The Hound of the Baskervilles* in 1939 and for a subsequent thirty years on the big and small screens, Watson’s use and his relationship with Holmes had to be tried and retried and built from the bottom up just to be able to hold the same importance as it does in the Canon. He was finally reestablished as a viable foil and sidekick to Holmes’ hero. Watson was given a further twenty years on screen to settle into this complementary role; in the last ten he has exceeded his original function and been established as a hero in his own right. He is made equal to Holmes in many ways, even superior to him in a few, notably in his moral character. He must still be examined in relation to Holmes, but in his journey from worshipful comic relief and blind subordinate through sidekick and helpmeet, to emotional supporter, and finally to independent moral agent and everyman hero, in his contrast to and relationship with Holmes, Dr. Watson evolves into an independent agent. Throughout this journey, which is of interest in its own right, he also constantly reflects the viewing audience.

## CHAPTER TWO

### DEPENDENCE

*“I should be proud and happy if I can be of any service.”*  
– Dr. John H. Watson, *The Sign of Four* (Doyle 3: 234)

#### Nigel Bruce: “The Comic Foil”

Twentieth-Century Fox’s 1939 release of *Hound of the Baskervilles* was not the first time the story was put on screen. It appeared as a silent picture in 1922 and again as a talkie ten years later. No footage of the former exists and the soundtrack and nearly all of the footage of the latter have been lost as well. However, a review from *Variety* at the time of the second film’s release on April 19, 1932 reports that it was “poorly cast, virtually none of the principles interpreting the Doyle characters as readers visualize them. The Doctor Watson is a flat comedian in the mannerism of Fred Lloyd... Sherlock... in Robert Rendel, was far from the prepossessing figure of fiction.” Nigel Bruce was not the first actor to re-conceive Watson’s role as a comic one, then. He was, however, the first to earn the character front billing with the other major players. It is with Bruce that Watson’s journey to reestablish himself begins in earnest.

Although Nigel Bruce’s Doctor Watson has lost favor at the hands of fidelity-based Holmesian scholarship, Alan Barnes points out that

these revisionists who complain that Bruce’s Watson mars this film... on the grounds that Doyle didn’t write Watson as an older, better-natured, funnier foil to Holmes, might ponder whether Bruce’s Watson didn’t actually rehabilitate the doctor on screen: Watson had, after all, been more or less written out of the first

20 years of Sherlock Holmes films... before Bruce, Watson was considered dispensable; after Bruce, it would be a near-unthinkable heresy to show Holmes without him (228).

This “rehabilitation” was a slow process and one that left Watson searching for his niche on screen for three decades. Though contemporary trade papers and reviewers had nothing but praise for Bruce’s contribution to *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, with the *NY Herald Tribune* calling his characterization “rounded and credible” (Steinbrunner 72) and *The Hollywood Reporter* claiming that he was “definitely created out of Sir Arthur’s own work as the blundering and frequently amusing Watson,” and gave “the role the precise detail of a steel engraver, and made it stand alongside Rathbone’s Holmes” (Mar 23, 1939), analysis of the film shows that Bruce’s Watson occupies a different role entirely from Conan Doyle’s capable narrator.

As a bumbling comedian, Nigel Bruce’s Watson exists only to highlight through contrast the infallible heroism of Sherlock Holmes as played by Basil Rathbone. “Fans who have deplored Nigel Bruce’s buffoonish Watson,” Leitch points out, “have ignored the extent to which the paragon of Rathbone’s Holmes makes such a counterweight necessary” (223). With the Second World War looming on the horizon, it is unsurprising that the average citizens’ helplessness to avert the impending calamity should be embodied in their proxy on screen. It is less surprising still that that proxy should wish to serve a hero who is presented as infinitely capable, morally incorruptible, indefatigable, undefeatable and practically omniscient. Such is the dynamic present in 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox’s *The Hound of the Baskervilles*.



It is immediately clear that the narrative structure of the film differs from that of the novel; Watson necessarily cedes his function as narrator to the camera lens. This is highlighted by the opening of the film, which shows the death of Sir Charles Baskerville and the coroner's inquest that introduces the main players in the drama. The result is that though Watson still gets to introduce the residents of Dartmoor to Holmes, he no longer gets to do so for the viewer; the importance of his role is radically diminished with this concession.

When the narrative turns to Baker Street for the opening scene between Watson and Holmes, the viewer finds Watson clipping newspaper articles relating to the Baskerville situation. He is doing so at Holmes' instruction and does not understand why. Their relationship is grounded in several elements that are clear in this scenario. Firstly, Holmes is established to have an apparently precognizant knowledge of the mystery that Dr. Mortimer will bring to him minutes later. Secondly, Watson not only doesn't share that precognizance, but Holmes hasn't bothered to take the doctor into his confidence. Despite this, Watson is blindly following his friend's instructions by engaging in what he considers a meaningless exercise. The speech in which Holmes praises Watson for serving as an inspiration for his own genius is conspicuously absent; Watson is present, but is not an active component in Holmes' process. That Watson has abdicated his function as enabler to Holmes' genius is further evidenced by the manner in which he leaves the detective in solitude to mull over the case. Rather than leave out of knowledge of and consideration for Holmes' habits, he leaves because Holmes picks up his violin.

The doctor scowls and declares “good heavens, you’re not going to start scratching on that infernal thing, are you?” and storms out of the room.

When the moment comes for Holmes to recommend the doctor as a companion to Sir Henry on his trip to Dartmoor, Watson is established as necessary to the plot, but fundamentally impotent as a person. Not only does Holmes not offer praise about the doctor’s capability, he jokes “I give [Watson] into your care, Sir Henry, guard him well.” Though this comment seems to be descended from the wish for Watson to be “safe and sound in Baker Street” (Doyle 3: 459), it indicates Holmes’ belief that Watson can’t care for himself, in which case his role as a protector for Sir Henry evaporates. The only essential function he retains is as a relay for information from the action in Dartmoor to the seemingly absent Holmes. This role is placed in the forefront by the expedient of showing Watson composing his reports, a device that keeps the hero in the narrative conversation, rather than allowing Watson to adopt the mantle of hero himself in any recognizable way.

Perhaps the most obvious example of Watson’s castration as a protagonist is the introduction of Holmes in disguise on the moor. Just after the doctor interrupts Sir Henry and Beryl Stapleton’s assignation on the moor, all three are approached by a vagrant peddler. The mysterious man attempts to sell junk to a blustering and irritated Watson, who looks quite foolish at the man’s hands. This early reintroduction of Holmes into the narrative suggests that the filmmakers did not believe Watson to be capable of driving it himself as he has been firmly established by this point as comic relief.

To further cement his role as a powerless subordinate, the reunion of the doctor and the detective is instigated by Holmes rather than Watson. Holmes is not seen silhouetted against the moon, which he admitted in the original text to be “imprudent” (Doyle 3: 552) and which prompted Watson’s search for “the man on the tor.” Rathbone’s invincible hero is not seen to make such a mistake, one that would establish Watson as a capable foil; rather he sends the doctor an anonymous note: “Dr. Watson – if you want to hear something to your advantage come at once to the stone hut on the southeast edge of Grimpen mire,” thus earning himself another opportunity to prove his intelligence and Watson’s foolishness.

When the meeting does take place, Holmes appears once again in his peddler’s disguise. The act is a purposeless one, as only Holmes and Watson are present. There is no element of the master-pupil dynamic present in the exchange; it is not a teaching exercise but merely exists to make Watson appear even more idiotic. In disguise, Holmes allows his friend to humiliate himself by claiming “I’m Sherlock Holmes...and now perhaps you realize why I can’t be hoodwinked!” to which Holmes, still in character, replies “Oh, sir, sir, sir, that changes everything. Well in that case, sir, my name must be Watson!” before erupting into raucous laughter at Watson’s expense and scoffing “a fine detective you are, calling yourself Sherlock Holmes!” Watson rants petulantly as Holmes continues his derisive laughter, inviting the audience to laugh with him. He placates the doctor by telling him that his reports were “very valuable.” Watson replies that it was “a shabby trick, which [he’ll] not forget” to which Holmes becomes serious and justifies the

necessity of keeping his presence on the moor a secret. He does not mention following the doctor out of fear for his safety, which suggests a distance in their friendship.

As Watson sulks, Holmes declares that “things are becoming clearer.” Characteristically slow, Watson replies “not to me, I assure you. Still a hopeless jumble.” As Holmes explains the situation, which he has pieced together flawlessly, there seems to be no intention to improve Watson, merely to inform him. Watson is not encouraged to grow and evolve. Despite Watson’s “huff,” and his declaration that he won’t forget Holmes’ trick, trust isn’t made an issue. When the scene ends, the viewer is made to feel, through Watson’s tantrum, that if there is any blame to place it should rest with the ridiculous doctor, not with the infallible and perfectly justified hero, Sherlock Holmes.

When Holmes reveals that he must “gamble with sir Henry’s life,” Watson’s morally motivated protestation is cut short by the detective, whose moral judgment is in question for a mere three and half words: “But you can’t possib—” “gambling to save his life,” Holmes cuts in. After this brief exchange, there is never another question regarding whether Holmes’ plan is the correct course of action. Watson’s role as moral agent is thus entirely usurped by Holmes; his hero worship and unswerving faith in the hero silences him entirely.

The final two acts with which Watson has the opportunity to justify his use to the plot are absent in the film. Rather than await Stapleton in ambush at his house, Holmes and Watson head off Sir Henry as he’s being chased on the moor. After Holmes kills the hound, he orders Watson to lead Sir Henry home while he, Holmes, pursues Stapleton alone. Holmes does not get trapped in the mire; rather he is locked in the hound’s lair and

left to die. Watson, having been forced from the action, does not get to save his friend. Rathbone's Holmes, the archetypal hero, contrives to free himself and rush back to Baskerville Hall in time to rescue Sir Henry yet again. However, in the meantime, Stapleton has taken advantage of Watson's ignorance to send him off to the moor so the villain may make his final attempt on the baronet's life. Watson is thus absent at the critical moment when Holmes reveals the solution to the mystery with a dramatic flourish. As Stapleton rushes out of the Hall to escape arrest, he knocks over the befuddled returning doctor, allowing Watson one final opportunity to fail to assist with the case in any material way.

From first to last, the adaptation nurtures a characterization of Watson that exists to serve the cinematic medium, but not the story itself. As a player on screen, Bruce's Watson shines; he is exceedingly effective as the comic relief. As a player in the actual drama, Bruce's Watson is superfluous. Any elements that display a symbiotic relationship between Holmes and Watson are absent. The hero is freed from his friend and allowed to act as a solitary, infallible paragon of justice. Watson's redundancy in the narrative is capped off by the manner in which the film ends. Rather than highlighting the bond between them, Dr. Mortimer gives a florid speech that drips of national pride and essentially paints Holmes as the saviour of England:

Mr. Holmes, we have admired you in the past, as does every Englishman. Your record as our greatest detective is known throughout the world. But this, seeing how you work, knowing that there is in England such a man as you, gives us all a sense of safety and security. God bless you, Mr. Holmes.

To the western world watching Europe teetering on the brink of war, the implications of having “such a man” working for the good of England are neither slight nor subtle. The need to believe in a hero like Holmes who seemed to have a super-human capacity to find and triumph over any villainy left no room for a hero in the mold of Conan Doyle’s Watson, who, though reliable, was never a step ahead, but always following, with the audience, alongside unfolding events.

Andre Morell: “The Aide-de-Camp”

*The Hound of the Baskervilles* would not be brought to the screen again for two decades. The cultural and socio-political landscape of the world was rebuilt during that time and the novel’s next cinematic outing reflects these changes in a new dynamic between the detective of Baker Street and his loyal companion. In 1959 the British production company Hammer Films adapted Conan Doyle’s novel and enlisted two of the company’s leading stars, Peter Cushing and Christopher Lee, both already famous for roles in the company’s classic horror films *The Curse of Frankenstein* and *The Horror of Dracula*, to play Holmes and Sir Henry Baskerville, respectively. Andre Morell took the role of Dr. Watson; it is significant that he was fresh from playing the eponymous role in the renowned BBC television serial *Quatermass and the Pit* in which he was known to the public as the face of heroic and brilliant rocket scientist Professor Bernard Quatermass. That an actor linked to such a role should be chosen to play Watson, who was still remembered by the public as Nigel Bruce’s incompetent bumbler, indicates an evolution in the conception of the character prior to referencing the text of the film at all. Morell recalled that “it was agreed not to do Watson as a comic character. Conan Doyle,

after all, felt that Watson was a doctor and not an idiot as he was often made out to be” (Davies, *Starring Sherlock Holmes* 78-9).

Contemporary sources during the release of the film disagree on the level of capability evinced by Morell’s Watson. *Newsweek* called him “typically bumbling” (June 8, 1959) and *Variety* referred to him as the detective’s “faithful stooge” (Apr 1, 1959). Conversely, the *Mirror News* professed him to be “a far more alert and kindly assistant than previous Holmeses have had to work with” (July 2, 1959) and the *Motion Picture Herald* praises Morell for making “the character a bit shrewder and less befuddled than he was in the days of the late Nigel Bruce” (June 20, 1959). While a transition is most assuredly in progress, The Dr. Watson of 1959’s *The Hound of the Baskervilles* is still searching for his purpose. The role he fills is, as Alan Barnes points out “a significant and largely unheralded departure from the type established by Nigel Bruce” (76). Its nature and position in the evolution of Watson’s character on screen becomes apparent through analysis of the film.

It seems likely that the slight genre shift from Fox’s dramatic effort in 1939 to Hammer’s purer horror style was at least partially responsible for Watson’s new role. Nigel Bruce’s good-natured bluster would be out of place in the highly “sensational, horror-tinged” (Hearn 38) atmosphere of the 1959 film where even “Holmes himself was never the main selling point (a fact evinced by the poster, which depicts only a slaver dog with bloodied fangs)” (Barnes 75). Hammer’s style demanded a different function for Watson. While not prepared to cast him as a self-motivated protagonist, he is granted the right to serve the narrative by serving Holmes. Morell’s Watson is clearly a capable

man, but his relationship to Holmes, who, as before, is presented as a paragon of capability, overshadows his latent talents.

The adaptation forces him into a passive role; indeed the dynamic between he and Peter Cushing's Sherlock Holmes is best described as that of a soldier to his general. He is not a blunderer, but merely follows Holmes' constant orders, never acting of his own volition. Ron Haydock, in *Deerstalker! Holmes and Watson on Screen*, highlights this when he points out that "there was never any real camaraderie between Cushing's Holmes and Morell's Watson" (205). Without reference to the emotional function that Conan Doyle's Watson has in Holmes' life, their relationship must stand only as a business partnership. Like Rathbone's portrayal, Cushing's Holmes does not have any real need for Watson. The men do not function as a symbiotic team, and thus Morell's errand-boy characterization loses any chance to display any independent heroic qualities. He is heroic only through his capacity to follow orders, a quality perhaps valued more by the World War II generation responsible for making and acting in the film than the younger generation who comprised the majority of the target audience.

The film opens with a flashback to Sir Hugo Baskerville's story: the original legend of the hound. Just as opening the 1939 film with Sir Charles death sidelined the relationship between Holmes and Watson, so also does this prologue to the main action. It segues directly into a scene in Baker Street in which it becomes clear that the prologue was a cinematic rendering of Dr. Mortimer's explanation of the legend to Sherlock Holmes. The opportunity for Holmes to educate Watson through the deductions over



Mortimer's walking stick is not present, beginning a trend of lost opportunities that highlight the absence of the teacher-pupil dynamic in the film.

In this initial Baker Street scene, Watson seems present in body only. He remains silent as Holmes questions Dr. Mortimer about the facts of the case. When Mortimer uses medical jargon, Holmes nods to the doctor, effectively giving him permission to speak, and Watson takes his cue to explain the condition to the detective. Watson then lapses into silence once again and does not speak until Mortimer has left. They have a short discussion in which Watson declares that he "saw nothing of significance in anything [Mortimer] said" and then proceeds to identify the only salient fact in the tale, the one that prompted Holmes to accept the case. Holmes cries "that's just it, Watson, well done my boy!" then promptly corrects him, undermining his own compliment. For his part, Watson shows no pride in the compliment and is not crestfallen at being torn down, furthering stressing the emotional detachment between the men. The scene ends with Holmes gaining the solitude he needs to contemplate the problem by assigning Watson a chore that will keep the doctor occupied. Watson, ever the good soldier, accepts the task without comment.

When the moment arrives for Holmes to recommend Watson to accompany Sir Henry to Dartmoor, Watson is barely consulted at all. Holmes proclaims "I can't possibly leave town until the end of the week at least. Watson... you're free at the moment, aren't you?" to which Watson replies, with a reaction that hardly evokes the beaming pride of the doctor's narration in the novel, "well, yes I am. If you think I can do the job." Holmes replies "you're the very man for it. That's settled then. You'll go down with them. You'll

keep in touch by telegram.” Just as with the chore he was ordered to complete earlier, Watson does not respond, rather he passively accepts his commission. No reference is made to any concern Holmes has about Watson’s safety. The absence of care and concern allows the doctor’s role to take on a fluid quality. Like any good soldier, he is versatile; he is made to fill whatever role is vacant by the plot and can do so easily with no emotional connection to ground him.

Once Holmes is left behind, Watson continues his passive role. His presence prompts exposition and the camera follows him to observe the action, but he himself is not responsible for the exposition or the action; he is merely a window to it. While Holmes is kept in the narrative conversation through the written correspondence he demanded from the doctor, Watson is never shown writing reports; instead he is shown receiving Holmes’ responses. Morell’s Watson accomplishes the tasks set him, but he is a reactive character, not an active.

Watson has the opportunity to display his intelligence and capability when he tracks Holmes down on the moor. Reacting to the sight of a man silhouetted against the moon, he takes the ailing Sir Henry back to the Hall and returns to the moor in search of the mysterious stranger. While searching the area, Watson hears a familiar imperious voice: “Why have you left Sir Henry alone?” “Holmes!” he cries in astonishment. “I repeat, why have you left Sir Henry alone?” Only after Watson satisfies Holmes that Sir Henry is safe does the detective offer a cursory greeting. The extent of Watson’s hurt feelings is a single line: “You might have let me know what you intended to do,” delivered without indignation. Holmes does not offer a genuine apology for deceiving his

friend. Characteristically for Morell's Watson, Holmes' explanation is accepted without question; that explanation makes no reference to concern for Watson's safety. When the doctor does ask what Holmes has learned during his time on the moor, the detective's answer is evasive: "There is more evil around us here than I have ever encountered before." It shows no desire to keep the doctor informed about the investigation at all, no appreciation for Watson's own efforts in the case and no intention to treat him as either a student or a partner. The question of trust is never raised; stolid Watson never questions his general.

In a scene invented for this adaptation, Holmes' life is imperiled by a cave-in in an underground mine. Like the attempt on Holmes' life in the Fox film twenty years earlier, the detective proves capable of saving himself, leaving Watson essentially unneeded. Unlike the earlier film, however, Morell's Watson does at least make an effort to rescue Holmes. The scene is therefore not significant in isolation, but by comparison displays an important progression in Watson's character. He is still extraneous, but his desire to assist shows that with a less superhuman companion, he might have been of material use.

Later, when the pair is safely lodged in Baskerville Hall, the fluidity of Watson's role allows him to serve as a receptor for Holmes' explanations. He is not given the chance to react, suggesting that the filmmakers cared little for his character development, but rather took advantage of him as a means to elicit exposition from the nearly omniscient Holmes. As they leave the Hall to pursue Sir Henry, Holmes pauses to further explain his deductions as they relate to a portrait of Sir Hugo Baskerville that has gone

missing. The nature of this explanation is once again such that if treated slightly differently could have been a learning experience for the doctor, but as it stands merely serves to reinforce Holmes' own brilliance.

Once again, Watson's final two opportunities to be of essential value are excised from the story. The ambush does not take place at Stapleton's home, Watson therefore loses his chance to display knowledge that Holmes lacks. The men do not give chase over the moor, so Holmes does not fall into the mire. Thus Watson's chance to save Holmes' life is also lost.

The final scene of the film shows the two men discussing the case in Baker Street together. Holmes has received a letter of gratitude and payment from Sir Henry, and interestingly hands the letter to Watson, telling him: "after tea, you must write to Sir Henry that I should be pleased to accept both his gifts." This last order reduces Watson to Holmes' secretary, an action that clearly and finally shows that Holmes does not consider Watson an equal partner in any capacity. The film ends with the following exchange:

"Tell me Holmes, when did you first suspect the truth about this case?"

"The truth?"

"Yes, that the hound was a real dog and not just a legendary myth."

"When Sir Henry complained about a missing boot, that put me on the scent, as it were."

"As early as that. That's incredible."

"It's elementary, my dear Watson. Elementary. Muffin?"

"Ah. Thank you."

That the scene ends light-heartedly shows that Watson does not begrudge Holmes' lack of confidence in him. No comment is made on why the detective not only failed to trust and confide in Watson about the mystery, but offered him no warning when he was certain that he was sending the doctor into mortal danger in Dartmoor. Holmes' lack of trust is not as telling as Watson's blind acceptance of that lack of trust, as it shows that the doctor places implicit faith in the faultless capacity of his friend not only to solve mysteries, but to safeguard the well being of others and make the correct judgments in every situation.

Hammer Film's *The Hound of the Baskervilles* was a Sherlock Holmes film for a new generation of viewers. This is evident in executive producer Michael Carreras' decision to pre-sell Cushing's incarnation as a "sexy Sherlock" (Davies, *Starring Sherlock Holmes* 78). With the 1960s on the horizon and the baby boomer generation beginning to come of age, the socio-cultural landscape of the world was in flux. Despite this shift in audience, Sherlock Holmes was still presented as an infallible hero. Neither his deductions nor his morals are ever in question and the audience, in the person of Watson, never mistrusts him in any way. The nature of Morell's Watson shows a desire for a society of reliable and capable citizens: people who were able to trust in their leaders; people who would not make waves. Watson's "exmilitary capability" (Pohle, 202) evokes not the rising Boomer generation that comprised much of Hammer's target audience but their parents' generation who comprised the production staff and cast of the film. Morell's Watson was outdated even as he appeared on screen, representing one

generation of viewers while showing the need for a new kind of representative, one who was less interested in following orders and more interested in learning the ropes himself.

Nigel Stock: “The Sherlock Surrogate”

Nine years after rendering *The Hound of the Baskervilles* for the big screen, Peter Cushing had a second crack at the role of the Great Detective when Douglas Wilmer vacated his position as the lead in the BBC’s television series *Sir Arthur Conan Doyle’s Sherlock Holmes*. Wilmer played in 13 episodes between 1964 and 1965 with stage and screen mainstay Nigel Stock as Dr. Watson. When Wilmer declined to return for a second season, the BBC searched for a replacement first in John Neville, who had played the detective to great effect in the 1965 film *A Study in Terror* and upon Neville’s refusal, in Peter Cushing (Davies, *Starring Sherlock Holmes* 90). Cushing would make a total of 16 episodes for the series in 1968, retaining Nigel Stock as his Watson. Among the episodes filmed, Cushing and Stock starred in a two part adaptation of *The Hound of the Baskervilles*.

Analysis of 1968’s *Hound* reveals a Watson on the brink of equality. He has clearly evolved from Andre Morell’s unquestioning soldier into a man with not only latent, but expressed capability. The progress shown through Nigel Stock’s Watson is perhaps most influenced by the change in the way Peter Cushing played Holmes. According to *Films and Filming*, when Hammer Films’ *Hound* was released, “critics were startled by Cushing’s “impish, waspish, Wilde-ian” Holmes” (Barnes 77). The actor softened his portrayal considerably in his second outing and worked to display on screen

his belief that “the stories should be treated in traditional fashion, true to the spirit of Conan Doyle’s original works” (“Peter Cushing Studio Biography”).

The production succeeds in moving closer to a Watson that represented all of the characteristics with which Conan Doyle imbued him, and thus begins to appear as a more rounded character. Stock was “highly praised as a Canonical doctor... and proved his durability by... remaining in the series when Cushing took over” (Pohle 226). His comfort in *Hound* may also be influenced in no small part by the fact that a character on a television show, parts one and two of the episode were Stock’s seventeenth and eighteenth outings as Dr. Watson, has more room to inject nuances into the continuing development of his character. However, from the beginning of the series in 1964, Douglas Wilmer suggests that the adapters were aware of Watson’s inherent importance to the stories and sought to fit him in; Wilmer called the absence of Watson’s narrative filter the “chief difficulty” (Pointer 59) in putting Sherlock Holmes on screen.

While Nigel Stock’s Watson does seem to serve a greater role in 1968’s *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, he still does not occupy the complementary role that would display his qualities as the ideal helpmeet for Sherlock Holmes. In working to make Watson an essential part of the narrative, the adapters failed to give him independent strengths that infuse all of the elements of the interaction between the doctor and the detective with a synergistic quality. Rather, Watson is molded into a kind of surrogate for Holmes himself, acting as an eager if silent apprentice in the detective’s presence and as a stand-in for Holmes in his absence. His natural capacity to serve the story as an independent and unique protagonist is apparent in his desire to learn, but the heroism he

actually displays throughout most of the film is more of a capacity to channel Holmes' skills than any active display of his own. When Stock's Watson appears heroic, it is a reflection of Holmes' heroism. Offering him the chance to reflect heroism is another step toward the emergence of his own independent heroic character, but it is only that: a step.

Like the two previous versions of *Hound*, the BBC's version opens away from Baker Street. In a voiceover narration, Sir Charles Baskerville tells the story of his nefarious ancestor Sir Hugo and the legend of the hound. After this pre-title sequence, the action resumes at Baskerville Hall as Sir Charles continues his story, which transitions into a diegetic narration told to Dr. Mortimer. Thus not only is the importance of the relationship between Holmes and Watson downplayed by starting the action elsewhere and foregrounding other characters, but by having another narrator rather than none at all, Watson in particular is pre-established in a non-narrative role. He is not the teller of this tale.

After the whole of Sir Charles' story is told, including his receipt and burning of the note that lured him to his death as well as his death itself, the action cuts to Baker Street, beginning with Holmes' line "Well, Watson, what do you make of it?" and includes Holmes' playful trickery with the polished coffee pot. This highlights the adapters' desire to remain close to Conan Doyle's text. Attempting to raise Watson's status from previous adaptations, this version highlights the teacher-pupil aspect of their relationship but fails to give Watson an independent character, casting him instead as an apprentice, seeking to imitate his master in all things. Due to this imitation, Stock's Watson, like Morell's before him, is placed in a largely reactive role.



This teacher-pupil dynamic continues through the examination of Dr. Mortimer's walking stick. Watson's attitude is not one of mild interest in the exercise, but of an eager school boy, one step away from visibly blushing with pride when Holmes merely tells him that he knows the detective's methods. The blocking on screen intensifies this as Holmes is seated with Watson standing before him making his guesses in the fashion of a student standing before a headmaster. The significant speech in which Holmes tells Watson that he stimulates genius is included for the first time in any adaptation; in response, Watson is nearly giddy with the praise of his "master" and equally broken-hearted when Holmes tells him that his deductions are mostly erroneous.

The dynamics of the interplay between Holmes and Watson that suggests that Watson is being groomed to be a secondary Holmes give way when other characters enter the scene. With Holmes actively engaged in his work, he doesn't have the time to devote to tutoring Watson and consequently the doctor, devoid of active purpose, is left in silence during Holmes' exchanges with others. Sir Charles' narration has presented the Baskerville legend to the audience; when Dr. Mortimer presents it to Holmes, it does not receive a second narration. Instead, Mortimer hands the original document to the detective, who reads it to himself, with the result that the audience and every player in the action knows the tale except Watson. Holmes begins questioning Mortimer and hands Watson the paper; the doctor must decide to either read it so he can understand the foundation of the case or actively observe Holmes at work. From the time the case is presented through the end of the scene in Baker Street on through the scene in which the three men are in transit to meet Sir Henry and into the introduction of the baronet,

Watson is not given a single line to speak. After all, a surrogate is not necessary when the primary player is available and active.

The next time Watson speaks is through another “training exercise.” After thoroughly examining a warning note received by Sir Henry, Holmes hands it to the doctor asking “What do you make of it, Watson?” Though he does not add anything that Holmes has not already deduced, reinforcing his superfluity, the detective takes the doctor’s attempted inferences seriously, offering information that Watson missed. Unlike his Holmes of nine years previously, Cushing’s detective is invested in Watson’s training and likewise, Watson does not passively accept Holmes’ deductions but works to confirm them and understand how he arrived at each conclusion. Having observed Holmes sniff the page, for example, Watson does likewise and is able to correct a mistaken conclusion. After this interlude, Watson is not referred to until the close of the scene: “Dr. Watson and I will be honoured to entertain you at luncheon...gentlemen. Come Watson.” Holmes, in the role of master, both speaks for his friend and orders him along.

Once back in Baker Street, the blocking allows the passive Watson to at least remain in scene by placing him in the foreground, pouring drinks. He is not taking part in the conversation but he is clearly engaged in listening to it and attempting to follow it. Harking back to Morell’s secretarial Watson, when Holmes decides to send a telegram to ascertain whether Baskerville Hall’s butler Barrymore is in Dartmoor, he tells Watson to take his dictation. Dutifully, Watson puts down the decanter in his hand, picks up a pen and asks “the message?”

That progress has been made in the relationship between Holmes and Watson in this adaptation is evident in the recommendation Holmes gives Watson to accompany Sir Henry to Dartmoor: “You must take with you a trusty man who will be always by your side ... I can say in all confidence that there is only one man I’d like at my side when in a tight corner.” The camaraderie inherent in his words is diminished slightly by the fact that the filmmakers did not allow Watson to react in the moment. The sense of equality is lessened, therefore, by Watson’s receptive passivity.

He is given the chance to react in the following scene, in which Holmes gives the doctor his instructions as they walk to the train that will take Watson, Dr. Mortimer and Sir Henry to Dartmoor. Holmes orders: “simply report the facts to me by letter, no theories. I will do the theorizing.” Despite his interest in Watson’s training, he is not willing to allow the doctor to “practice” when it matters. For his part, Watson is very diligent and does not seem abashed by this apparent lack of faith. Instead, he references the earlier recommendation and beams with pride: “May I say Holmes, how grateful I am for the confidence you’ve shown in me?” Holmes, not one for sentimentality, responds “I hope you’ll remain grateful; you have your revolver with you?” Later in the scene, however, Holmes allows his professorial mantle to fall away for a moment to tell his friend: “This is an ugly, dangerous business, and I shall be very glad to have you back safe and sound in Baker Street. Be careful.” Though Watson’s reactions are less like a friend and more like the teacher’s pet, this show of love and respect harks to the elusive and slowly evolving emotional connection that is apparent in the Canon and is gradually gaining purchase in the relationship between the men on screen.

Holmes is again kept in the narrative conversation through Watson's letters; however, as Watson essentially acts as Holmes rather than for him, both times the doctor is seen composing his reports the audience only hears the salutation "My Dear Holmes" rather than the reports themselves. This implies that Holmes does not receive Watson's observations through a filter; he learns and will act on exactly what the audience has seen as the action followed Watson.

Unlike the previous adaptations, this *Hound* was made for television rather than film; to include the full story presented in the novel, it was made in two parts. The first draws to a close when Watson follows Barrymore out of the house to discover to whom the butler is signaling and bringing food. Harking back to the incompetence displayed by Nigel Bruce's Watson, the doctor loses sight of his charge. He is caught out without his revolver, hears the hound, declares breathlessly that he "must...not...panic..." and sprints in terror back to the Hall. Part one ends with Watson in danger, in fear and in ignorance. This incompetence is, significantly, manifested only when Watson actively fails to heed the advice of his master: "you have your revolver with you?" Watson reverts to an incompetent character only when he ceases to act as Holmes would act. This indicates that Stock's Watson is not inherently a hero in Holmes' mold, but has suppressed his own natural incompetence because he can be a hero by acting like Holmes.

This dual nature reappears as the second part of the episode gets underway. Narratively and visually, the audience sees Watson re-inhabit Holmes' persona. As the first scene opens, Watson is reporting his terror to an incredulous Sir Henry. In the course

of his report, Sir Henry offers a suggestion for action against Barrymore. Watson rejects his plan which prompts Sir Henry to ask “what do you suggest?” Watson replies: “I’d try to imagine what Holmes would do in the circumstances.” As he says this and actively channels Holmes, Nigel Stock visually mimics the distinctive posture and gestures of Peter Cushing. The audience of the time, familiar with Cushing’s acting, would immediately recognise Stock’s deliberate employment of what is colloquially known as “the Cushing finger,” an idiosyncratic gesture linked to the actor. With that gesture and his goal to “imagine what Holmes would do,” Watson successfully puts aside his own ineptitude and once again becomes the heroic Holmes’ surrogate.

Later, Watson tells Sir Henry, in defense of the reports he sends to the detective: “I tell [Holmes] everything... I think I know his methods by this time and consequently I omit nothing.” He also explains those methods as well as Holmes’ habits. He employs the method himself in his interrogation of Laura Lyons. His manner is better described as “Holmesian” than “Watsonian” as he uses direct questions, intimidation and a rational approach to induce the woman to speak rather than employing the comforting, gentlemanly behavior traditionally associated with the doctor.

In Holmes’ absence, Watson seems to have grown in will and capability. By channeling Holmes he is able to display a personal strength that he seemed to lack in the early scenes in which Holmes is present and active. He uses this proactive behavior to track the mysterious man he sighted out on the moor. Finding the stranger’s hideout, Watson waits in ambush, which places him one step ahead of Morell’s Watson who was surprised by the waiting Holmes, just as Morell was a step ahead of Bruce, who did not

track the stranger but was sent for by the man himself. The differences seem slight; however, they represent the vital progression from incompetence to activity and from activity to initiative. When Holmes reveals himself to Watson, he enters laughing and Watson, likewise, is ecstatic to find his friend in Dartmoor: “I’m astonished...well I must say I was never so glad to see anybody in my life!” Worth noting is that Holmes admits that he was as surprised as his friend, having “no idea [Watson] found [his] hiding place until [he] was twenty yards from the door.” This dent in the omniscient characterization of Sherlock Holmes shows an inverse relationship in the rise of Watson and the capability with which the detective is portrayed.

The scene shifts as Watson learns that Holmes has deceived him. It is shot in a way that shows Holmes’ face and Watson’s back. The doctor is seated before his friend with his head hung and his shoulders slumped. Rather than the righteous indignation of Bruce or the easy acceptance of Morell, Stock’s Watson evokes a child who’s had his feelings hurt and this glimpse into an emotional bond between the men shows that such a dynamic was hovering in the back of the script, though it did not appear in any noticeable degree elsewhere. Holmes does not show any true remorse, suggesting that this emotional bond was conceived in this adaptation more as an independent element of the doctor’s personality than as a dynamic between the men. The rift is healed through some disclosure on Holmes’ part. Watson, stung at not having the full trust of his friend throughout the case, seems to deflate to his eager apprentice role once Holmes returns to the action. Once again, the detective needs no surrogate when he can conduct his business in person.

Later, as the men dine, Holmes explains his plan to catch Stapleton: “We must set a trap,” Holmes says “Tomorrow evening Sir Henry must dine with the Stapletons as arranged.” Watson, ever eager to please his master, declares “I shall not stir from his side for an instant!” Holmes tells him instead that the doctor must “devise an excuse and allow him to go there alone,” a proposition that shocks Watson. Holmes assures him that they will be near at hand to assist Sir Henry. Watson does not question the morality of Holmes’ plan or the ethical questions raised by his intention to send the baronet blindly into mortal peril. At this point in the narrative, it is necessary to set as much information before the audience as is held by Holmes. Much of this exposition comes in conversation between Holmes and Watson, but it is presented more as a person working through his own ideas than a dialogue between equal partners.

As the wait outside Stapleton’s home is not shown, Watson’s opportunity to be of use in knowing the layout of the building is lost. More significantly, Watson not only doesn’t get to save Holmes from certain death in Grimpen Mire, but Watson himself attempts to pursue Stapleton over the treacherous terrain. Holmes restrains him bodily, very likely saving the doctor’s life. This reversal of roles, which reinforces the distance between the men by reestablishing the dominant-subordinate relationship, is how the film ends. The final shot is of Holmes gripping Watson in a life-saving gesture.

Nigel Stock’s Dr. Watson displays qualities of heroism, but he is not on his own journey. Because he mimics the master rather than compliments him, Watson is not an independent agent. He doesn’t offer qualities that Holmes lacks; instead he serves as a less functional or less developed version of Holmes. As the proxy for the audience,

Watson's needs and perspective are projected onto the audience. Essentially he displays a desire to better himself, but that betterment is manifested not in an introspective and proactive development of his own latent traits, but a dogged belief that to be a hero, he must transform himself into someone else. Watson does not have the inherent capability to match Holmes on his own ground and therefore spends his life as a pale imitation of the detective, not a heroic figure in his own right.

In *Starring Sherlock Holmes*, David Stuart Davies points out that as "Watson is the narrator of the stories and Holmes' sounding board...when it came for the character to be taken from the page and dramatized, it's perhaps not surprising that other writers had problems knowing what to do with him" (92). Beginning with Nigel Bruce, adapters were determined to include the doctor in their renderings, but just how to include him was a question that was dealt with through trial and error. His narrative function was usurped by the camera lens and scriptwriters spent decades trying to wedge him into a different role. Each role he was given altered the nature of Watson's personality to some degree and none allowed him to function as an independent, truly essential element of the stories.

The reason that the adaptations of *The Hound of the Baskervilles* from 1939, 1959 and 1968 each fail to make Watson matter, that each have a Watson foundering to find his niche, is that though they are anxious to make him an essential player, and each adaptation moves closer to managing this, the adaptations are set on a particular notion of Holmes that doesn't allow Watson to be necessary to the detective in any way other than as a mere functionary. None of them present Watson as a character that is emotionally



indispensable to the story. He might be replaced in Fox's film by any comical character, in Hammer's with any aid de camp and the BBC's endeavor with anybody willing to act like the detective in his absence. A Watson was needed that served not only the plot, but his own and Holmes' emotional needs. In order for Watson to be truly indispensable, he needs to complement Holmes rather than supplement him. In order for Holmes to need Watson, he would have to cease to be the infallible paragon that was projected on screen by the generation of filmmakers responsible for these three adaptations.

## CHAPTER THREE

### INTERDEPENDENCE

“I am lost without my Boswell.”  
– Sherlock Holmes, “A Scandal in Bohemia” (Doyle 1: 12)

#### Transitions: Parody and Lenfilm

The 1970s represented a shift in the way filmmakers engaged with the Sherlock Holmes franchise. New takes on the characters included Billy Wilder’s *The Private Life of Sherlock Holmes* and the adaptation of Nicholas Meyer’s pastiche novel *The Seven Percent Solution*, which focused heavily on Holmes’ sex life and drug use, respectively. Several comic parodies also appeared, targeted, as David Stuart Davies notes, to “take [Holmes] down a peg or two” following decades in which “too much reverential homage had been paid to the sage of Baker Street” (*Starring Sherlock Holmes* 100). Gene Wilder and John Cleese both took cinematic digs at the Holmes mythos, but only one parody of *The Hound of the Baskervilles* resulted from the trend; the 1978 film starred Peter Cook and Dudley Moore as Holmes and Watson with “Carry On” regular Kenneth Williams in the role of Sir Henry Baskerville. The plot bears almost no resemblance to the novel and the film, which misses the mark as both a Holmes vehicle and as a comedy, was described as a “dismally uninspired, desperately jumbled picture” in *Films and Filming* (Davies, *Starring Sherlock Holmes* 107). It is worth noting here only for its participation in the trend of presenting a less than capable Holmes, dispelling the pervasive notion of the detective as an infallible man. New ideas are often tried first in comedy before edging into drama; this breakdown of the archetypal Holmes, which had thus far stanchied the

opportunities for Watson to emerge as an important and rounded character in his own right, paved the way for a more equal partnership. The partnership, manifested in the emotional bond that was highlighted in the adaptations of the 1980s, finally allowed Watson to appear as an independently capable man, no longer searching for a way to be of use to the narrative.

Two versions of *Hound* that will not be analyzed here in detail were released to general public and critical censure and fell into obscurity almost immediately. The first, a one-off Holmes television episode from 1972 was sloppily made on a painfully small budget with neither of the lead actors filling their roles believably. The second, an installment of BBC's "Classic Serials" made in 1982 is so minutely faithful to both the spirit and the letter of the original novel that it barely takes the contemporary cultural context into account at all. As a result of their individual failings, neither resonated with the public and are therefore not indicative of the bond between the evolution of Watson's character and society's evolving notion of its own sense of self.

Three adaptations of *The Hound of the Baskervilles* were released to warmth and praise between 1981 and 1988. The first, a two part episode of a Soviet television series made by Lenfilm that ran to great acclaim between 1979 and 1983 bears mention though its situation as a cultural outlier makes it less pertinent to this study than the other two. It should be noted that though the production was foreign, it has been screened with English subtitles and received much praise in the UK to the extent that Russian Vasily Livanov has the honour of being the only actor of any nationality to receive an OBE by the Queen of England for his portrayal of Sherlock Holmes. The longest of any version of *Hound*

ever put on screen, it focuses less on action than character; the production is faithful without being slavish. A feature worth noting is the redistribution of Canonical lines between Holmes and Watson, providing a closer balance in the men's intellects. Lines once directed exclusively to Holmes are presented to include Watson in the conversation. For example, Watson rather than Holmes is given the line "A man's or a woman's?" referring to the footprints at the sight of Sir Charles Baskerville's death. In the novel, this line precipitates the cliff-hanger, chapter-closing reveal "Mr. Holmes, they were the footprints of a gigantic hound!" (Doyle 3: 414). By giving the question to Watson rather than Holmes, the answer is thus undirected at the detective but has instead a universal quality, acknowledging the two men as a team.

During the absence of Holmes in the middle of the story, Watson is made the main player, not a reporter and not an observer, but the active protagonist. He not only serves the action, but he is fleshed out through a more multi-faceted emotional depth. His relationship with Holmes displays shared humor, pride and concern. In addition, Watson is re-imagined as a mentor and confidant for Sir Henry as the baronet struggles to assimilate into English country life. These added dimensions to Watson's character represent a major step in the transition from stooge to hero. Here, for the first time, Watson's character is made complex enough to render him unique and irreplaceable within the narrative.

While Holmes' absence gives Watson the best opportunities to shine, Vitaly Solomin is generally noted as bringing great strength and depth to Watson throughout

every sequence in which he appears. Notable Canadian Holmesian scholar Charles Prepolec praises Solomin's Watson heartily in his review of the Lenfilm series:

Dapper, but sensibly dressed, he carries himself with a no-nonsense military posture that is tempered by an air of concern that one might expect from a physician. In repose, he seems perpetually bemused by his friend's world and behaviour, but Solomin's youthful and friendly face comes alive whenever he smiles or laughs. ...language barrier or not, he is in my estimation one of the very best Watsons to ever appear on-screen. (Prepolec)

It is quite apparent through both the script and Solomin's performance that a new general conviction in Watson's significance was taking hold.

Donald Churchill: "The Best Mate"

When native Scottish actor Ian Richardson was given the role of Sherlock Holmes, he read and annotated all 60 Conan Doyle stories in preparation (Davies, *Starring Sherlock Holmes* 114). He had particular notions regarding what made the detective who he was and those notions included the character's undesirable qualities as well as his desirable qualities. "[T]hough a 'hero,'" Richardson argues, "he escapes the dullness of having to be a good person. He is allowed to behave badly because you are led to believe that without his faults he would not have his virtues" (Davies, *Starring Sherlock Holmes* 7). Richardson, with his familiarity with the Canon, is aware of these faults; in previous adaptations, however, they had hardly received much treatment beyond a stately frost in the detective's unflappable demeanor.

Richardson's idea of a fallible hero shines through in the two Holmes films he made, both released in 1983, the second of which was an adaptation of *The Hound of the Baskervilles*. Though Richardson was critical of his Watson, Donald Churchill, calling his performance "silly ass," and remarking that Churchill "didn't really give a damn about the part" noting with frustration that "Watson was a man of letters as well as a physician" (Davies, *Starring Sherlock Holmes* 115), the production still allows Watson to have a relationship with Holmes that is complementary, particularly on an emotional level. Whether this is because of or in spite of Churchill's performance is of little consequence; the film shows a symbiosis between the characters that, with the exception of Lenfilm's Soviet production two years previously, had not been present in any version of *Hound* to date.

Once again, the adaptation begins away from Baker Street with the death of Sir Charles Baskerville. The sequence detracts much less from the foregrounding of the Holmes-Watson relationship than previous adaptations, however, as it contains almost no dialogue at all and at a mere two minutes thirty-eight seconds long, it functions as a teaser to the main action rather than as an element of the narrative proper. With the cut to Baker Street in the next scene, Holmes is seen and heard playing a tune on the violin; the first line belongs not to the detective, but the doctor. When Holmes asks Watson what he makes of their visitor's stick, Watson launches directly into an explanation. The particular deductions that the writers chose to include for Watson were mostly correct; he reaches only a single erroneous conclusion. The subtle difference between making incorrect inferences and making several correct inferences but leaving out several

important pieces of the puzzle allows Holmes to fill in the blanks in a complementary fashion rather than tear down Watson's reasoning and build his own independently. The blocking of the scene reinforces this, as the men stand next to one another, centered onscreen, examining the stick together.

The blocking in the next scene continues to support the presentation of the two men as a team. When Dr. Mortimer arrives, Watson takes his hat and stick while Holmes fetches a chair. The legend of the hound is read aloud, allowing Holmes and Watson to hear it for the first time together. After Mortimer leaves, the two men smile and chuckle at one another, ending the scene with a single line indicative of their bond: "the game's afoot, Watson."

The central element of the scene in which Holmes recommends Watson as a companion and protector for Sir Henry is pathos. Holmes declares "I shall send someone in my stead. He's a redoubtable fellow in whom I have an absolute trust." Watson, looking heartbroken that Holmes has more faith in another for the task asks with a stutter "Really? W-well, who's that then?" Holmes, for his part, looks confused that Watson didn't recognise himself in the detective's description and answers "You, old man." More focus is placed on Holmes' pleasure at making his friend happy than on Watson's pride at the compliment, highlighting Holmes' reliance on the emotional bond between them.

The scene in which Holmes and Watson part company is unique among adaptations of *Hound*. After telling Watson to write every day and report everything, Holmes issues the final warning about the danger that Watson will face. With a smile, the doctor draws his revolver and Holmes holds up his hands playfully and laughs. "goodbye

Holmes.” Watson says, storing his weapon. “Bon voyage mon amie” Holmes laughs, with the air of one friend sharing an “inside joke” with another. The camaraderie exhibited in this scene is highly indicative of the shift in the dynamic between the two characters.

Holmes is evoked several times while he is absent from the narrative to keep him in the conversation. Here, for the first time onscreen, Scotland Yard Inspector Lestrade is restored to the story. He fills a comic function, particularly in dialogue with Watson who always seems to get the upper hand even when intentionally acting like a fool himself. When the two men meet in Dartmoor for the first time, Lestrade immediately asks where Holmes is. When Watson replies that he’s alone, Lestrade cries “Without Holmes? But you’re always together!” showing that their camaraderie is not only visible when they are alone, but is commonly acknowledged among their acquaintances as well. As an active player in the story, Watson takes the initiative both to visit Laura Lyons and to confront Mrs. Barrymore about her crying at midnight. In the midst of his work, he declares “My word. If Holmes only knew what he was missing!”

In a scene included as a throwback to 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox’s 1939 adaptation, Holmes reappears early in the narrative in disguise. As in that film, Holmes takes advantage of the opportunity to play a joke on Watson. The inclusion of Holmes necessarily diminishes Watson’s role. Watson does not interrupt Henry & Beryl on the moor; instead Holmes is shown to be watching from nearby. This suggests that it is perhaps less that the filmmakers were interested in showing Watson as more intelligent or more capable, Andre Morell’s Watson was capable enough, as was Nigel Stock’s, but



rather that his relationship with Holmes shows him to be a friend rather than an instrument. His importance as an emotional equal to Holmes is much greater than ever before.

That is not to suggest that Watson is not given the opportunity to demonstrate his heroic capabilities. It is Watson who discovers that Mrs. Barrymore is signaling to someone on the moor and he leads Sir Henry out to search for whoever is signaling back. Just as Watson has the upper hand in his interactions with Lestrade, Sir Henry takes his orders from Watson. Additionally, Watson saves the baronet's life and shoots and injures the murderer, Selden.

The ease of the emotional connection between Holmes and Watson is apparent in the tone of the doctor's reports. Unlike the businesslike missives of earlier versions, the letters of Churchill's Watson don't read as mere facts but as informal correspondence to a friend: "were I the Nottinghill murderer," Watson quips, "I should feel supremely confident with inspector Lestrade bungling about."

The reunion between Holmes and Watson takes place when Watson spots the disguised Holmes and follows him to his den. As in 1939's adaptation, Holmes continues to play to Watson in disguise; however, the comparative reaction of Churchill's Watson shows the progress made with the character in the intervening four decades. While Bruce blustered and lied, Churchill is unruffled, draws his revolver and demands an explanation of their visitor. When Holmes reveals himself, Watson reacts with barely controlled anger: "I do wish that you would let me in on things Holmes." The doctor is only appeased when Holmes declares "thanks to you I have all but completed the case." This

indignation at Holmes' lack of trust displays Watson's independent spirit. Perhaps the most interesting element of the scene, though, is a small gesture at its close. As Holmes speaks, he pulls on his jacket leaving his collar askew. Still in conversation, Watson absently reaches up and tucks it in. This easily missed, unacknowledged gesture goes far in describing the close personal bond between the men.

Holmes and Watson go to question Laura Lyons together. The scene reveals two points of interest: the first is Holmes' own awareness of his fallibility. Mrs. Lyons' first line is directed to the detective in anger: "You're no gentleman, sir." He responds easily: "Only one of many faults, I'm afraid." Holmes proceeds to be quite harsh in his questioning, while Watson stands back, allowing his friend to do his job. However, Watson has the opportunity to prove his heroism when the woman's belligerent husband bursts in and uses violence against her. "How dare you treat a lady in that fashion!" Watson explodes in rage. Even when Lyons threatens Watson with a broken bottle, the doctor stands firm, ready to defend Mrs. Lyons at great peril to himself. Though Holmes calls him off before blows are exchanged, the scene certainly displays more of Watson's assets than Holmes'.

As they prepare the ambush for the denouement, Watson reaches the end of his patience, new territory for Watson on screen. He states firmly: "Now look here Holmes. I want no more secrets, Holmes. I'm cold, I'm uncomfortable, and I'm entitled to know what our plans are." Under that declaration, Holmes concedes: "Quite right Watson" and explains everything he knows about the case. This disclosure is indicative of a level of

trust not present in earlier adaptations. Despite this new level of importance, Watson is still not given the chance to be of use regarding the layout of Stapleton's house.

The dynamics of the rest of the film are drastically altered from Conan Doyle's text. Rather than mauling Sir Henry, the hound is put in physical confrontation with Holmes instead. Where Holmes had outpaced Watson in the novel and shot the hound before the doctor caught up with him, here Watson shoots and kills the hound, integrating an additional level of teamwork into the tale. That sense of teamwork continues as Holmes does not resolve the situation alone, but takes Watson with him. Together they rescue Beryl Stapleton and together they pursue Jack Stapleton into the Grimpen Mire. They get trapped in the hound's lair and Holmes, still the obvious leader of the duo, comes up with a two-man plan for escape. While this does not quite equate to Watson saving Holmes' life directly, both men must depend on one another for their mutual survival. They execute their parts in the plan, following which, Watson stays to care for Beryl while Holmes continues to give chase to Stapleton through the mire, where the villain eventually perishes.

The film ends at Baskerville Hall. Sir Henry and Beryl exit the scene, leaving the film to close with Holmes and Watson contemplating the case together. The whole production begins to redress the imbalance between Holmes and Watson as characters by giving them independent personalities yet having them effectively work as a single unit, Watson providing the heart and Holmes the mind. There is no doubt that Holmes is still the intellectual superior of his friend. He has the dominant role in the relationship, much as Conan Doyle's novel established, and as every adaptation thus far demonstrated. This

film, however, shows for the first time that though Holmes is superior, he is nonetheless emotionally dependant upon Watson. Without the doctor's unique personality, Holmes would not function as well either personally or professionally.

Edward Hardwicke: "The Life Partner"

By 1988 Granada Television had created twenty-four 50 minute episodes and one 100 minute telefilm, each adapted directly from a Conan Doyle story and starring Jeremy Brett as Sherlock Holmes. Granada had won a court battle with Sy Weintraub, who helmed the two films starring Ian Richardson, for the right to make the show; it went into production in 1983 (Davies, *Starring Sherlock Holmes* 122). The second 100 minute telefilm that Granada chose to make was *The Hound of the Baskervilles*. Like the 25 episodes already produced for the series, efforts were made to retain as much workable material as possible from the original text in the transition from page to screen.

Brett, who functioned as a champion for Canonical fidelity on set, was keen throughout his tenure as Holmes to do justice to Watson's character. In an interview published in the *New York Times* on May 26, 1985, two years into his eleven year stint as the Great Detective, he was quoted as saying that "we bring Watson out of the buffoon and into the light. This is clearly one of the great friendships in literature, and Watson was a sensible fellow with many admirable qualities." What is most important in Brett's conception of Watson is not that he is sensible or intelligent, but that the friendship between the men is the central element of not only Watson's character, but Holmes' as well. This firm foundation is even more apparent in Granada's *Hound* than it was in the version made five years previously. In addition to Brett's firm ideas and those of the

production staff, Watson was brought “into the light” by the performance of Edward Hardwicke, who took over the role opposite Brett when it was vacated by David Burke after the first 13 episodes of the series. His efforts on behalf of the Watson character are evident from his acting, for according to Peter Kemp in an article for *The Independent*, “Edward Hardwicke’s personification of Watson seems so stalwartly genuine that you feel even Holmes’s hawk-like gaze could not spot a single give-away touch of falsity in his performance” (Davies, *Bending the Willow* 124-5).

The film, like its immediate predecessor, opens with Sir Charles waiting & running from Hound. However, here it literally is a pre-title teaser, falling in line with the standard format for all of the episodes that Granada made. The action is shown, but no words are spoken until the cut to the first scene, where Holmes plays his “well-polished coffee pot trick” upon the doctor. What is interesting about the scene is the manner in which it is framed. Holmes is in the foreground and the audience, rather than experiencing the moment of awe that Watson does at the detective’s apparent omniscience, sees Holmes prepare and execute the trick. Thus, in the very first scene, Holmes’ magic is diminished as the audience is allowed to see behind his illusion. The sense of Holmes as superhuman is reduced from the first words of the film.

When Holmes asks the doctor’s opinion, Watson is not flustered and Holmes does not act like a schoolmaster giving a lesson to a child. Instead, Holmes’ attitude is playful; he bursts into applause at the conclusion of Watson’s speech and while earlier Watsons would have beamed with pride at the compliment, Hardwicke, who never failed to present Watson as a secure and confident man in his own right, is merely complacent.

Following this, Holmes is given the telling lines that Conan Doyle wrote for him to highlight the symbiosis between the detective and his friend:

Watson, you know I am bound to say you habitually underrate your abilities. It may be that you are not yourself luminous, but you are a conductor of light. Some people without possessing genius have a remarkable power for stimulating it. I confess that, my dear fellow, I am very much in your debt.

These lines, so indicative of the relationship between Holmes and Watson, show that the doctor is not on Holmes' level but is nonetheless an integral element in the detective's process. Their inclusion shows an emphasis on the men's relationship.

The emotional bond continues to develop during Dr. Mortimer's visit. Holmes and Watson share many sly glances, smiles and laughs with one another; it is clear that they are old established friends. Holmes teases Watson by quipping, "this may appeal to your lurid taste in fiction, Watson" but Watson's reaction shows that he recognizes it not as an insult, but a jest. The self confidence evident in Hardwicke's portrayal once again shows the depth of Watson's character.

Holmes reads the legend of the hound aloud as well as holding the paper so that Watson can read along, allowing them, as with Richardson and Churchill, to engage with the case for the first time together. Watson then holds a conversation with Mortimer about Sir Charles' death in which the doctor is given some of Holmes' lines from the novel, just as Solomin had in Lenfilm's production. This redistribution occurs throughout the film and ensures that "Hardwicke's Watson emerges not only as an intelligent,

reliable and sophisticated companion, but a perceptive one too” (Davies, *Bending the Willow* 142).

While the scene in which Watson leaves Holmes to ponder in solitude is absent, it is understood to have taken place as he is seen to return to Baker Street after what is clearly an absence of some time, which Holmes deduces the doctor had spent at his club. In a scene pulled directly from the novel, he comes home to a smoke-filled sitting room and complains or rather admonishes Holmes for the “poisonous atmosphere.” Here, audiences see Watson question Holmes in a way they had never before seen him do on screen. This plays into Jeremy Brett’s notion that “[i]n some ways, Watson is stronger than Holmes. That comes through his kindness, I suppose. He sees Holmes’s weaknesses and tries to protect him from them... Watson is always on the lookout in order to save his friend from pain, indignity or destruction” (56-7). They proceed to discuss the case as equals.

The scene in which Holmes recommends Watson as a guardian for Sir Henry is short and clear. Holmes tells the baronet that business keeps him in London and then he slyly points and says “I recommend my friend Watson.” The camera cuts to Watson, who looks surprised, and back to Holmes, who smiles at him. “That’s very kind of you doctor,” says Sir Henry, and that is the full extent of it. Rather than telling Watson to report everything, Holmes says “when the crisis comes, Watson, and it will, report to me.” This suggests that Holmes has faith in Watson to follow the trail and sift the important facts from the erroneous. In an interesting exchange, Holmes quotes from *Hamlet*: “there are more things on heaven and Earth...” to which Watson looks

disapprovingly and responds “we are men of science, Holmes.” That Watson should remind Holmes to maintain his grip on the real and the immediate indicates a reversal of roles that briefly places the doctor in the dominant intellectual position.

The transition from the action in London to Dartmoor happens with Watson’s send-off. The scene itself ends with lines drawn from the Canon that once again highlight the deep emotional bond between the men: “it’s an ugly, dangerous business, Watson. Believe me I shall be very glad to have you back safe and sound in Baker Street once more.” In addition to the dialogue, extreme close ups show the importance of the sentiment and how genuinely it is meant. Watson looks very touched and responds “thank you Holmes,” to which answer Holmes smiles fleetingly and looks troubled. To emphasize its importance, Holmes’ lines are reiterated in voiceover later in the film.

Once on the train to Dartmoor, the action shifts to make Watson the protagonist. Voiceovers show his inner thoughts, reinforcing the link to the audience as well as Watson’s prominence in the tale. The narrative device also restores, however briefly, Watson’s role as narrator. As the active player, the audience meets Stapleton through Watson’s meeting with him and Beryl through his meeting with her. Watson also spots the mysterious “man on the tor,” protects Sir Henry when he runs out after Selden, and deduces the identity of and searches out Laura Lyons. In order to keep Holmes in the narrative conversation, a few reaction shots to Watson’s reports are scattered throughout this section of the film, and finally in frustration, Watson growls “I would to God Holmes was here. Why does he not come?” There is clearly admonishment for Holmes’ apparent



negligence in the doctor's words and tone, showing an independence of thought and spirit as well as independence of action.

Watson tracks down the "man on the tor," taking Mortimer with him. The two men, guns in hand, wait in ambush. Using the text from the novel, Holmes calls out to him; Watson, for his part, is both shocked and pleased while Holmes smiles lightly. "I thought you were in Baker Street, working on that case of blackmail" the doctor cries. "That is what I wished you to think," replies Holmes as he extends his hand in friendly greeting, Watson smiles and steps forward to grasp it. "I have deserved better at your hands, Holmes." He admonishes, "You've used me and do not trust me." Holmes proceeds to explain that their enemies would have been put on their guard had Sir Henry or Watson known that he was in Dartmoor. He notes his own fault in being "foolish enough to show [himself] against the moon, further crumbling Holmes' supposed infallibility. Watson's only irritation stems from the fact that he believes his reports were a waste of time and effort. Holmes pulls them out and says how invaluable they were, ending his speech with "brilliant, my dear fellow. Brilliant." Here Watson does not act like a petulant child, but as a reasonable adult, frustrated at the secretive nature of his friend and understandably annoyed at the idea that his time, which he seems to consider as valuable as his friend's, would be wasted.

As the men trade notes, tellingly including information that Watson had gathered of which Holmes, despite his independent investigation had no knowledge, the detective declares that their "researches have been running along the same lines." This Canonical compliment to Watson's intelligence, excised from most adaptations, again suggests that

Holmes not only likes and needs Watson personally, but respects him as a man of independence and capability. Holmes proceeds to share all the information he has gathered, taking Watson, as an equal, into his complete confidence.

Together they discover the portrait of Sir Hugo, and together they brief Sir Henry on their plans. They have clearly developed the plan together before hand as well. Similarly, when they question Laura Lyons, they tag team the comments and when she tells her story, she sits framed between them. This teamwork, on show in the final third of the film when the two men are reunited and have the opportunity to work in tandem, illustrates the level to which Watson has been elevated to serve as an equal to Holmes. When Holmes enters the action, Watson is not relegated to the background nor is he presented as a redundancy, rather he complements Holmes, almost as a husband and wife complement one another. Indeed, David Stuart Davies, comments that the “nature of the relationship that exists between the two men...has all the uncharted domestic connotations of a marriage” (*Bending the Willow* 38).

During the denouement, Watson is given, for the first time on screen, the opportunity to provide the essential function as lookout that Conan Doyle wrote for him in the novel. Holmes states, “while Dr. Mortimer and I guard the path, you watch the house, Watson... be careful Watson.” As the tension builds, the camera lingers not on Holmes, but on Watson, watching the house, loading his gun, and moving off to make his report to his waiting friend. This chance to serve the narrative in a manner that only he is uniquely equipped to do reinforces the irreplaceable qualities of Watson’s character. As in the previous adaptation, the final chase is altered to increase Watson’s participation.

For though it is Holmes that fires the bullet that finally fells the hound, both men shoot the beast together. Once again, though, Watson is denied the opportunity to rescue Holmes from the Grimpen Mire.

The final scene of the film is back in Baker Street with only Holmes and Watson in attendance. Watson is reading back his account of the case to Holmes and they discuss the loose ends as colleagues and as equals. The final lines focus entirely upon the relationship between the men: “I have tickets for *Les Huguenots* at Covent Garden. A little dinner at Marcini’s on the way?” Holmes asks his friend pleasantly, “Wonderful Holmes.”

In these two adaptations, there is no question that Watson found his niche as Holmes’ equal counterpart. Jeremy Brett was fond of saying that “he believed that Holmes needed Watson, perhaps more than Watson needed Holmes.” (Davies, *Bending the Willow* 56) and this shifting dynamic only begins to show in the adaptations of the 1980s. It is vital to note that the elements that most demonstrate a level of equality and the presence of true emotional attachment are those that have been deliberately lifted from Conan Doyle’s own text and woven into the scripts of the films. James W. Maertens’ claims in his article “Masculine Power and the Ideal Reasoner: Sherlock Holmes, Technician Hero,” that

Holmes is remarkable for being completely unattached to anyone. Even his intimacy with Watson is that of a superior to disciple, teacher to pupil, genius to biographer. These are distanced, detached, and abstract relationships characterized more by Logos than Eros. (Maertens 313)

However, his suggestion seems to be contradicted by the evidence of Watson's journey on screen; the development of the cinematic Watson both to a level of interdependence as a necessary emotional support to Holmes parallels his journey to be resorted to his role as written by Conan Doyle. That Maertens contrasts Logos with Eros, love, rather than Pathos, emotion, is worth considering.

Although Watson fulfills roughly the same function in the 1983 film as he does in the 1988, the relationship between he and Holmes can nonetheless be said to have evolved from the former adaptation to the latter. Churchill's Watson fills the role of best friend. In that role, he shares humor, provides support, and functions symbiotically with Holmes. There is no doubt that this represents growth in character from Nigel Stock's mimetic Watson. However, there is a notable difference between Churchill's helpmeet, "friend Watson" and Hardwicke's and that is largely that Churchill's provides Pathos, while Hardwicke's displays something more akin to Eros.

In speaking of Watson's romantic attachment to client Mary Morstan in the novel *The Sign of Four*, Jeremy Brett noted that he considered that "Watson was more in love with Holmes—in a pure sense—than he could have been with a woman" (Davies, *Bending the Willow* 95). This is not meant to suggest any sexual connotation to their relationship, for that was neither stated nor implied. Granada writer Jeremy Paul explained the relationship as it was intended to come across in the series, *The Hound of the Baskervilles* included: herein "lay this extraordinary, detailed Victorian friendship between two men, which carried no modern sexual overtones at all. It was just friendship uncomplicated in its nature, something that perhaps our hurrying world has lost sight of"

(Davies, *Bending the Willow* 118). That he felt the need to include the caveat regarding sexual overtones suggests that his conception of their relationship was beyond simple friendship and was more akin to a pure love: the Eros that Maertens alleged did not exist.

Whether or not platonic love flowed from the Canon is hardly relevant; there can be no disputing the fact that by 1988 the focus of Sherlock Holmes adaptations rested on the deep love that existed between Dr. Watson and his friend and that love rested on Watson's independent qualities as a capable protagonist, for indeed, as director, screenwriter, author, and Holmesian Nicholas Meyer stated, "why [would] a genius hang out with an idiot?" (3).

These adaptations followed on from films and television series born into the counterculture of the 60s and 70s, in which the mainstream film and television industry was still very much in the hands of the older generation. That generation had a keen sense of what it meant to need an infallible hero in whom to trust, children born after the Second World War felt the ripples and after affects, but not the genuine fear of knowing that their lives, their nations, may cease to exist without men of strength and genius to protect them. The Holmes films of the 1980s represented a shift and spoke very much to a new generation of viewers. The simultaneous presentation of domesticity and independence reflected the wants and needs of the rising "Me Generation."

In many ways, by the end of the 1980s, Granada had succeeded in assimilating Sherlock Holmes into the realm of modern popular television with all the contemporary hallmarks, notably an atypical yet nonetheless functional family and main characters that each had unique personal qualities that played off one another (Jones 250). While Holmes

in the guise of Ian Richardson and Jeremy Brett was still a genius, far above the audience and his friend in intellect, he was nonetheless made human in his need for emotional support. The audience is still left to identify with Watson, who no longer has the need to worship his friend; Churchill's Watson and even less so Hardwicke's Watson does not need a hero after whom to tag along like an excited puppy. They, like the children born in the 1950s and 60s, have become independent and confident in their abilities. Thus Watson's journey has returned him to his place in Conan Doyle's original stories: he is not only essential to the narrative, but he is essential to Holmes himself, who, as presented on screen in the adaptations of the 80s, really would have been "lost without [his] Boswell" (Doyle 1: 12).

## CHAPTER FOUR

### INDEPENDENCE

*“I believe that I am one of the most long-suffering of mortals.”*  
– Dr. John H. Watson, *The Valley of Fear* (3: 633)

#### Kenneth Welsh: “The Moral Agent”

Jeremy Brett and Edward Hardwicke continued to film Sherlock Holmes stories for Granada Television up until 1994, when Brett’s failing health put a halt to the series. Adaptations were scarce for the next decade likely because, as David Stuart Davies points out, “Brett... had made the character his very own, and television companies were loathe to attempt any new Holmes productions... Similarly, Holmes was also absent from the cinema screen” (*Starring Sherlock Holmes* 158). The next time audiences saw a new version of *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, the relationship between Holmes and Watson had morphed yet again. Two made for television movies were released in 2000 and 2002 respectively and both showed a Watson that had outgrown Holmes in many ways as a new young generation of viewers, children of the Baby Boomers who had grown up with Peter Cushing’s quintessential hero, worked to differentiate themselves from their parents and assert their independence. Not only did they reject the fawning superfluous Watson of their parents, but it was no longer enough to complement the heroic, if fallible Holmes of the 1980s either. The Watson of the new millennium asserts himself over Holmes, showing not only his own capability, but his strength of character, breaking from his need for his friend and colleague altogether to emerge as the more trustworthy, more capable figure of the two.

Between Granada's adaptation and the Hallmark presentation of 2000, an anomalous version of *Hound* was made that is nonetheless worth briefly noting. In 1999 Scottish Television aired an animated children's television series called *Sherlock Holmes in the 22<sup>nd</sup> Century*, the basic premise of which is that a cryogenically frozen Sherlock Holmes is thawed in the 22<sup>nd</sup> century in order to battle the clone of the villainous Professor Moriarty. Though the episode called "The Hounds of the Baskervilles" bore little resemblance to the original tale, the series itself presents an interesting dynamic between Holmes and Watson. The doctor was not frozen, but his narratives were saved on a computer and uploaded into the memory banks of a robot, which takes on not only the doctor's memories and personality, but his face as well. The interest of this lies in the superhuman qualities of the character; as a robot, Watson has the power to interact with machines, is immune to bullets, has built-in weapons and has incredible physical strength, all qualities that Holmes lacks. Conversely, his fundamental purpose is one of service. The dynamic represents a transition between the symbiotic relationship of the characters in the 1980s and the fiercely capable Watson of the early 2000s.

In 2000, Hallmark Entertainment aired a new version of *The Hound of the Baskervilles* starring Matt Frewer as Sherlock Holmes and Kenneth Welsh as Dr. Watson, the first of four outings for the pair. Rather than focusing on the emotional aspects of the bond between the men that strengthens them both, the film, like the three that would follow it, "examines several stress points in the relationship between Holmes and Watson" (Morrill 55). Unlike adaptations in the past, which had screenwriters scrambling to keep Holmes in the narrative conversation, even reintroducing him early in several



versions, here the focus is on Watson. After the doctor leaves for Dartmoor, Holmes does not appear onscreen until a mere eight minutes before the picture's close.

The rocky relationship between the two protagonists, for there can no longer be any dispute over whether Watson is a primary figure in the story, indeed here is the primary character, may in part be the result of uneven casting of the leads. Matt Frewer's Holmes is at best antic and at worst ridiculous. The actor himself comments that

Playing Holmes is rather like Hamlet. It's a horse that has been ridden by many jockeys and there's a certain responsibility with it – particularly to the audience, because they have certain expectations. But I think once that those preconceptions are satisfied, then you can bring your own stuff to the dance and hopefully I've done that. (Davies, *Starring Sherlock Holmes* 178)

Frewer's unique interpretation of the character calls for an alteration in Watson's character as well. He must provide more grounding, more sensibility and more authority to realistically offset the sometimes childish behavior of his counterpart. Alan Barnes sums it up well when he says that “fortunately for those unconvinced by the Frewer Holmes, the production has the foursquare credibility of Kenneth Welsh's Watson to lean on” (85). It is Watson that provides the foundation of this tale.

It is not merely the casting and the actors' interpretations that illustrate the next phase of Watson's journey. The script provides several interactions that show Watson as the moral agent in the face of poor judgment or mistimed action on Holmes' part. The question of which man is truly the more capable hero comes into question here for the first time on screen.

Carrying on from the precedent set by Granada, the opening takes place at Baskerville Hall with Sir Charles' death, but functions as a pre-title sequence with no words. As such, it does not detract from the first scene proper which introduces Holmes and Watson at Baker Street and establishes their relationship and respective characters. Though the opening line is "Well Watson, what do you make of it?" Holmes' coffee pot trick is absent, leaving the focus entirely on Watson as he begins to make his deductions. The doctor is fore-grounded in the scene while he speaks and he proceeds to make a mixture of correct and incorrect deductions. After telling Watson that he is mistaken in nearly everything, Holmes takes over and in a highly patronizing fashion, goes on his own deductive rant. He ends with the ever-telling Canonical lines calling Watson a conductor of light, but as they are delivered in the same patronizing manner, Watson does not accept them as any sort of compliment, even a back-handed one. Unlike previous Watsons, not only is he not flattered, but he does not seem hurt, merely frustrated.

When Dr. Mortimer arrives, the camera frames the three men sitting in a circle of sorts, with no character given priority. A passing addition to the dialogue establishes that Watson knew Sir Charles personally, which, though it is never referenced again, seems to personally invest him in the case and perhaps even place him closer to the action than Holmes. As the legend of the hound is narrated to Holmes, Watson, and the audience by Mortimer, Holmes acts petulant, even rude. Reaction shots show him smiling at Watson in self-satisfaction, while the doctor looks back, un-amused.

Reworking the lines about "the poisonous atmosphere" within the apartment leads to an important first regarding the characters' relationship. After Holmes smokes a

nominal amount of tobacco, Watson begins coughing dramatically. When Holmes asks if he's catching cold, Watson replies that it is the poisonous atmosphere that is causing him trouble. Holmes pulls a childish face and responds petulantly: "oh, you're referring to my pipe." "How very observant of you" snipes Watson, sarcastically. It is not merely of interest that they are arguing, but that Watson's jibe questions Holmes' observational skills, the very foundation of his strength and genius. By asserting himself in this realm, Watson shows contempt for those very qualities that inspired the depiction of the character's worshipful behavior half a century earlier.

It is perhaps a small point, but worth noting in a study of Watson's reflection of the contemporary culture, that he is shown to have an aversion to smoking again later in the film. Just as the growing anti-drug initiatives of the 1980s contributed to Jeremy Brett's decision to have his Holmes quit his cocaine habit on screen, this added component to Watson's character may have been influenced by the rising anti-smoking climate of the 2000s. That Holmes should continue to smoke heavily while Watson is given the moral position against tobacco is of interest as it displays an instance in which Watson is given the moral high ground over the detective, a theme that will play out throughout this adaptation and continue to develop in the next.

After the conclusion of the meeting with Dr. Mortimer, Holmes and Watson briefly talk over the case. "I anticipate a three pipe night, Watson," says Holmes before walking off, leaving only the doctor in-frame. Watson shouts after him "one more of those I think will be the death of me. I'll be at my club!" That Watson is left holding the camera and is given the last word reinforces the notion that this story is his, not Holmes'.

Though he does go to his club and thus grants Holmes his solitude, Watson does it out of recognition and pursuit of his own comfort, not Holmes'.

Holmes' recommendation of the doctor is short and to the point: "Watson will accompany you. It may be entirely unnecessary, but better safe than sorry." Watson's response of "me Holmes?" is spoken more out of confirmation than surprise. Holmes replies, "yes you, Watson, I have business to attend to here. You'll be in good hands, Sir Henry, I can vouch for that." He then offers a nod to Watson, who is doesn't seem proud or pleased that his friend should think so highly of him. He merely nods back, confident that the recommendation was well-earned and that Sir Henry will be safe in his care. With Welsh's Watson, Holmes can no longer utilize praise as a viable currency.

The emotion so inherent in the send-off scenes in Richardson's and Brett's versions is quite absent here. In businesslike tones, Holmes reminds Watson to bring his revolver. "It's the first thing I intend to pack," Watson replies. "You're to be at Sir Henry's side at all times, do you understand, Watson?" He continues. "You can rely on me, Holmes." Watson states. After instructing him to write daily reports, Holmes once again exits the frame, leaving Watson alone. This blocking does not suggest any closeness between the men. "Of course. Of course!" Watson shouts after him. Nowhere does Holmes suggest that he fears for Watson's safety and for the doctor's part, he seems, more than anything else, irritated that Holmes though any of this necessary to tell him in the first place.

Once at Baskerville Hall, Watson wastes no time in questioning Barrymore. Welsh's performance highlights the character's exceptional strength of will and

capability. Though certainly still not as quick-witted as Holmes, Watson seems an infinitely more able person than Frewer's antic detective. He is certainly the active protagonist, driving the action and conducting the investigation himself rather than merely gathering data for Holmes to analyze. He serves as the fount of knowledge for Sir Henry, answering all of his questions about English country life and the operation of his estate. He also acts as the voice of reason regarding Beryl Stapleton.

His correspondence with Holmes shows the same spiky dynamic that his face-to-face interactions displayed: "We have added several characters to our drama, Holmes. I shall try and convey my observations accurately without polluting them, as you so charmingly put it, with my own opinions." It becomes clear that even in private there is tension in their friendship, with neither necessarily gaining the upper hand.

Watson is given another opportunity to act as the moral agent in the film. Selden, presented in this version as an innocent man, wrongly accused, is sought out because Watson declared that "if we are to help this man we're going to have to bring him in." As a result, their pursuit of him is conceived as a gesture of compassion and mercy.

In addition to displaying compassion, Welsh's Watson is shown to be capable of following evidence and piecing together the clues that he discovers. When Barrymore comes forward with evidence of the letter from "L. L.," Watson questions him firmly, though notably not in the fashion of Holmes, but in a compassionate yet firm manner, a manner that is best described as distinctly "Watsonian." Eventually, all other players leave the frame and for the third time Watson is left alone at scene's end while the camera lingers on him as he considers the fresh evidence.

In a newly written scene in which Watson goes to the town of Grimpen to post a letter to Holmes, he runs into Dr. Mortimer who offers to drive him there. They take a detour to the house of Laura Lyons, whom Watson meets by chance but realizes immediately that she must be the L.L. of Sir Charles' note. After tricking Mortimer into driving on without him, Watson goes back in to question Mrs. Lyons. Once again his questioning is "Watsonian" rather than "Holmesian." He is very gentle but probing; he seems kind but firm. When she cries, he gives her his handkerchief and says "I'm terribly sorry" he is compassionate and thus pointedly distinguished from Frewer's Holmes.

Continuing his line of investigation further than any Watson before him, the doctor then confronts Mr. Franklin. His gentlemanly indignation prompts him to state sharply "I wonder what sort of a man would turn his back on his own daughter." Sticking up for himself when Franklin tells him to mind his own business, Watson draws himself up and asks menacingly, "are you threatening me Franklin?" He backs down in the face of Watson's strength of character and changes the subject. Franklin comments, thinking he is witnessing the helpmeet of Selden, that the man is a fool for having his food brought to him by day rather than in the cover of darkness. Interestingly, it is Holmes who is actually doing so, not Selden. The implication is that the detective is a fool for failing to capably hide himself.

Watson follows the boy to Holmes' hideout, highlighting the contrast between Watson's competence and Holmes' incompetence in not remaining hidden, for he makes not one brief error of showing himself against the moon but a second in allowing himself to be so easily tracked. Watson finds the hideout empty, but witnesses Selden's demise

and takes action alone. In every other version of *Hound*, the reunion of the characters takes place here. This allows Holmes, already absent for a third of the story, to return to the narrative for the remainder of the action and take over from Watson as the protagonist. Welsh's Watson is called upon to continue in the lead role for much longer. After discovering that it is Selden, not Sir Henry that has been killed, and making the deduction, usually given to Holmes, that Sir Henry's clothes provided the scent to the hound and caused the man's death, Watson returns home alone to inform and comfort Mrs. Barrymore.

The first time any word is heard from Holmes since the action moved from London to Dartmoor is in the form of a telegram to Watson. It orders Sir Henry back to London where the detective claims to be waiting for him. "Well Holmes, you've certainly alarmed Sir Henry with your urgent telegram. Needless to say, he's anxious to know what's behind all this and so am I," the doctor writes back. The cryptic nature of the telegram annoys the doctor, who believes he deserves to be taken into his friend's confidence.

On the heels of Holmes' message, Sir Henry receives a letter from Beryl Stapleton begging that he come to meet her, alone, on an urgent matter. Watson, the voice of reason, tells him not to go, but the baronet defies him. In response, Watson says he will accompany him, broking no arguments, so he may protect Sir Henry if need be. At the rendezvous, Sir Henry and Stapleton get into a fierce argument with Watson, revolver in hand, hidden and watching. When Sir Henry storms off, Watson remains and sees Stapleton release the hound after the baronet. Still hidden, the doctor takes aim at the

beast, but is attacked by Stapleton; they devolve into a brutal fist fight as the hound finds and attacks Sir Henry. After doing Sir Henry an injury, the hound is shot, though not killed, by a disguised man who turns out to be Holmes: “sorry for the slight delay Sir Henry, the pistol got tangled in this cumbersome disguise.” The detective never explains why the disguise was necessary in the first place, but his inability to deal with it properly nearly leads to Sir Henry’s death.

The delayed reunion between Holmes and Watson occurs as the pair track Stapleton across the moor:

“You set me out like a tethered goat!”

“Interesting analogy, Watson.”

“How could you treat me this way; it shows a distinct lack of trust, Holmes!”

“I trust you implicitly, my friend. The same lad who brought me my dinners everyday brought your reports as well.”

“Then why did you keep me in the dark?”

“I needed you to hold the attention of the various parties, leaving me free to investigate this case incognito.”

“In short, a tethered goat!”

By the conclusion of this exchange, the men are snarling at each other in anger. The subtle change in the notion of trust is evident in Watson’s rage. He is less hurt that his friend didn’t think highly enough of him to take him into his confidence and more frustrated that Holmes should maintain a charade that put him in danger. It is also interesting to note that the wording and delivery of Holmes’ responses invite the audience



to side with Watson and share his anger. That the doctor maintains the upper hand in the confrontation is supported by his having the final word.

Frewer's Holmes has been of little value to the investigation throughout the film. He also fails where the action is concerned, for though Stapleton meets his end in the Grimpen Mire, it occurs because Holmes did not kill the Hound when he shot it. The dog turned on its master and they died together, no thanks to the detective's efforts.

The most telling elements of the story as regards the shift in the dynamic between Holmes and Watson occur after all the players are safe back at Baskerville Hall. Holmes fills in the few missing pieces of the mystery, but at this point in the narrative, they don't aid in bringing the guilty party to justice. Sir Henry cuts across him to say "well Mr. Holmes, your own plan didn't exactly go off without a hitch," holding up his bandaged arm. Watson takes the opportunity to question the detective's moral authority as well as his capacity to conduct a successful investigation: "Yes, yes, what on earth were you thinking, Holmes? I mean, you didn't intend the dog to attack him, did you?" "Of course not, Watson," Holmes replies defensively, "if not for the impediment of my disguise, I would have had my shot at the dog while it was still six paces off." "A whole six paces?" Henry says sarcastically. Holmes laughs uneasily. He is being literally and figuratively attacked from both sides, as the blocking reinforces the notion that Holmes himself is, to a degree, on trial for endangering the lives of Watson and Sir Henry. The men are situated on either side of him and continue to question him. "I assure you, Sir Henry, you were in no real danger, I am a crack shot," Holmes says in an attempt to justify himself. "This is worse than arrogance, Holmes, this is hubris," Watson rails, "I mean, it is one

thing to make a tethered goat out of me, but how could you play such a game with Sir Henry's life?" After explaining his trap for Stapleton, which involved taking Beryl into his confidence and using her to inform the villain that Sir Henry would be returning to London, thus forcing his hand, Watson replies, "well. You never fail to... surprise me Holmes."

After explaining that Stapleton was a Baskerville, though not how he knew it to be so as he had never entered Baskerville Hall to see the incriminating painting, Holmes states "come along then, Watson, we have new business to attend to." The film ends not on any sense of camaraderie between Holmes and Watson, but on a final acknowledgement of Watson's part in the narrative as Sir Henry says goodbye to the doctor. "Watson" is the final word of the film.

Kenneth Welsh's Watson represents the beginning of a new trend for the doctor's character. No longer the yin to Holmes' yang, he is a man in his own right with the capability to work on his own and the strength of character to question others when he believes they are in the wrong. David Stuart Davies states that "[t]his Watson is neither a comic character nor a lapdog. He is presented as Doyle would have him: loyal, brave and with a fierce independent spirit" (*Starring Sherlock Holmes* 184). He may have a fiercer independent spirit than even Conan Doyle conceived. While Frewer's Holmes falls short several times, Welsh's Watson is never seen to waver or fail. The eccentricities of Jeremy Brett's Holmes, not to mention the brusqueness, often bordering on rudeness with which he endowed the character were countered by the emotional support he solicited from Hardwick's Watson through the close bond he worked to show between the men.

Frewer's Holmes would have fallen short both professionally and personally had Welsh's Watson not been available to temper his mistakes and his rudeness. Conversely, here Watson seems to function well enough without Holmes. He is the moral and compassionate superior of his friend and is much more likable. In addition, as he shows himself capable of conducting the investigation without Holmes, whose contribution to the case was no more than forcing it to a climax, the audience of this adaptation might be inclined to wonder why the detective is necessary to the story at all.

Ian Hart: "The Arbiter of Justice"

If the opportunity for Kenneth Welsh's Watson to assert himself was born out of the weaknesses and erratic nature of Matt Frewer's Sherlock Holmes, the same cannot be said for the most recent version of *The Hound of the Baskervilles* to date, made in 2002 and starring Richard Roxburgh as Holmes and Ian Hart as Dr. Watson. Roxburgh's Holmes is nothing if not human, but he displays the qualities of detachment and rationality that comprise the main components of Holmes' character and he employs none of the risible traits inherent in Frewer's performance. It is Hart's Watson, however, that is the hero of this tale. He emerges as such in part through the tension established between his character and Holmes', as their relationship "is laced with cynicism, mistrust and constant bickering" (Davies, *Starring Sherlock Holmes* 189). The script allows Watson to get the upper hand in their relationship and as such he usurps not only Holmes' function as moral agent, as Welsh and to an extent Hardwicke had done before him, but he becomes the active agent of justice in the piece as well, a role reserved exclusively for Holmes until this film.

As a protagonist it has, until this point, been Holmes' function to see that justice is done by the close of the case. Some Holmeses were concerned with utilizing moral means to reach that end, others depended upon their Watsons to be the voice of morality, but the justice itself came from Holmes. In 1977's *Sherlock Holmes on the Screen: The Motion Picture Adventures of the World's Most Popular Detective*, Robert Pohle suggests that "it seems... very probable that this Galahadism is an aspect of Holmes that accounts in part for his great revival of popularity in our own despairing age: his ability to make order out of chaos, and to put things "back in joint" when they seem hopelessly tangled and inexplicable." (203). A quarter of century on, his comment is hopelessly outdated. If any character in 2002's adaptation can be said to display the idealism of a Galahad, it is not Holmes, but Watson. In addition, the text itself will bear out that it is the doctor, not the detective, who most succeeds in putting things "back in joint" and seeing justice done.

The film opens away from Baker Street at the coroner's inquest regarding the death of Sir Charles Baskerville. The audience is here introduced to Dr. Mortimer and to Barrymore, who give their testimony effectively reconstructing Sir Charles' death. The end of the inquest is interrupted by sirens announcing Selden's escape and showing his flight as the opening credits role.

In an interesting departure from tradition, the first scene introducing Watson and Holmes takes place not at 221B, but in a Turkish bath, where the men are enjoying leisure time and discussing where they'll have dinner. Stating that they'll have to dine at Baker Street, Holmes throws a letter to Watson, stating that he knows no more than the

contents indicate; the letter announces the impending visit of Dr. Mortimer. By dispensing with the customary opening scene in Baker Street, the screenwriter alters the dynamic between Holmes and Watson from the very beginning of the tale. They are seen here to spend their spare time together, establishing friendship. The absence of Watson's attempted deductions over Mortimer's walking stick and Holmes' correction of his friend's mistakes allows no opportunity to show that Watson admires or aspires to be like Holmes in any way. The filmmakers effectively eradicate any elements of hero-worship as well as any hint of a teacher-pupil dynamic between the men.

When Dr. Mortimer arrives at Baker Street and begins to explain the situation, he is questioned both by Holmes and Watson in turn, though it is Watson alone who is unnerved when Mortimer says he withheld information at the Coroner's court. This first instance of Watson's strict moral and ethical nature will echo throughout the film.

Holmes instructs Mortimer to tell the legend in his own words; Watson and Holmes hear it together along with the audience. When he tells them about the hound's footprints, Holmes confirms "you saw this," clearly interested in the facts of the case. Watson, looking beyond the mystery, adds "and you said nothing?" again unnerved at the deception itself. In the first true instance of the tension that builds between Holmes and Watson over the course of the film, when Watson states his bewilderment at certain aspects of the case as Mortimer stated them, Holmes calls his friend an "idiot."

Following naturally from Welsh's Watson's aversion to Holmes' tobacco use, here for the first time in any version of *Hound*, the filmmakers show Holmes taking drugs. Watson looks on disapprovingly as Holmes binds his arm and injects himself with

cocaine, shutting the door on the doctor, who waits for a moment in consternation before walking away shaking his head sadly. Roxburgh's Holmes will be seen to inject himself onscreen a second time later in the film, this time the shots of him doing so are dramatically cross cut with shots of the residents of Grimpen singing hymns in church on Christmas morning. Though David Stuart Davies bemoans the inclusion of such scenes, citing that in the Canon, "the detective's drug habit... manifested itself only when he was bored and there was no mystery on hand to occupy his mind," claiming that the drug scenes "just seem like sensational dressing," they reveal the filmmaker's idea of who Holmes is (*Starring Sherlock Holmes* 189). It is hasty to dismiss the scenes because they are not representative of Conan Doyle. In fact, because they are not out of Conan Doyle, they are even more indicative of the contemporary context of the film. Not only is Holmes fallible, but he has incredibly unsavory qualities. He has traits that make him a fascinating man, but he is not a man worth imitating, as, for example, Rathbone or Cushing's takes on the character were. Of the two men, certainly Watson represents the positive role model here.

Holmes' recommendation of his friend in this film is the shortest of any version: "Sir Henry, you must take with you someone who will be always by your side." Holmes states. The camera cuts to Watson, who not only understands that Holmes is referring to him, but seems to have anticipated the recommendation, echoing Welsh's confidence in his own abilities. The film then cuts directly to Holmes giving the doctor parting instructions. "You must report the facts to me in the fullest possible manner, anything, anything which may seem to have a bearing on the case." When he pauses, Watson asks

impatiently “What is it?” “Keep your revolver with you night and day,” Holmes replies. Watson shoots his friend a look that confirms that it was his intention to do so in any case.

An extra scene is inserted after the party leaves for Dartmoor showing Holmes doing some detective work behind the scenes. As he is collecting soil samples from the cab that tracked Sir Henry around London, the detective is confronted by the cabbie, out of whom he gets information by beating the man with his cane and nearly choking him into unconsciousness. This display of violence establishes that Roxburgh’s Holmes is not concerned with the means of his case, only the ends. It also makes an interesting comment on Holmes’ intelligence, which in other versions and in Conan Doyle he would likely have utilized before employing violence as a last resort. This less cerebral, more physical turn for Holmes may likely prove to be a harbinger of future adaptations and appropriations.

Upon arrival at Baskerville Hall, the camera follows Watson, who takes up his role as active protagonist in the tale. He proceeds to query Sir Henry about the Baskerville family and by extension inform the audience, displaying a distinct talent for asking relevant questions. When he later meets Beryl Stapleton, he probes her for pertinent information as well. In addition to gathering information, Watson also dispenses it, as, like Welsh’s Watson, Hart’s displays his intellect by again acting as the fount of knowledge regarding English country life.

While writing a letter to Holmes at night, Watson sees footsteps through the crack below his door. He takes the initiative to rouse Sir Henry and leads him through the

house. They come across a hidden door, which Watson not only identifies but opens expertly, once again displaying his intelligence and his capability. They find Barrymore at the window and Watson confronts him, pistol in hand, and proceeds to state without hesitation that Barrymore was signaling to someone on the moor.

Over dinner with the Stapletons and the Mortimers, Watson brings up Holmes. In a comical scene, the doctor goes on to speak at Holmes' expense: "Within eccentric limits his knowledge is, as you say, extraordinary. But it has to be said that his ignorance is as remarkable as his knowledge. When I first met him, he was unaware that earth traveled around the sun!" Watson states with a smile. The rest of the guests begin to question Holmes' knowledge in various areas, from philosophy and politics to botany and music. The scene, a reworked version of a passage from the first Holmes novel *A Study in Scarlet*, seems calculated to showcase Holmes' ignorance and fallibility.

The screenwriter supposedly "pored over numerous film versions of *The Hound*" (Davies, *Starring Sherlock Holmes* 188) in preparation for penning his own and saw fit to glean the séance from the 1939 film and insert it into this version. The scene allows Watson, already established as a solid, intelligent and capable man, to display his bravery as well. When a sound is heard at the window, Watson gets up and pulls back the curtain to reveal the hound. Despite the potential danger, he immediately draws his revolver and runs outside to check for traces of it.

After returning to Baskerville Hall, Sir Henry enters the kitchen and finds Selden there; the convict lashes out and attacks him ferociously. Watson, hearing the commotion from the next room, calmly grabs his revolver from his coat pocket, enters the kitchen



and levels the gun at the convict and when Selden jumps out the window, Watson gives chase. He has a clear shot as Selden flees across the moor, but despite Sir Henry's urging, Watson lowers his revolver saying "I won't shoot an unarmed man in the back." Watson's noble behavior certainly contrasts with Holmes' earlier violence against the unlucky cabman. It is here that Watson spots the "man on the tor."

Determined to track the unknown man, Watson is seen poring over a map of the area. He then goes alone, revolver in hand, across the moor. He ducks from shelter to shelter to avoid being observed and circles the mysterious man's hut with all the expertise of a trained SWAT man, keeping his back to the wall and his gun leveled as he approaches. He waits in ambush, revolver cocked in readiness until he hears the detective: "It is exceedingly cold out here Watson, I wonder whether I might come in without you shooting me." "Holmes? Holmes, for God's sake! I've never been so glad to see anyone in my life!" Watson cries. "I've been expecting you," says Holmes, entering the hut. "What ... How long have you been here Holmes, from the first?" says Watson in frustration. "By no means," the detective replies. "You've used me!" Watson rages, "I assure you—" Holmes begins, but the outraged doctor cuts him off: "You don't trust me Holmes! I think I've deserved better at your hands!" Holmes explains his reasons for keeping Watson in the dark and tries to console him as he is furious that his reports have been wasted. "On the contrary," Holmes states, "I made arrangements for them to be sent on to Grimpen from Baker Street. They've only been delayed by one day. I must compliment you upon the zeal and intelligence you have—" but Watson cuts across his friend's compliment: "I'm sorry, but you can't bring me 'round with a few gobbets of

praise; I'm furious with you Holmes!" For the first time, Holmes is unable to talk his way through Watson's disgruntlement. Watson's reply to Holmes' praise almost seems to be a reply to each of the previous films in which Watson's character is weak enough and his blind spot where Holmes is concerned is large enough that the detective's "few gobbets of praise" do indeed bring the doctor around. Hart's Watson's indignation at not having the full confidence and trust of his friend speaks to his confidence in himself.

At this point, they hear cries of pain and run to help. After discovering that the dead man is Selden, not Sir Henry, Holmes asks Watson to conceal the hound's part in Selden's death from the baronet. The detective indicates to a disapproving Watson that Sir Henry will have an unpleasant ordeal to pass through before the case reaches its conclusion. Later that evening, when Holmes tells Sir Henry he has nothing more to fear, Watson merely stares daggers at him, showing his frustration, but still clinging to some trust in the detective's ability to resolve the problem.

In another new scene, Watson is given the chance to use his skills as a doctor when he personally conducts a post mortem on Selden. "There's only one significant danger: that our man should strike before we're ready," Holmes states. "Our man? For God's sake Holmes, tell me!" Watson gets more frustrated and finally Holmes reveals that Stapleton is the villain and Beryl his wife. After Holmes' explanation, Watson answers in annoyance: "and all this you have withheld from me. I'm telling you Holmes, it won't do." For the third time, he cuts across Holmes as the detective tries to justify himself. "I insist upon being fully informed from this point onwards." Watson's assertive behavior shows that he has reached a level of self awareness and the character's blind

spot regarding his friend, which has gradually shrunk in size over the course of his character's rise to independence has, at this point, dissolved entirely.

After informing the company that they are returning to London, Holmes and Watson instead take the train, only to alight at nearby Exeter to meet Inspector Lestrade of Scotland Yard. Once again, Holmes had not disclosed his plan to Watson, who rages: "Holmes! You're the most infuriating man alive!" "Quite possibly," the detective replies coolly. "Holmes!" "Trust me Watson. You do trust me?" To that question, Holmes receives only silence.

At the stake out of Stapleton's house, Holmes sends Watson to sneak forward to see what they're doing, allowing Watson to perform one of the functions that Conan Doyle wrote into the story to justify Watson's importance to the climax. He does so and reports back, noting with unease that Beryl is absent: "where the hell is she, I don't like it Holmes!" During the wait, as the tension builds and a thick fog slowly creeps forward to obscure the men's views of Merripit House, the camera focuses only on Watson in a one-shot close up, a trend that continues right through until they leave their hiding places. "If he's not out in ten minutes, the path will be covered. In twenty we won't be able to see our hands in front of us." ... "I'm calling this off. I'm taking Sir Henry home." Says Watson determinedly and starts to stand. "Watson! I forbid it!" Holmes snaps and physically restrains Watson. Dangerously, Watson snarls "take your hands off me!" At this point, the tension between the men has nearly reached its breaking point as Watson realizes that Holmes' plan endangers Sir Henry's life.

Once the hound is released after Sir Henry, Holmes, Watson, and Lestrade all draw their revolvers. The doctor and the detective both shoot, but miss. Holmes then orders Lestrade after Stapleton while he and Watson chase the hound. The men fire several times simultaneously and fell the hound. Watson, again playing the role of skilled medical man, rushes to Sir Henry, who has been mauled savagely. “Sir Henry! Sir Henry! Damn it, man, we must get him home!” Watson lifts the unconscious baronet over his shoulder and carries him home across the moor single handedly. Once there, he then begins to deal with his wounds, letting Dr. Mortimer take over as soon as the other physician arrives.

Not content to allow the action to unfold in his absence, Watson jumps on a horse and returns with haste to Merripit House. His first question on arrival is one that had not occurred to Holmes to deal with, as the detective was busy questioning and berating Stapleton: “Have you found Miss Stapleton?” When he is told that they haven’t found her, Watson runs through first the house, then into the stable in search. He finds her hanged. He is horrified, and cuts her down, rage taking hold of him. He bursts back into the house, punches Stapleton in the face and levels his revolver. Holmes tries to restrain him and as they struggle fiercely, Stapleton knocks Lestrade out, grabs the inspector’s gun, shoots Watson in the shoulder and runs out of the house. Holmes tries to stay and help his wounded friend, but Watson, determined to see justice done grits his teeth and order Holmes to “get after him, go on!” Holmes does so, but falls into the Grimpen Mire, where he is slowly sinking to his death. This sign of carelessness, lifted straight from Conan Doyle, appears on screen for the first time here. Stapleton approaches the

struggling Holmes, taunting him and preparing to shoot him, when he is killed by a single bullet from behind. Watson had pursued them, despite his injury, and proceeds to pull Holmes from the mire to safety, effectively saving his life not once, but twice. This second chance for Watson to be indispensable to the plot and to Holmes is therefore not only reintroduced into the story, but increased twofold. The other notable aspect of the scene is that while Conan Doyle and every other adaptation had Stapleton perishing in the Grimpen Mire, here the agent of final justice against the villain is Watson.

The final scene of the film delivers the most startling evidence of the drastic change in the character of Ian Hart's Watson. The two men sit opposite one another on a train back to London, Watson's arm bound in a sling; they sit in a tense silence. Tentatively, Holmes says "I have a box for *Les Huguenots* tonight." Watson looks at him, but does not reply. "I thought a little dinner at Marcini's on the way," the detective continues, with hesitation. After another prolonged, uncomfortable silence, the doctor speaks the final lines of the film: "The answer to your question is no." "What?" "No, I don't trust you. But Marcini's will be nice." The question of trust is a large consideration in the deconstruction of Holmes and Watson's relationship as seen in *The Hound of the Baskervilles*. In the novel, Watson points out that it is often Holmes' habit not to disclose the full facts to him, and that the habit is a frustration. Watson's hurt is apparent at that lack of trust in every version of the men's reunion on the moor, though the level of Watson's indignation is tied to his character's level of independence and self-confidence. Here, for the first time, trust is dealt with an entirely new way. It is not Holmes' lack of trust in Watson that is the focus, but Watson's lack of trust in Holmes. The significance

of this bears upon Watson's evolution into an independent protagonist and hero figure in no small way, for Holmes' reasons for not trusting in Watson appear self serving, while Watson's reasons for not trusting Holmes are tied up in his experience of Holmes' failure to safeguard Sir Henry and his willingness to place his dearest friend blindly into mortal peril.

The advent of this new assertive, totally independently-thinking Watson speaks to a generation of viewers reluctant to venerate the Sherlock Holmes of their parents and grandparents. The interest of a character like Holmes no longer rests solely in his remarkable gifts, but in his intricate human failings. As the filter for the audience, Watson displays his own strength in rejecting the hero worship that defined his character for so many years. He is as deeply human and as complex as Holmes; Alan Barnes even goes so far as to describe Hart's Watson as "an emotional yo-yo." From the stance of a fidelity scholar, Barnes declares that "it's impossible to perceive just why the pair hang out together – especially since the script makes a point of establishing the fact that Watson cannot ever trust Holmes" (87). Their friendship is ultimately justified by Watson's independence, though, rather than jeopardized by it. At this point in his journey, Watson is no longer defined by his relationship with Sherlock Holmes. In the final moments of the latest version of *Hound* Watson makes two choices: he reaffirms his independence by reaffirming his ability to recognize and judge Holmes' fallibility and he reaffirms his friendship with Holmes by reaffirming their social connection. Through these two acts Watson shows that the relationship is one that both men actively chose to

maintain. Through that equality of independent character strength, Watson finally becomes his own man.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### CONCLUSION

In his official commentary on the DVD release of Twentieth Century Fox's 1939 adaptation of *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, David Stuart Davies notes that "Watson has always caused a problem for scriptwriters because basically for most of the time he's an observer and a describer. Onscreen this would be very dull to present the detective's partner in such a way... so the screenwriter has to give Watson something else to do." Over the course of the screen history of *Hound* an array of roles have been assigned to Watson to justify his place in the narrative. Considered in isolation, each role speaks only to the technical difficulties touched upon by Davies' comment. Once placed in conversation with one another, the rich adaptational history of *The Hound of the Baskervilles* provides a cultural fossil record that shows a distinct and fascinating progression in the presentation of the character, his role and his relationship with Sherlock Holmes. Through detailed analysis of the shifting dynamics of the relationships within the works, the evolution of Watson's character is plainly evident. As the proxy for the audience, it is intriguing to consider the links that join the presentation of Watson on screen to the expectations, needs and wants of that audience. The record indicates a change not only in the type of hero that the audience wishes to see, but in the way the audience identifies and interacts with heroism itself. Watson's gradual journey from stooge to moral agent and dealer of justice attests to the growing need of the audience to bear responsibility for maintaining the order of society. Watson moves from dependence



to interdependence to independence and it is that evolution that illustrates the shifting self-image of the audience.

The great distance that Watson has traveled over the course of nearly seven decades on screen is clear in the shift of the conception of his character. A passing statement from the *Hollywood Reporter* in 2004, in a retrospective on 1939's adaptation starring Rathbone and Bruce, called the story "Dr. Watson's tale" (June 3, 2004). This sentiment, certainly not evident in the press at the time, is indicative of the widespread revisionist attitude toward the essential qualities of Watson's character in reference to the tale. It is likely that this type of public re-imagining of Watson will continue to be evident in future Holmes vehicles, particularly as contemporary interest in Sherlock Holmes on page and screen waxes.

The current cultural relevance of studies of Sherlock Holmes is easily extrapolated from the recent statement made by Wessex Press/Gasogene Books, the most prolific publisher of Holmesian material:

They are beginning to call 2009 "The Year of Sherlock Holmes." While the Great Detective is always a staple, history has shown that Holmes periodically goes through cycles of increased popularity. We are entering one of these cycles now. Headlining the list of impending Holmesiana are two screen vehicles. The most widely publicized, a Christmas Day blockbuster by director Guy Ritchie and starring popular actors Robert Downey Jr. and Jude Law in the leading roles, will draw a new generation of viewers to the Sherlock Holmes franchise. At the time of this writing, the only promotional materials available to the public, including photographic stills and a few

slightly varying versions of the theatrical trailer, support the trend expounded in this study. Four promotional cinema posters, one each for Holmes, Watson, and two main supporting roles have been made and distributed. Though all four feature the respective character in front of an identical background, each character has a separate tagline. The poster of Holmes depicts him standing jauntily with the caption “Nothing escapes him.” On the poster of Watson, the doctor has a blade slung over his shoulder and is marked with the caption “Crime will pay.” The two main points of interest, that Watson has a weapon while Holmes does not and that they have different captions speak to the continuing evolution of Watson’s character. Watson seems to continue his new role as active agent of justice, as the implication behind his weapon and his caption is that it is Watson who will bring the criminals to final justice after Holmes, whom “no one escapes,” has tracked them down.

The theatrical trailer also deserves a brief analysis. The film treats both Holmes and Watson as action heroes and the trailer offers hints of the treatment of the men’s relationship. Jude Law’s Watson, following on from Hart’s, is shown asserting himself over his friend and pointing out Holmes’ flaws in a scene in which the doctor berates the detective for his lifestyle and his hygiene. Judging by the trailer, the film is poised to take the next step in the evolution of the character, as the assertive independence of Welsh’s and Hart’s Watsons were developed through a diminishing of the emotional bond established in the portrayals of Churchill and Hardwicke. The trailer of the impending film shows not only an assertive Watson who also, in the final seconds of one version, punches Holmes in the face for stating the line “Watson, you are invaluable as a traveling

companion; you have the grand gift of silence,” which was lifted verbatim from the short story “The Man with the Twisted Lip” and which Conan Doyle’s Watson interpreted as a compliment. It shows a strong bond of friendship as well, in the form of teamwork and shared humor. Under Holmes’ voiced over comment “it does make a considerable difference to me having someone with me on whom I can thoroughly rely,” a close up of Watson appears onscreen followed by a clip of Holmes working to pick a lock when Watson arrives and smashes the door in with his boot. Holmes stands, shakes his friend’s hand and says happily, “It’s nice to see you Watson,” which comment receives a broad smile from the doctor.

This independence and capability of character, coupled with cooperation may mark the Watson of the new generation. Watson’s rise to equal protagonist is no longer at the expense of his friendship with Holmes, nor of Holmes’ own character. It is very likely that the detective’s less than savory characteristics will be present in the film, following the recent trend of popular flawed protagonists in a long string of superhero films, which *Sherlock Holmes* seems to emulate. However, as in the cases of Richardson and Brett, those qualities will likely add to the detective’s interest rather than making him questionable as a hero altogether.

The second major Holmes vehicle is an impending BBC 1 prime time television show helmed by co-creators and executive producers Stephen Moffat and Mark Gatiss. Both men are currently involved in the popular revival of British cult science fiction classic *Doctor Who* and their launch of a new show, simply titled *Sherlock*, will likely continue to build the interest generated by Guy Ritchie’s film. Less press and fewer

promotional materials exists for the series than the film. All that is known at present is that the series will update the characters and set them in contemporary London and the lead roles will both be played by well known actors, though Martin Freeman, cast as Watson, is the more widely recognizable of the two. The nature of the relationship between Holmes and Watson and the qualities of Watson's character may not be apparent until the premier of the series in 2010, but the compiled evidence of past adaptations and appropriates suggest that it will fit rather than defy the trend of Watson's evolution.

2009's impending film *Sherlock Holmes* represents the first time in over 20 years that a Holmes vehicle has been released in American cinemas. The renewed interest in the franchise speaks to the convictions of filmmakers and television gurus that Holmes is worth reinventing and, more importantly, that the franchise is relevant to modern audiences. In an interview on the 7<sup>th</sup> of September *Sherlock* co-creator Stephen Moffat responded to the question "why do you think now is an appropriate moment to revive these stories?" by stating that "there's never been a time when we wouldn't want ... a good version of Sherlock Holmes" ("Proms Literary Festival"). This plays into the detective's own claim upon his apparent return to life in "The Adventure of the Empty House" that "time doth not wither nor custom stale [his] infinite variety" (Doyle 2: 799). On screen, there can be no doubt that this variety extends to his friend and colleague Dr. Watson, who continues to evolve in the public eye as the public itself continues its own evolution.

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