



HG 8011
Detecting Meaning with Sherlock Holmes

Reading Sherlock Holmes II
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+ *The Adventure of the Dancing Men* (1903)



- Holmes, upholder of justice and drug addict?
 - In the Victorian era, “sale of opium, laudanum, cocaine and morphine was legal. Victorian users took these dangerous drugs as self-medication and as recreation” (VW)*
 - Holmes's recreational use of drugs can be explained in two ways.
- The Victorian Web (See *References*)



The Adventure of the Dancing Men (1903)

From *A Study in Scarlet* (1887):

- Nothing could exceed his energy when the working fit was upon him: but now and again a reaction would seize him, and for days on end he would lie upon the sofa in the sitting-room, hardly uttering a word or moving a muscle from morning to night. On these occasions I have noticed such a dreamy, vacant expression in his eyes, that I might have suspected him of being addicted to the use of some narcotic, had not the temperance and cleanliness of his whole life forbidden such a notion. (*The Complete Sherlock Holmes*, vol. I, 13)

From *The Sign of Four* (1890):

- Sherlock Holmes took his bottle from the corner of the mantel-piece and his hypodermic syringe from its neat morocco case. With his long, white, nervous fingers he adjusted the delicate needle, and rolled back his left shirt-cuff. For some little time his eyes rested thoughtfully upon the sinewy forearm and wrist all dotted and scarred with innumerable puncture-marks. Finally, he thrust the sharp point home, pressed down the tiny piston, and sank back into the velvet-lined arm-chair with a long sigh of satisfaction. (*The Complete Sherlock Holmes*, vol. I, 99) [not unusual for heroes to have fatal flaw—superman; more “relatable”]





The Adventure of the Dancing Men (1903)

- The introduction of Holmes “his long, thin back curved over a chemical vessel in which he was brewing a particularly malodorous product.”
- “If there is an afternoon train to town, Watson, I think we should do well to take it, as I have a chemical analysis of some interest to finish, and this investigation draws rapidly to a close.”
- Holmes brilliant or because others around him lack the skills of close observation?
- The drawings of the Dancing Men.
- Why are they not described in the narrative but illustrated?
- Hilton Cubitt’s family background:

“You'll just ask me anything that I don't make clear. I'll begin at the time of my marriage last year; but I want to say first of all that, though I'm not a rich man, my people have been at Ridling Thorpe for a matter of five centuries, and there is no better-known family in the county of Norfolk.”





The Adventure of the Dancing

Men (1903)

■ "I am only a simple Norfolk squire, but there is not a man in England who ranks his family honour more highly than I do."

- The significance of Elsie Patrick.
- The marriage as irrational:

You'll think it very mad, Mr Holmes, that a man of a good old family should marry a wife in this fashion, knowing nothing of her past or of her people...

- Holmes not simply a character that makes the characters from prominent families look foolish, he preserves their reputations.





The Adventure of the Dancing Men (1903)

- Legitimizing Holmes (as non-official source of authority).
- Representation of legal authority: Inspector Martin of the Norfolk Constabulary.
- “Then you must have important evidence of which we are ignorant, for they were said to be a most united couple.”
- The co-operation of police and detective.
- Inspector Martin impressed by Holmes genius.
- Authority undermined as Holmes orders the inspector around.
- The character traits of Inspector Martin.





The Red-Headed League (1891)

- The credible narrator credible?

Holmes: “I know, my dear Watson, that you share my love of all that is bizarre and outside the conventions and humdrum routine of everyday life. You have shown your relish for it by the enthusiasm which has prompted you to **chronicle**, and, if you will excuse my saying so, somewhat **to embellish so many of my own little adventures.**”

- The effect of Holmes’ remark on the reader.





The Red-Headed League

(1891)

- Structural similarities in the stories; Holmes' observations, often perceived as genius, often downplayed.
- Very much of the construction of the “genius” Holmes also attributed to Holmes' knowledge of just about everything.
- The ad that Wilson responded to first published in *The Morning Chronicle*.
- Calling attention to the “chronicle” or “chronicling”; that which is factual / invented.



+ *The Red-Headed League* (1891)



- Depiction of John Clay.
- “I beg that you will not touch me with your filthy hands,’ remarked our prisoner, as the handcuffs clattered upon his wrists. ‘You may not be aware that I have royal blood in my veins. Have the goodness also when you address me always to say “sir” and “please”.”

- Depiction of Peter Jones:

“This fellow Merryweather is a bank director and personally interested in the matter. I thought it as well to have Jones with us also. He is not a bad fellow, though an absolute imbecile in his profession. He has one positive virtue. He is as brave as a bulldog, and as tenacious as a lobster if he gets his claws upon anyone. Here we are, and they are waiting for us.”

+ *The Red-Headed League*

(1891)

- Holmes never has any problems of his own—his life boring but made exciting by his clients’ “little problems.”
- “l'Homme n'est Rien l'Oeuvre Tout” (the man is nothing, the work is everything” misquoted.





References



- Doyle, Arthur Conan. *The Complete Sherlock Holmes*. Volumes I and II. Introduction and Notes by Kyle Freeman. New York: Barnes & Noble Classics, 2003.
- *The Victorian Web: Literature, History & Culture in the Age of Victoria* (Holmes info. contributed by Dr. Andrzej Diniejko, <http://www.victorianweb.org/authors/doyle/addiction.html>)
- http://www.dailymotion.com/video/x13m7yj_sherlock-holmes-12-the-red-headed-league_creation