



A Study in Scarlet

It is the first story in the Canon, and we treasure it for its account of the first meeting of our beloved heroes Holmes and Watson. Yet despite its honored position as Holmes's debut, I wonder how many of us would have established our deep and longstanding passion for the adventures of Sherlock Holmes based only upon this single tale. It seems to me that the first Holmes story is actually more enjoyable when it is read over again after experiencing the full extent of Holmes's adventures and the full range of his and Watson's characters. Then indeed do we cherish the moment when it all began, long ago in the chemical laboratory at St. Bartholomew's Hospital.

Questions

This is where it all began: the published adventures of Sherlock Holmes and the treasured friendship between Holmes and Watson. On this theme of "firsts," I have two personal questions to ask the Hounds.

When you first read the stories of Sherlock Holmes, did you begin at the beginning with A Study? If you had a non-Sherlockian friend who wanted to see what all the fuss over Sherlock Holmes was about, would you recommend that he or she start here?

But in this age of movies and television, our first reading of A Study in Scarlet or any Holmes story is not likely to be our first impression of Sherlock Holmes. The Hounds have often discussed the merits of the various "major" interpretations of Holmes upon the stage and screen, but isn't it true that "we hear of Sherlock everywhere," in everything from cartoons to commercials? Is this a good thing or a bad thing? Does Sherlock Holmes "belong" to too many people these days?



We think of Sherlock Holmes as an extremely introverted man, but in this tale, he seems to take a liking to Watson almost immediately, even before learning that Watson is interested in splitting the cost of those lodgings that Holmes cannot afford on his own. For all of his quick deductions about Watson's profession, his wound, and Afghanistan, is it possible that Holmes was expecting someone else to come into the chemical laboratory that day, and that he at first mistakenly supposed Watson to be that person? Who did he think Watson was, and why was he so happy to see him?

The December, 1987, issue of the Baker Street Journal featured a wonderfully insightful article by Jennifer Decker, citing the parallels between *A Study* and Herman Melville's *Moby Dick*, and comparing Holmes and Watson's relationship to that of Queequeg and Ishmael. Are there any thoughts among the Hounds as to Holmes's resemblance (or not) to the strange and prescient harpooner of the Pequod? Do you think that the author of *A Study* meant to shock us with the unusual character of Sherlock Holmes? Is it possible that Watson was originally meant to be the true focus of the tale, the Everyman-observer of all things bizarre?

The Arrest: It seems to me that Sherlock Holmes chose a very clumsy way of bringing Jefferson Hope into custody. I wonder if Hope was actually startled into his desperate fight — a natural reaction to Holmes's sudden slapping on of those handcuffs. If Holmes had Hope's capture to do over, do you think he would choose a different method?

Does anyone else find it interesting that Inspector Lestrade was the one who drove Hope's cab once the American was in custody? Is it possible that Lestrade knew something of, say, "Shiple's Yard" before turning his career steps towards Scotland Yard?

Did Sherlock Holmes ever regret that he tracked down Jefferson Hope? Was this one of those cases where Holmes eventually felt he had done more harm in his capture of the criminal than the criminal had done by his crime?

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