

# Autobiographical deductions: doyle's characters and context



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In the novel *A Study in Scarlet*, we observe the relationship between Dr. John Watson, a retired Anglo-Afghan war veteran, and Sherlock Holmes, whom we first learn of as a man that works at a chemical laboratory in the hospital.

Within the first chapter of this novel, we are set up to wonder who Sherlock Holmes is and why he is characterized to be such a mysterious person.

Sherlock Holmes is brought out as a “ cold-blooded” person (Doyle, 10), but I believe he is actually very big-hearted and works quietly, and most importantly, very diligently to do the right thing. I also believe that Sir Arthur Conan Doyle relates himself to Holmes in many ways throughout this novel by using Holmes as a character to describe who Doyle is, and lessons that he had learned during his years growing up.

Early on in the novel, Watson arrives in London and meets up with an old friend at the Criterion Bar. He reveals that he is looking to spend less money on housing by finding a roommate to live with. This is when Dr. John Watson's friend, Stamford, first brings up Holmes by mentioning that he knows of someone else that is also looking for a roommate. Watson's friend Stamford goes on to state about Holmes, “ You mustn't blame me if you don't get on with him, I know nothing more of him than I have learned from meeting him occasionally in the laboratory. You proposed this arrangement, so you must not hold me responsible (Doyle, 10).” This was the first flag that really stuck out to me that something might be strange about Sherlock Holmes. He also goes on to describe Holmes as cold-blooded which makes me wonder instantly why he is described as that as well as why the author, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle would characterize Holmes to seem that way. John Watson and Stamford soon arrive at the hospital where Watson meets

Holmes for the first time. Holmes begins to talk to Watson about his discovery of haemoglobin and explains the process. This first impression makes Holmes out to be seem like a very intelligent and proud man. He also exemplifies his extraordinary talent of deducting information about people, which is ironic as the title of chapter two is The Science of Deduction. When John Watson first met Holmes, Holmes states, " You have been in Afghanistan, I perceive." This was done without any prior knowledge of Watson, simply a firm handshake, and leaves Watson wondering how Holmes could've every deducted that he was in Afghanistan simple from that information. They begin discussing living arrangements and learning more about the details of characteristics of each other. We learn as readers that Holmes enjoys doing chemistry experiments and that he also goes into periods of quiet, keep to himself, periods. He also enjoyed going on long walks in to lowest portion of the city (Doyle, 15). Holmes likes to spend his time alone and isolated. This is where they really seem to complement each other as Dr. John Watson is known as being " extremely lazy" and also suffers from being easily shaken at loud noises as a result of post-traumatic stress from his time spent in war.

Through his narrative in A Study in Scarlet, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle presents Sherlock Holmes as a chemist who keeps to himself, and is very proud. He also continues to contrast Dr. John Watson and Sherlock Holmes personalities by Holmes having regular meetings with " clients", whiles Dr. Watson sits at home alone. This draws on the mysterious aspect of what exactly does Sherlock Holmes do for a profession? Sir Arthur Conan Doyle also splits these two characters in chapter two. The title is called The Science

of Deduction, but Dr. Watson just cannot deduct what Holmes really does for a living. In return, we can refer back to the first chapter where Holmes deduced instantly that Dr. Watson was in Afghanistan. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle was born in London and grew up to be scientifically educated, much like Sherlock Holmes. According to "Discovering Arthur Conan Doyle", once Doyle arrived at college he found it to be boring but also difficult. He found playing sports and listening to lectures much more exciting. This is parallel with Holmes working in a chemist lab, but really getting the thrill and enjoying life when he is working as a detective ("Discovering Arthur Conan Doyle."). Doyle also found describing and learning about his instructors' personalities much more exciting than he did studying ("Discovering Arthur Conan Doyle."). This is where Holmes gets the extraordinary ability to deduct that Dr. Watson was in Afghanistan. I also found that Doyle became interested in photography and would often document and later publish his findings as well as began writing short stories based on the adventures he had as a young child. We learn in Chapter two of *A Study in Scarlet*, that Holmes also published an article himself entitled, "The Book of Life." Sir Arthur Conan Doyle grew in poverty and didn't have many social connections around the time that he graduated from medical school. This caused him to struggle to open his own medical practice as he could not afford it. Aside from these struggles, he was still a very successful, modest medical practitioner. This is where we learn to see the resemblance between Sir Arthur Doyle and Sherlock Holmes.

It starts to click that Doyle describes Holmes as keeping to himself, like when he would often go on walks alone in the lower-income poverty area of the

city. This is because it reminded him of where he came from once he entered medical school and no longer received money from his family. This also explains why Holmes worked as a chemist in a hospital rather than opening his own practice ("Discovering Arthur Conan Doyle."). I researched to find that Sir Arthur Conan Doyle reveals that his inspiration for Sherlock Holmes is a former teacher of his, Dr. Joseph Bell. In "Discovering Arthur Conan Doyle", Doyle states that Dr. Bell was a teacher that would often educate his students on the importance of using all of the senses as well as the importance of observations when using deduction and diagnosing such as Holmes. This is interesting to me because I think that a young Sir Arthur Conan Doyle is to Dr. Joseph Ball as Dr. Watson is to Holmes in the beginning of this novel, but as Doyle grew and graduated medical school that he came how to describes Holmes to be. In other words, he was a young Dr. Bell and when he grew up he began to show the same characteristic that he was taught from his teacher. Dr. John Watson learns so much from following and observing Sherlock Holmes throughout, "A Study in Scarlet", and its correlates with how much Sir Arthur Conan Doyle learns from Dr. Joseph Bell in medical school ("Discovering Arthur Conan Doyle."). Dr. Joseph Bell would also use inductive and deductive reasoning to guess a person's profession much like Sherlock Holmes does in the story ("Discovering Arthur Conan Doyle."). An example is shown at the end of chapter two into the beginning of chapter three when a letter comes for Sherlock Holmes from a man and Holmes was already able to deduct his profession before the man had come to deliver the note. Dr. Watson asks, "I wonder what that fellow is looking for?", while pointing to a stalwart, plainly-dressed individual who was walking slowly down the other side of the street, looking anxiously at the numbers.

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He had a large blue envelope in his hand, and was evidently the bearer of the message. " You mean the retired sergeant of Marines?" replied Holmes (Doyle, 23). From that small description that he had seen of the man he was able to deduct that he was a retired marine. It is fascinating that Sir Arthur Conan Doyle admired an individual so much that he would incorporate him into a novel as well as allow his teacher personality and traits to rub off onto himself.

Through reading and researching " Discovering Arthur Conan Doyle", I learned that although Sir Arthur Conan Doyle was very impressed and intrigued with Dr. Joseph Bell's deductive reasoning skills, he was disturbed by the way to acted towards his patients. It is stated that he was often cold towards his patients, much like Sherlock Holmes is towards Dr. Watson in, " A Study in Scarlet"( " Discovering Arthur Conan Doyle.") In chapter one Stamford goes on to say, " You don't know Sherlock Holmes yet, perhaps you would not care for him as a constant companion." Dr. Watson replies, " Why, what is there against him?" With which Stamford replies, " Oh, I didn't say there was anything against him. He is a little queer in his ideas- an enthusiast in some branches of science. As far as I know he is a decent fellow enough (Doyle, 9)." This portrays Holmes to be cold-blooded early on in the novel. This connects Sherlock Holmes with Dr. Joseph Bell in a way that they both can come off as tense and cold. Another aspect that particularly stuck out to me is that in " Discovering Arthur Conan Doyle", Sir Arthur Conan Doyle acknowledges Dr. Joseph Bell as his inspiration to the character Sherlock Holmes, but then also creates Dr. Watson. This could just be a coincidence that they are both labeled Dr. but with opposing

characteristics, but I believe that there is a correlation between Dr. Watson being like a younger Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and then growing into the Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Joseph Bell characteristics. Throughout the novel, Dr. Watson works alongside Holmes as he works to deduct the murder case where he learns much for what Holmes is actually like ("Discovering Arthur Conan Doyle"). In Chapter seven while working to solve the murder, the novel states, "Sherlock Holmes sprang from his chair with an exclamation of delight." 'The last link,' he cried, exultantly. 'My case is complete.' 'I now have in my hands,' my companion said, confidently, 'all the threads which have formed such a tangle.'" He then continues to go on states that he had solved the case (Doyle, 62). This is an example of Holmes out of nowhere using his deduction to solve the case. This connects him to Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and Dr. Joseph Bell in using deduction and pride confidently.

Throughout, "A Study in Scarlet" we learn much of who Sir Arthur Conan Doyle is through the characters of Sherlock Holmes and Dr. John Watson. Sherlock Holmes comes off in the beginning of the novel as a cold-blooded person but turns out to really help Dr. Watson by allowing him to learn from him and eventually work alongside him to help solve the murder, much like how Sir Arthur Conan Doyle learned from Dr. Joseph Bell. I researched to learn that Doyle thought highly of his teacher Dr. Joseph Bell in which he acknowledges that he used him throughout the story as Sherlock Holmes.

In all likelihood, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle used Dr. John Watson as a man that is like a younger version of himself. A version of Doyle that was in medical school learning from Dr. Bell. He then grows to learn through deductive and inductive reasoning to understand and correctly describe professions and

well as solve problems such as the murder case in this novel. This is where he learns to become more like Sherlock Holmes. Dr. John Watson is learning from Sherlock Holmes much like Sir Arthur Conan Doyle learned from his teacher, Dr. Joseph Bell. Through its deductive reasoning, this novel is a great representation of learning, growing, working alongside, and different role models in life.

## **Work Cited**

" Discovering Arthur Conan Doyle." Discovering Sherlock Holmes - A Community Reading Project From Stanford University, Stanford University, 2006 Doyle, Arthur Conan., and Nancy Timmins. A Study in Scarlet. Langenscheidt ELT, 2007.