

Reviewing sherlock holmes's thoughts and goals

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The Motive & Mind of Sherlock Holmes

It is not for no reason that the character of Sherlock Holmes has become so engrained into modern society. Once the character became public domain, adaptations and renditions of the classic character have blossomed—from novels to plays and, in several instances, television and film. And while it is remarkable how this character has so permeated our culture, it is equally as important to recognize why this is. The character Sherlock Holmes uses the unique process of “the science of deduction” which, when paired with his antisocial, borderline-sociopathic personality, makes for a literary icon that stands the test of time.

In the very first chapter of Sign of Four (Arthur Conan Doyle’s second novel to feature Sherlock Holmes), the titular protagonist articulates an important aspect of both his personality and the science of deduction—which just so happens to be the name of said chapter.

“ My mind . . . rebels at stagnation. Give me problems, give me work, give me the most abstruse cryptogram, or the most intricate analysis, and I am in my own proper atmosphere. I can dispense then with artificial stimulants. But I abhor the dull routine of existence. I crave for mental exaltation. That is why I have chosen my own particular profession (Doyle 6).

This passage indicates Holmes’s necessity for stimulation and his hatred for boredom—which, ironically, is his main motivator for all his acts of heroism. According to Holmes, the only reason he does the things he does is because it keeps him busy. This of course could be a lie; there very well could be

genuine heart in his actions, but there are few if any instances in the novel to suggest such a motivator. Rather, his cold and clinical demeanor and manner of speech make it appear—to Watson, the narrator, at least—that Holmes is in it for selfish reasons. This theme would come to make an appearance in several of Doyle's works, as well as the numerous adaptations.

This science of deduction is extremely important when taking into account Holmes's profession. According to Holmes, there is a precise difference between observation and deduction. Observation tells him that Watson went to the Wigmore Street post office due to a smudge of dirt appearing on one of his insteps. Deduction, on the other hand, required him to make assumptions about observations—his example being he knew Watson sent a telegram rather than a letter because his pen was unused on his desk. It is these types of situations that make Holmes such a unique and entertaining character to read about, and interesting enough to make the readers convinced of the story's believability.

An important aspect of Sherlock's need for stimulus comes from his drug use. Sign of Four is the first of Doyle's Holmes writing to examine this aspect of the character, and the author is not exactly subtle about it—the very first action in the book is Holmes injecting cocaine into his arm. It is presented as a morality issue; Watson, the medically trained friend, attempts to warn Holmes of the dangers of drug use, while Holmes calmly ignores the advice and delivers a precise counterpoint. It is clear that Watson has had this

conversation before, as he drops the subject almost immediately and doesn't attempt to argue any longer.

The way he interacts with others is also indicative of his unusual personality. As the modern-day retelling of the classic stories Sherlock puts it, Holmes has sociopathic tendencies—mainly because he lacks the capacity for experiencing empathy for others. This is clear in the original works too, including Sign of Four, throughout the entirety of the story. These characterizations and iconic storytelling techniques go to show how much of a classic character Sherlock Holmes has been and will continue to be for a very long time.