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Hyde-ing Between Holmes and Watson

An Examination of a Homosocial Bond Through a
Freudian Analogy of Jekyll and Hyde

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Title: *Hyde-ing Between Holmes and Watson: An Examination of a Homosocial Bond Through a Freudian Analogy of Jekyll and Hyde.*

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Abstract: The relationship between Sherlock Holmes and John Watson is one of the most famous male friendships in modern literature. Using the two novels *A Study in Scarlet* and *The Sign of Four* from Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's extensive canon about the extraordinary detective and his companion, this essay examines the bond between Holmes and Watson through Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's theories about male homosocial desire. Furthermore, it aims to illuminate their interdependency with the help of a Freudian Jekyll/Hyde analogy that also highlights the psychological balance they provide for each other. The result of the analysis indicates that Holmes and Watson need and complement each other, and that is the reason their friendship endures.

Keywords: Sherlock Holmes, John Watson, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, male homosocial desire, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, structural model of the psyche, Sigmund Freud, *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, Robert Louis Stevenson.

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Introduction

When thinking of famous literary relationships, one of the first to come to mind has to be the one between Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's detective Sherlock Holmes and his ever present assistant-companion Dr. John Watson. Beginning as a simple, cost-effective, flat-sharing arrangement, it grows into first a working relationship and later a deep friendship. The completely opposite personalities of the characters make for interesting situations, and as they learn to live with each other's quirks they also start to complement each other. The bond that forms between them is multifaceted, and in this essay I will first look at it through Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's theory of male homosocial desire, finding different ways in which they express this facet of their bond. I will then show how Robert Louis Stevenson's novella about Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, through the theories of Freud's structural model of the psyche, can be used as an analogy to further explore the interdependency that develops between Holmes and Watson. I will argue that adding a psychological reading to the homosocial theory, showing how they balance each other, in turn may explain why their bond is so strong that it has become the paragon of male friendship, something that is evident in the many recent adaptations in popular media.

Material and method

Scottish physician and writer Sir Arthur Conan Doyle (22 May 1859 – 7 July 1930) began writing as a student, and continued later while waiting for patients at his own, initially less than successful, medical practice. In 1886, he finally found a publisher for *A Study in Scarlet*, his first novel about the peculiar detective loosely modelled after a former university teacher of his. *A Study in Scarlet* was published in 1887, and a sequel, *The Sign of Four*, was commissioned and published in 1890. After that, Doyle went on to write short stories for *The Strand* magazine, many of them featuring Holmes and Watson. Some twenty-five detective stories later, he felt that he wanted to dedicate more time to writing historical novels and decided to let Holmes die in *The Final Problem*, published in 1893. However, he had not counted on the popularity of the character, and after significant public outcry he wrote *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, which was serialised in *The Strand* 1901-1902. This novel takes place before the incident in *The Final Problem*, and it was not until Doyle resumed writing his short stories in *The Strand* after ten years that Holmes was brought back and the explanation was given: he had faked his own death in order to escape dangerous enemies. Doyle continued to write for *The Strand* until 1927, by which time he had produced a total of fifty-six short stories and four novels about Sherlock Holmes and John Watson.

I have chosen to work with the first two novels, *A Study in Scarlet* and *The Sign of Four*, because of how events in them illuminate the Holmes/Watson relationship. In *A Study in Scarlet*,¹ some background is given on both characters, and we learn of the circumstances under which they come to live together. Watson is a former army doctor who has been injured in the war in Afghanistan. Having contracted a fever that leaves him convalescent, he is sent home on a small allowance with permission to improve his health for a few months. This explains why he is unemployed and still a bit weak as well as in need of a cheap accommodation. Holmes is a former independent student of chemistry, working at the chemical laboratory of a London hospital. On the side, he works as a consulting detective, helping out the local police in their investigations as well as taking on a few independent cases. Apparently, this does not pay as much as he would like it to, since he is looking for someone with whom to share a suite of rooms he has his eye on. He has a great deal of special knowledge that helps him with his work, but is curiously ignorant of other things considered to be general knowledge. Once Watson learns what Holmes actually does for a living, he is invited along on a case. Holmes solves the case in question, but the Scotland Yard gets the credit, much to Watson's dismay. He therefore resolves to publish an account of the matter, with the somewhat indifferent blessing of Holmes, and henceforth takes on the role of unofficial chronicler. In *The Sign of Four*,² the two companions have been suitemates for a number of years - presumably seven, although it seems that Doyle was less than meticulous with his chronology. Either he did not care, or he lost track himself, which is easily imagined since the stories are the supposed recollections of Watson in no particular order. Be that as it may, it is clear that some time has passed during which Holmes and Watson have worked together on several cases, and they have become familiar with each other's habits. What is more, they have not had a case in months and Holmes is displaying signs of extreme boredom bordering on depression, revealing a recreational drug habit that worries Watson. Yet another case presents itself, and the client turns out to be Mary Morstan, Watson's future wife.

Working from these two points in time, one can draw some conclusions about how the relationship evolves. I will not dwell on any chronological inconsistencies due to the aforementioned imprecision of Doyle, since it is unclear whether they are his own mistakes or those of Watson, given the homodiegetic narrative style chosen. I will, however, through qualitative analysis after close reading, examine the expressions of male homosocial desire in the formation and maintenance of the friendship of Holmes and Watson, and then discuss the psychological aspect of the balance and strength of it through an analogy of Jekyll and Hyde.

¹ Hereafter cited as SCAR.

² Hereafter cited as SIGN.

Theory

Male homosocial desire

Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick coined the term 'male homosocial desire' to describe the way men express their intimate relationships with other men. The word 'homosocial' denotes the social bonds between persons of the same sex, and the word 'desire' is in this case used to explain a structure, the affective or social drive or force similar to the psychoanalytical 'libido', that shapes a relationship, in whichever emotive form it manifests itself. The term 'male homosocial desire' also refers to men's preference for the company of, and attention to, other men. Sedgwick discusses the connections between homosociality, homosexuality and homophobia, meaning to "hypothesize the potential unbrokenness of a continuum between homosocial and homosexual" (Sedgwick 1985, 1). In this discussion, she distinguishes between male and female homosociality - the female continuum being less disrupted and female homosociality not being as dichotomous to homosexuality as the male one - arguing that they differ because, on the one hand, in a patriarchal society, women's relationships are not based on the same power play as men's, and because, on the other hand, men's fear of the attention developing into a homosexual desire sparks a need to emphasise heterosexuality and gives rise to the homophobia that characterises many forms of male homosociality today. This was not always so: in ancient Greece "the continuum between "men loving men" and "men promoting the interests of men" appears to have been quite seamless" (4). There existed a sort of mentorship whereby younger men relied on older men to teach them the ways of Athenian society and introduce them to the privileges they were about to inherit, and under which it was only natural for them to perform all sorts of services for their tutors. In patriarchal Western society today this has obviously changed, and it seems that " 'obligatory heterosexuality' is built into male-dominated kinship systems" (3), further adding to the tendency towards homosexual panic in homosocial settings.

As a result of this need to enforce the heterosexual norm, male homosociality takes on a triangular structure with women functioning as safe conduits for further expressing these bonds of male intimacy, be they "friendship, mentorship, entitlement [or] rivalry" (1). Sedgwick reasons that this makes women an important part of "the structure even of relationships that seem to exclude women" (25), and any female concept can therefore be used as a channel for male bonding. Different forms of male solidarity or "bonds...by which males enhance the status of males" (3) will serve to reinforce the patriarchal structure that dominates women. Consequently, male homosocial desire will also be visible through different ways of performing male gender and displaying masculinity.

In order to investigate why the homosocial bond between Holmes and Watson seems especially strong, an analogy of Jekyll and Hyde, constructed with the help of Freud's structural model of the psyche, will be used.

The Freudian Jekyll/Hyde Analogy

A contemporary of Doyle, Robert Louis Stevenson published his novella *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* just a year before *A Study in Scarlet*. The two texts display similarities on several accounts, although most notably in the way they reflect late Victorian concerns about the rise of new sciences. It is easy to see the influence of Darwin on the main idea of Stevenson's novella, and it also seems to anticipate some of Freud's ideas. Subconscious impulses drive a respectable doctor to dangerous experiments resulting in a split personality: on the one hand the rational, friendly and well-liked gentleman, and on the other hand the cruel, remorseless and ape-like creature. Jekyll, being the consummate scientist, uses his professional methods to circumvent the dilemma of reconciling the good and bad sides of his nature by instead separating them, confining his vices to the primitive creature Hyde. Unfortunately, the transformation proves both addictive and unstable, and results in self-destruction. The story points to the risks of pushing scientific discovery too far, a fear that was very much present in the Victorian era and still is relevant today, given the speed with which new discoveries are constantly made.

Stevenson's story deals primarily with the duality of good vs. evil within the human individual, but the moral of the story is that no one can live without both sides to their personality, and the importance of integration and balance can also pertain to a person's strengths and weaknesses. Just as Hyde runs rampant when Jekyll separates him from the tempering influence of his better self, our weaknesses can become obstructive flaws of character that lead us astray if we do not learn to accept and handle them.

What happens when Jekyll splits his personality can be described using Freud's structural model of the human psyche. According to the model, the rational, organised Ego mediates between the basic instincts of the Id and the critical, moralising Super-ego. Since the Id contains the libido, our primary drive, it is also the source of our desires. Its impulses are neither good nor bad, and they operate solely on the pleasure principle, which is to say that they avoid pain or un-pleasure and seek the quickest gratification possible. Devoid of value or judgement, the libido is both the drive to create and destroy, love and hate, live and die. Mainly as unconscious as the Id, the Super-ego often works in contradiction to it. It controls our sense of what is right and wrong or culturally and socially acceptable, and punishes misbehaviour with guilt, effectively acting as our conscience. The mostly conscious Ego, then, representing reason or common sense and being the part of the psyche that deals with reality, seeks ways in which to please the Id without conflict with the outside world

or the Super-ego. However, this puts it in a constant struggle, creating anxieties that it tries to overcome using more or less conscious defence mechanisms (such as for example repression) to lessen the tension (Freud, 1923).

Applying this model to Dr Jekyll's case, we can then see that his Ego has trouble mediating between the desires of his Id and what his Super-ego intimates is appropriate behaviour for a man in his position. He has been repressing his urges rather than finding a good way to satisfy them, and it drives him to an attempt at separating the Id from the Ego and the Super-ego. However, freed from the restricting influence of the Super-ego – and indeed from the reason and rationality of the Ego – the impulses of the Id are amplified, and what Jekyll first perceives as a rather harmless inclination towards minor indiscretions quickly deteriorates into an irresistible compulsion towards degenerated crimes. Stressing the importance of keeping your impulses in check returns us to the question of equilibrium and assimilation, and where in *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* this struggle is internalised, the aim of this essay is to show that external influence in the form of a close relationship can be just as vital to the process. I suggest that Holmes and Watson act as balancing forces for each other, each being the Jekyll to the other's Hyde.

Context and Outline

The Holmes canon has been the object of many a study for a variety of reasons. For example, British crime novelist June Thomson has not only written her own pastiches on the sleuthing couple, but also the meticulously researched fictional biography *Holmes and Watson: A Study in Friendship* where she, among other things, draws plausible conclusions about their psychological backgrounds. Along these lines, my own analysis focuses on the interdependency that their partnership leads to and how this fuels and nourishes their friendship. Lynette Porter collects scholarly analyses of the great detective and his companion from several different points of view in *Sherlock Holmes for the 21st Century: Essays on New Adaptations*, showing that more recent adaptations, such as the BBC series *Sherlock* and the Guy Ritchie films *Sherlock Holmes* and *Sherlock Holmes: A Game of Shadows*, seem to agree that the homosocial bond between Holmes and Watson is at the heart of the tales, and that this is the main reason behind their popularity and longevity. With this in mind, I chose to start off by exploring what a homosocial bond is and how it applies to Holmes and Watson. For natural reasons, Watson being the main narrator of the tales, placing equal emphasis on the characters has proven to be difficult.

I will not go into detail on the subject of triangulation with women, since there are so few examples of this in my two primary texts, and since my focus lies elsewhere. I would only like to briefly mention Mary Alcaro's essay "My Dear Holmes: Examining Sedgwick's Theory of Homosociality in *The Sign of Four*" where she claims that Watson chooses Mary Morstan because

she is safe and he is in too deep with Holmes: I do not quite agree with this. Watson seems genuinely in love but that does not exclude the possibility of his being more susceptible to fall in love with a woman in order to reaffirm his heterosexuality. Also, while Holmes may display what could be interpreted as signs of jealousy, I believe it only to be because he deems love and marriage to be numbing to reason and, therefore, a waste of time, and perhaps because he is afraid Watson will have less time for him. In addition, although the statement refers to another text in the canon (*A Scandal in Bohemia*), I would like to mention Melissa Caro Lancho's essay "Holmes and Watson or Sherlock and John: A Homoerotic Reading of Conan Doyle's Characters in BBC's *Sherlock*" where she claims that Watson is jealous of Irene Adler because he wants to be the object of Holmes' affection. While this may be plausible if one is looking to find a homoerotic motive there, I consider it sufficient to say that it is possible he wishes Holmes would think as highly of him as he does of Irene. Considering the limited scope of this essay, I have chosen to stay mainly within the homosocial end of Sedgwick's continuum.

In the first chapter, I will show how Holmes and Watson express homosocial desire. In order to identify the different ways in which this can be conveyed, I have taken the cue from some previous work done on the subject of male friendship. In "Homosexuality in Men's Talk: Balancing and Recreating Cultural Discourses of Masculinities," Scott Fabius Kiesling discusses how men "do friendship" in the heterosexist atmosphere of an American university fraternity, and how this corresponds to Connell's concept of hegemonic masculinity in *Masculinities* (1995). *Sherlock's Men: Masculinity, Conan Doyle and Cultural History* by Joseph A. Kestner helped me apply this to Holmes and his time.

In the second chapter, I will show how my Jekyll/Hyde analogy can be used to highlight the psychological dynamic of the friendship and explore the ways in which Holmes and Watson need and complement each other, how one acts as the Jekyll to the other's Hyde, so to speak. Here, I rely more on my own interpretations of the text, since I have found no similar previous research making the same comparison. However, I use the conceptual guide to friendship formation presented by Martin and Paula Fiebert to define the psychological aspects of the relationship, and I also lean to some extent on the psychological conclusions of June Thomson, since they move in the same direction.

1. Homosociality

This first chapter will focus on showing different ways in which Holmes and Watson express their desire to further their relationship in both *A Study in Scarlet* and *The Sign of Four*. The chapter is divided into two subsections: 'Expressing Desire' and 'My dear fellow'. 'Expressing Desire' aims to identify some of these expressions and 'My dear fellow' discusses examples from the texts.

Expressing desire

As already stated, male homosocial desire can be expressed in displays of masculinity and performing male gender. Kiesling has a useful way of placing ideals of masculinity within cultural discourses:

Gender difference is a Discourse that sees men and women as naturally categorically different in biology and behaviour. *Male solidarity* is a Discourse that provides a bond among men, either as having similar sexual desires, or through bonds such as sports teams or the military. Men are understood to normatively want (and need) to do things with groups of other men exclusive of women. [...] *Heterosexism* is the definition of masculinity as heterosexual; to be a man in this Discourse is to sexually desire women and not men. *Dominance* is the identification of masculinity with dominance or authority; to be a man is to be strong, authoritative, and in control. (3)

Each discourse can be seen as a part of what Connell calls 'hegemonic masculinity' – "the masculinity that occupies the hegemonic position in a given pattern of gender relations" (Connell 1995, 76) – representing a certain standard for men to hold themselves up to or identify with: the closer one can get to representing this standard or ideal, the higher one's inherent status as a man. Based on these discourses, Kiesling defines both overt and indirect expressions of male homosocial desire. Overt expressions in direct action or speech are few and they are kept abstract, limited to certain closed settings and rarely directed at an individual but rather at a group. As such, they are not really applicable to my main texts and I will, therefore, not go into further detail regarding this type of expressions (except to point them out if and when they occur). Indirect ones are more common, and they are found for example in displays of masculinity (as corresponding to the hegemonic ideal) and camaraderie (often related to strength and safety in numbers), in displays of knowledge and/or status, in finding common ground, and in creating desirable status (for oneself or others). There is also "homosociality by alliance" (15), which is to say that some men are desirable as friends or allies because they have status and, therefore, transfer status to their friends or allies. Kiesling points to competition, agreeing on values and sharing experiences as other common ways of bonding, and shows how "men [build] homosociality even as they compete for status" (23) in trying to tell the best (or worst) story.

The hegemonic masculinity of the late Victorian London depicted in the Holmes canon is discussed in Joseph A. Kestner's book *Sherlock's Men* (1997). Kestner states that the tales "confirmed qualities which were radically gendered as masculine in Victorian culture: observation, rationalism, factuality, logic, comradeship, daring and pluck" (2), and observes that "the rubric 'manliness' was used to connote the dominant form of masculinity and its ideal paradigm" (15) during the 19th century. This idea of manliness, incorporating patriotism, generosity and chivalry as qualities that made up a gentleman, was inspired by the heroic exploits of men such as Nelson and Wellington, and led to a kind of hero-worship that also expressed the hegemonic male ideal of the time. Kestner adds that "[h]ero-worship becomes in the Holmes tales the very manifestation of the detective as masculine paradigm" (16), and it can, therefore, also be seen as an expression of male homosocial desire.

Mentoring or tutoring relationships reminiscent of the ancient Greek homosocial order as mentioned in Sedgwick (4) can produce close bonds between the participants, and male homosocial desire is likely to manifest itself in any element of these situations. There is also a link to hero-worship here, in that the mentor obviously is someone to look up to and be inspired by, just like a hero. Another aspect of it is that the mentee can be seen as someone to carry on a legacy: there may be a desire on the part of the mentor to pass something on in order to be remembered or even immortalised.

In her article "'Bromance Is So Passé': Robert Downey, Jr.'s Queer Paratexts", Kayley Thomas argues that "Holmes' attachment to Watson is positioned above Holmes' participation in a larger social system; while his devotion to a primarily patriarchal Victorian social order (i.e., the interests *of* men) is established, his desire for a bond with a particular man (i.e., an interest *in* men) dominates" (Thomas in Porter, 39), effectively pointing towards the potentially unbroken homosocial continuum as seen in Sedgwick. This resonates well with the idea that the homosocial bond between Holmes and Watson is the main focus of the stories, and the maintenance of that friendship is, therefore, likely to be a top priority for the characters. Hence, any form of male bonding and furthering of friendship is an expression of male homosocial desire.

My dear fellow

When they first meet, Holmes and Watson share nothing but a mutual need for accommodation. Although their arrangement is presumably strictly business, Watson remarks that Holmes seems delighted at the prospect and they start to compare habits, since, according to Holmes, "[i]t's just as well for two fellows to know the worst of one another before they begin to live together" (Doyle, SCAR 9). Neither one finding the self-professed shortcomings of the other too objectionable, the foundation for their bond is laid out. This can be seen as a way of finding common ground, or

smoothing the way, where both men express their desire to give the relationship a good start by making sure to remove the most immediate obstacles that could give rise to a conflict.

What first draws Watson to Holmes is the fact that he poses such a mystery. Not only does Holmes, within moments of their first encounter and after no more than a glance, guess that Watson is an army doctor just returned from Afghanistan, but he gives absolutely no hint whatsoever as to what line of work he himself is in. Holmes gains the upper hand by displaying knowledge about Watson while relinquishing none about himself, thus placing Watson in a subordinate status position and creating a desire in him to know more. Watson confesses to be “considerably interested in [his] new acquaintance” (9), both regarding his uncanny ability to draw conclusions from his observations and because he is curious about his occupation. He probably feels slightly at a disadvantage due to the status imbalance, but this only serves to fuel his curiosity and attraction, making him regard Holmes with some measure of awe. They move in together, and Watson describes his new roommate thus:

As the weeks went by, my interest in him and my curiosity as to his aims in life gradually deepened and increased. His very person and appearance were such as to strike the attention of the most casual observer. In height he was rather over six feet, and so excessively lean that he seemed to be considerably taller. His eyes were sharp and piercing, save during those intervals of torpor to which I have alluded; and his thin, hawk-like nose gave his whole expression an air of alertness and decision. His chin, too, had the prominence and squareness which mark the man of determination. His hands were invariably blotted with ink and stained with chemicals, yet he was possessed of extraordinary delicacy of touch, as I frequently had occasion to observe when I watched him manipulating his fragile philosophical instruments. (11)

Already, the way Watson speaks about Holmes reveals admiration: he demands attention, he is tall, and he looks alert, decisive and determined. These are all positive masculine attributes that correspond well to Kestner’s definition of manliness, making Holmes into a man Watson can look up to as a representation of the hegemonic ideal, and displaying some hero-worship in the process. Watson even remarks on Holmes’ touch: if a woman spoke thus about a man, we would probably think her infatuated. In fact, in some ways the hero-worship element of Victorian male homosocial desire can be seen as a kind of infatuation in that it is mainly based on admiration, but also in that it has a measure of distance and ignorance to it: you often admire your heroes from afar without knowing all that much about them. Watson, however, defends his interest:

The reader may set me down as a hopeless busy-body when I confess how much this man stimulated my curiosity, and how often I endeavored to break through the reticence which he showed on all that concerned himself. Before pronouncing judgment, however, be it remembered how objectless was my life, and how little there was to engage my attention. My health forbade me from venturing out unless the weather was exceptionally genial, and I had no friends who would call upon me and break the monotony of my daily existence. Under these circumstances I eagerly hailed the little mystery which

hung around my companion, and spent much of my time in endeavoring to unravel it.
(11)

The very fact that he feels the need to justify his attention to Holmes' person tells us that he is uneasy about his attraction to Holmes. Perhaps, it is only due to the fact that curiosity was considered a rather feminine quality, and as such it makes him feel less of a man compared to the very manly man he is speaking of, but perhaps it also to some degree points to the disrupted homosocial/homosexual continuum that Sedgwick speaks of. Either way, the mystery finally unravels of its own accord when a case surfaces and Watson gets a first hand look at Holmes' particular talent in action. Having previously doubted the practicality of deductive theories, he is now duly impressed and confesses that his "respect for [Holmes'] powers of analysis increased wondrously" (20). Here, one can detect a certain relief when Watson finds a safe outlet for his admiration, making it professional instead of only personal and thus letting him express it indirectly. Incidentally, the sentiment is well received by Holmes, as seen when he explains how he came to the conclusion that the man bringing their first case to their attention was a retired sergeant of Marines. In Watson's own words: "'Wonderful!' I ejaculated. 'Commonplace,' said Holmes, though I thought from his expression that he was pleased at my evident surprise and admiration" (21). Here, Holmes reveals a first glimpse of satisfaction at Watson's esteem, and the way he demonstrates his talent suggests that he may be trying to create a desirable status for himself.

Although Holmes seems quite comfortable with his role as consultant to the Scotland Yard being unofficial, leaving the credit for the solving of cases to detectives Lestrade and Gregson, Watson feels that Holmes' genius ought to be shared with the world: "Your merits should be publicly recognized. You should publish an account of the case. If you won't, I will for you" (121-122). Clearly, they have different views on what is important, but apart from the obvious hero-worship, this may be an attempt on Watson's part to create a status for Holmes that he evidently feels Holmes merits, making himself benefit by alliance. Holmes gives his permission, but later critiques Watson's publication for being romantic where it should have been scientific, again showing their differences in priorities. Despite this, Watson continues as Holmes' chronicler, probably because it caters to Holmes' ego but also because it makes for good public relations and brings new cases. Their respective expressions of status may be different, but they both show an interest in negotiating common ground, and they both continue to benefit from the arrangement.

Both Kestner and Thomson point out the element of hero-worship on Watson's part, evident in the way he idolises Holmes (Kestner, 16). There are also, mentioned elsewhere in the canon, pictures of great heroes among his possessions (Thomson, 20). When Holmes is being derisive about a couple of fictional literary detectives Watson admires, Watson is defensive about his heroes to the point of actually critiquing Holmes: "I felt rather indignant at having two characters whom I

had admired treated in this cavalier style. I walked over to the window, and stood looking out into the busy street. ‘This fellow may be very clever,’ I said to myself, ‘but he is certainly very conceited’ ” (SCAR 18-19). As Watson’s admiration of Holmes grows, the detective becomes the hero and the doctor becomes the devotee. Watson’s hero-worship puts him in a position close to the one of a mentee. There is a suggestion later in the canon that Watson wants to be like Holmes, in that he sometimes tries to learn to reason like him, but from the start it is clear that Watson, although seemingly striving towards the kind of male ideal that Holmes represents, is in fact representing another side of that ideal: loyal, honest and brave. There also seems to be in him a desire to be worthy of Holmes’ attention and friendship.

Holmes craves the adulation Watson provides both in person and in writing. He considers himself exceptional and needs confirmation, and having Watson around feeds his ego. The way he doles out tidbits of his genius while simultaneously staying mysterious keeps his companion in a constant state of amazement, again creating desirable status. At the same time, he seems to be tutoring Watson, encouraging him to learn and approving when he gets it right. There may be a desire to pass something on, accompanied by a sense of being important and interesting to someone. There is a similarity to the homosocial order of ancient Greece where an older man took a younger man under his wings in order to tutor him in the ways of Greek society. The bond between them would have been intimate and strong, all the more so for its temporary state, as the younger boy would grow into a man and one day take on an adept of his own (Sedgwick, 4). Of course, Holmes and Watson are of roughly the same age, but the element of mentorship could bring a powerful note of closeness to their relationship.

As much as the power status of the relationship seems to be in Holmes’ favour, there are instances of the opposite. There is a side to Holmes that brings out a nurturing feeling in Watson. A quote from *The Sign of Four* comes to mind, where Watson has just lectured Holmes on the hazards of his recreational drug use: “Remember that I speak not only as one comrade to another, but as a medical man to one for whose constitution he is to some extent answerable” (SIGN 125). Why should he feel answerable for Holmes’ constitution at all, even if he is a doctor? Holmes is a grown man, fully capable of taking care of himself. Moreover, he is well aware of the dangers of taking drugs; he just feels that the advantages outweigh the disadvantages, explaining that he finds his habit “so transcendently stimulating and clarifying to the mind that its secondary action is a matter of small moment” (125) and that his mind needs exercise when he is not working. The simplest answer is that, by this time, Watson has come to care deeply for his friend, although he only shows it indirectly and disguises it as medical attention. Holmes clearly returns the sentiment, or he would not even bother to explain himself. He addresses Watson as “[m]y dear doctor” (130), the only overt expression of feeling they both ever use in my two primary texts. It matters to him what Watson

thinks of him, and Watson thinks his drug habit is a waste of genius: “Why should you, for a mere passing pleasure, risk the loss of those great powers with which you have been endowed?”(125). This reversal of power in the relationship shows that the friendship has deepened and passed beyond the rather one-sided adoration that started it, and is a clear expression of a desire on both parts to maintain the bond.

2. The Jekyll to the Hyde

This chapter aims to illuminate the psychological balance that Holmes and Watson provide for each other. The fact that they need, complement and depend on each other makes their bond, if not essential, at least very important to them both, and adds another dimension to the analysis of the expressions of male homosocial desire for a more complex understanding of the relationship. An examination of the way the friendship is formed, and of what sustains it, may reveal why it grows so strong. As the previous chapter, this one is also divided into two subsections; the first one, 'Like will to like or opposites attract', defining psychological aspects of friendship formation and linking them to Freud's structural model of the psyche in order to make way for the Jekyll/Hyde analogy, and the second one, 'Mirroring', discussing examples from both *A Study in Scarlet* and *The Sign of Four*.

Like will to like or opposites attract

In "A Conceptual Guide to Friendship Formation", Martin and Paula Fiebert suggest two dimensions to friendship:

The first dimension, one of commitment and loyalty, may be viewed, and ultimately assessed, as a continuum of resistance to the dissolution of the relationship. [...] The second dimension involves a mutual willingness and desire to explore intra-individual behaviors as well as vital aspects of the interaction. (384)

Within the second dimension, four variables are defined:

(a) a tendency to accept aspects of the negative self concept of the other, (b) a willingness to risk self-disclosure, (c) an attempt to fulfill needs mutually - needs in a state of deprivation and needs currently met by other people or other circumstances, and (d) a mutual modification of constructs, attitudes, and values. (384)

Based on this, they identify four models of friendship formation, "all-inclusive, but not mutually exclusive" (385). These are in turn the Incremental Model (the longer you know someone, the greater the chances are that you like them), the Shared-stress Model (more or less intense situations of externally produced stress, such as war or college, tend to bring individuals together), the Perceived-similarity Model (the search for common ground, progressing from peripheral to central areas such as interests, attitudes, personality traits and cognitive styles, and also including the perception of status equality) and lastly the Perceived Need-complimentarity Model (a dissimilarity in the form of a need in one person that is answered reciprocally by a need in another, such as nurturance-succorance or dominance-submission).

With these models in mind, we can imagine that any relationship that is intentionally developed or taken further has a reason – the reason being that we like or admire something about, or get or want something from the other that makes us want to stay in the relationship. These desires may or may not be conscious, and using Freud’s structural model of the psyche we would say that they originate in either Id or Ego. An unconscious attraction would be based on desires derived from the Id. Sometimes, we simply call it chemistry, that feeling of wanting to be near someone without knowing what sparks it. It could be similarity, as in the Perceived-similarity Model and the proverb ‘like will to like’, or it could be dissimilarity, as in the Perceived Need-complimentarity Model and ‘opposites attract’. When the desire is conscious and coming from the Ego, we are probably aware of the reasons for the attraction. Either we share something, like a hobby or a profession, making us experience similarity, or we can calculate that it is a useful connection to have and cultivate the friendship intentionally on a need-complimentary level, even if we do not have much else in common. Hence, the main motives for consciously entering or building a relationship would also be perceived resemblances or differences. What drives most relationships is certainly a combination of conscious and unconscious instincts, and they can act both ways. Similarities can be attractive when they can function as common ground, but they can also be repelling if they mirror a weakness in us. Vice versa, dissimilarities may cause dislike if we cannot relate to them, but they can also be the very reason for attraction if they show us something we aspire to or want. Using the Fieberts’ dimensions of friendship we can see that as a relationship evolves, we commit to it and start to explore it in different ways. Trying to accept the other person for who they are could mean acknowledging the possibility of a negative trait becoming a Hyde. Risking self-disclosure could mean revealing our own Hyde. Attempting to fulfil each other’s needs could include a readiness to act as a positive influence, a Jekyll, if necessary. Accommodating and identifying with each other, each becoming part of the other’s self, can ultimately make us see ourselves through the eyes of the other. This way, a close relationship can help us grow: with someone acting as our mirror – or Super-ego – we can become aware of unconscious behaviour and change it if need be. In other words, someone else can act as the Jekyll to our Hyde.

Mirroring

The most striking thing about the relationship between Holmes and Watson is that they seem to be such opposites. Where Holmes is detached and logical, Watson is spontaneous and emotional. At first glance, it may be difficult to see how they could ever be friends. However, as it turns out, they have enough in common to get the relationship going – such as, for example, a strong lust for adventure that is well satisfied by the detective work – and later, their respective differences actually make them complement each other, each exercising a tempering influence on the other that

keeps certain character flaws from becoming obstructive. In this sense they both act as Jekyll to each other's Hyde, which creates an interdependency that strengthens their bond and brings out the best in both of them.

Holmes prides himself on being the detached observer, the cold intellectual, and sees all emotional qualities as unnecessary interference and “antagonistic to clear reasoning” (SIGN 136). As Stamford, the mutual acquaintance that brings Holmes and Watson together, remarks: “Holmes is a little too scientific for my tastes – it approaches to cold-bloodedness” (SCAR 5). This may be useful in his line of work, and, as such, represents the rational side of his personality, his Ego or Jekyll in professional situations. However, outside of work it becomes a weakness, making him appear superior and conceited, socially awkward and clumsy. He is not completely insensitive; however, despite the fact that this side of him becomes a Hyde and seems to be more troublesome than helpful when it comes to dealing with other people, he lets the logical side take over, mostly, since it is more important to him: “whatever is emotional is opposed to that true cold reason which I place above all things” (SIGN 239). He probably identifies with 'that true cold reason', as it is his strength and without it he is insecure. He is especially tactless when he gets caught up in his work, making Watson exclaim “[y]ou really are an automaton—a calculating machine [...] There is something positively inhuman in you at times” (136). He can be egotistic and vain, as Watson himself remarks when Holmes critiques the publication about their first case:

I was annoyed at this criticism of a work which had been specially designed to please him. I confess, too, that I was irritated by the egotism which seemed to demand that every line of my pamphlet should be devoted to his own special doings. More than once during the years that I had lived with him in Baker Street I had observed that a small vanity underlay my companion's quiet and didactic manner. (126)

Holmes' Hyde is socially incompetent, lacks empathy and consideration. He would be entirely insufferable if he did not care enough about Watson to restrain himself. His caring for Watson seems to make him want to be a better person, as shown when he deduces from Watson's pocket watch that he has an estranged brother: “'My dear doctor,' said he kindly, 'pray accept my apologies. Viewing the matter as an abstract problem, I had forgotten how personal and painful a thing it might be to you' ” (130). The mere presence of Watson makes Holmes more considerate, acting as a Jekyll Super-ego in reminding him of social conventions, and as a Jekyll Ego in opening his eyes to other people's actual perception of him. It also seems to have an impact on the frequency of his drug abuse, since he forgoes a chance at using when Watson presents him with the puzzle of his pocket watch.

Holmes is clearly prone to depression when not working, and that could easily take over and become a Hyde. He says:

'I cannot live without brain-work. What else is there to live for? Stand at the window here. Was ever such a dreary, dismal, unprofitable world? See how the yellow fog swirls down the street and drifts across the dun-coloured houses. What could be more hopelessly prosaic and material? What is the use of having powers, doctor, when one has no field upon which to exert them? Crime is commonplace, existence is commonplace, and no qualities save those which are commonplace have any function upon earth.' (131-132)

Having Watson around helps in several ways. His publications bring in cases and, thus, more work, and his constant admiration provides a validation that lifts Holmes' spirits and works like a balancing Jekyll to keep the Hyde of black moods at bay.

At times, Holmes blurts out what he really feels and thinks before he has a chance to consider whether it is appropriate or not. This impulse originates in his Id, unchecked by Ego or Super-ego, and is another example of his Hyde. Mostly, it is in relation to Watson that he realises his mistakes, and I believe he corrects himself out of consideration for Watson's feelings. Here, Watson's presence acts as Super-ego, reminding Holmes' Ego to behave in a proper manner:

'How in the world did you deduce that?' I asked. 'Deduce what?' said he, petulantly. 'Why, that he was a retired sergeant of marines.' 'I have no time for trifles,' he replied brusquely; then, with a smile, 'Excuse my rudeness. You broke the thread of my thoughts; but perhaps it is as well. So you actually were not able to see that that man was a sergeant of marines!' (SCAR 20).

When wrapped up in thoughts, Holmes can be sharp-tongued and blunt, and Watson's company helps him remember that people are human beings with feelings and not just abstract variables in his own intellectual games. At times, Holmes' clinical approach to the world makes him appear extremely cynical. Watson's friendship anchors him in the social world and makes him more human, again acting as the Jekyll to his Hyde.

There is another Jekyll/Hyde comparison in Holmes that Watson seems well aware of when he muses:

So swift, silent, and furtive were his movements, like those of a trained bloodhound picking out a scent, that I could not but think what a terrible criminal he would have made had he turned his energy and sagacity against the law instead of exerting them in its defence. (SIGN 163).

Had Holmes chosen a path on the other side of the law, he would have let his Hyde through. As it is, he chose to stay on the side of justice, letting his Jekyll prevail. This was evidently done long before he met Watson, but it is interesting to note that Watson considers the implications.

June Thomson reasons that Holmes' need for constant validation could be the result of his being emotionally deprived as a child, particularly due to an emotionally distant mother. This would

also explain the fact that, as Watson observes, “he was as sensitive to flattery on the score of his art as any girl could be of her beauty” (SIGN 33). Moreover, Thomson sees Holmes’ ambition as a need to prove himself, and claims that “Watson’s unflinching admiration was an important factor in maintaining their friendship” (Thomson, 13). Holmes needs to be Watson’s hero because it brings out the best in him, and he feels a need to live up to the high regard Watson has of him. Watson acts as a mirror, making Holmes notice his own behaviour in a way that he does not do in interaction with other people. Thomson also addresses what she bluntly calls Holmes’ “manic-depressive tendencies” that could account for the “light and dark sides to his nature” (15). I again refer to the Jekyll/Hyde analogy: when the dark side – the Hyde – is threatening to take over in terms of depression and drug abuse, or merely cold-bloodedness and insensitivity, Watson is there as the Jekyll that steers Holmes towards the light side with his good company, adoration and respect.

What is Watson’s Hyde, then? Due to both his modest personality, and to the fact that he, in the capacity of chronicler, obviously focuses on Holmes, there is precious little said about Watson’s own character in my two primary texts. However, when comparing his vices with those of Holmes in the beginning, he calls himself “extremely lazy” (SCAR 9), although the fact that he is recovering from war injuries – and probably post-traumatic stress disorder – would certainly account for at least some of his lethargic disposition at the time. Presumably, Watson is being a bit hard on himself and thinks himself weaker than he is, both physically and mentally. He is awed by Holmes’ quick mind and feels dull and dim beside him. This lack of self-confidence could easily become a Hyde, and Holmes provides a balancing Jekyll showing Watson that he has other useful qualities. He drags him along on his excursions and provides a stimulus that is invigorating to Watson, who would otherwise just stay in and continue to nurse his somewhat hypochondriac self. Without Holmes acting the Jekyll, Watson’s Hyde side would keep him indoors, dragging him down into depression. Thomson calls Watson a romantic and an idealist, referring to the portraits of his heroes found among his possessions and saying that this “could well reflect a boyhood admiration for men of courage” (20), and perhaps it can be said that he is a little bit too much of a dreamer. In that case, he could be quite fortunate in having chosen Holmes as a hero, since the great detective is far from perfect. That said, Holmes is extraordinary enough to fit Watson’s need for a hero, and living with Holmes could be the very thing that keeps Watson’s feet on the ground, but also off the couch.

Sedgwick observes that intense male friendships in Victorian fiction seem to have one thing in common: “the shadowy presence of a mysterious imperative (physical debility, hereditary curse, secret unhappy prior marriage, or simply extreme disinclination) that bars at least one of the partners in each union forever from marriage” (174). This fits well with both Watson’s invalidity and Holmes’ disposition, and suggests that their friendship would not have been possible if either of

the bachelors had been eligible for marriage at the point of their first meeting. However, working with Holmes lets Watson explore his more adventurous side and discover a type of mettle he may not be aware that he possesses, although one would think that his wartime experience is a testament that he is by no means a coward. Be that as it may, Watson does seem to suffer from low self-esteem in some areas. When first encountering Mary Morstan, Watson is completely taken with her but immediately stops himself from even dreaming about a future with her, thinking that “an Army surgeon with a weak leg and a weaker banking account” (SIGN 137) has nothing at all to offer her. During the course of the case he discovers that Mary returns his feelings and in the end he dares to propose to her. It is entirely conceivable that he would not have found the nerve to do so if it had not been for Holmes acting the Jekyll to his self-pitying Hyde.

3. Conclusion

There is no doubt that the friendship of Sherlock Holmes and John Watson is one of the most famous representations of a male homosocial bond in modern literature. Sedgwick's theory applies well to it, and it is easy to speculate about it in the homosexual end of the spectrum, as has been done to some extent in both of Guy Ritchie's Sherlock films and in the BBC series *Sherlock*. The original texts, however, stay well within what counted as heterosexual in Victorian times. Therefore, I consider them to mainly describe a close but platonic relationship between two men.

We have seen how a mere convenience arrangement can grow into an intimate friendship through carefully negotiated homosocial interactions. Watson clearly admires Holmes as a man that represents well the hegemonic male ideal of the time, but he expresses it indirectly through appreciation of his remarkable professional talent, eventually leading to an infatuation-like hero-worship typical of Victorian male homosocial desire. Holmes is flattered by this attention and wants more of it, and he expresses this by staying mysterious and dazzling Watson with his powers, thus creating a desirable status for himself. Taking on the role of tutor is another way of ensuring Watson's continued adulation and respect. Over time, the bond between the two friends becomes strong enough to include both overtly expressed terms of endearment and genuine care for each other's well-being.

Looking at psychological aspects of friendship formation, such as perceived similarities and dissimilarities, has shown how reciprocity is a key feature of a relationship. Holmes and Watson may seem very different from one another at first, but they share an adventurous streak that makes their friendship thrive amidst the exciting puzzles and dangers of detective work. Their needs complement each other as Watson's tendency towards hero-worship finds a worthy object in Holmes, and Holmes' need for an appreciative audience is fulfilled by Watson's admiration. They both act as Jekyll to the other's Hyde: Watson makes Holmes more human and considerate, and Holmes drags Watson out of a lethargy that could lead to depression. Their friendship provides a balancing force for both of them, bringing out the best in each of them.

Holmes and Watson were to remain friends for at least forty-six years, by Thomson's reckoning – she calls their relationship "a close friendship and an example of male bonding which, though not unusual in itself, especially in an age of single-sex schools and gentlemen's clubs, is unique because of the detailed account of it which Watson has given us and also for its strength of endurance, despite the many strains to which it was subjected" (10). The aim of this essay has been to show that they needed and complemented each other, and I believe this to be the reason for the tenacity and longevity of their friendship as well as for the popularity of the stories. An even deeper analysis could have been made looking at the entire canon, but that is obviously a task for a larger paper.

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