

Sherlock Holmes as a character – four interpretations

→ For each excerpt, write down your impressions of *Sherlock Holmes* and *Dr Watson*.

1) *The Hound of the Baskervilles*



- older
- cocky ("wise guy")

- he gives the walking stick to Watson to analyze it, with knowing that he couldn't get to the right conclusion

2) *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*

- 1984 – 1994 (TV series)
- Jeremy Brett as Sherlock Holmes



- less cocky

- seem to get along well
- more childish
- mention of drug addiction
- DW: seems on the same step as SH

3) *Sherlock Holmes*

- 2009
- Robert Downey Jr as Sherlock Holmes



- bit cruder (his negative sides we mentioned)
- he seems jealous of Mary
- DW: seems more confident

4) *Sherlock (A Study in Pink)*

- 2010, season 1, episode 1
- 2010 – 2017, 4 seasons + 1 special episode (season 5 not yet planned)
- based on original stories (e.g. *A Study in Scarlet* → *A Study in Pink*)
- Benedict Cumberbatch as Sherlock Holmes



some Sherlock quotes:

“Possible suicides. Four of them. There’s no point sitting at home when there’s finally something fun going on.”

“We’ve got ourselves a serial killer, love those. There’s always something to look forward to.”

“Look at you lot, you’re all so vacant. Is it nice not being me? It must be so relaxing.”

“Anderson, don’t talk out loud. You lower the IQ of the whole street.”

- Where are differences between the “traditional” Sherlock Holmes and the modern adaptation *Sherlock*?
- In how far are the four Sherlock portrayals the same?
- Which Sherlock Holmes and which Dr Watson do you like best and why?

Reading: *The Adventure of the Dysfunctional Detective*

Read the text and answer the questions in writing (keywords).

1. How does the author of the casebook explain the success of Sherlock Holmes?
2. How does Benedict Cumberbatch explain the success of Sherlock Holmes?



THE ADVENTURE OF THE DYSFUNCTIONAL DETECTIVE

So who is Sherlock Holmes? The cleverest person in the room. Self-proclaimed ‘high-functioning sociopath’. Addict – of mental stimulation above all else. He is the thinker; the logician; the detective; the magician, achieving the seemingly impossible through skill and misdirection.

‘He has one whopping advantage over magicians, though,’ says Steven Moffat. ‘This is where Doyle is right and magicians are wrong: always tell them how the trick is done! I saw

a magic act in Edinburgh where you went to see the magic act, a very good magic act, and then you went back an hour later and he showed you how every single trick was done. And I have to say that knowing did not spoil it. Sherlock Holmes tells you how the trick is done. However much you may hate him, you want to listen to the next thing he says. You’d *really* hate him if he said, “I’m going to do all this and then not tell you how!”’

And plenty of people *do* hate him. After all, he makes very little attempt to be likeable.

‘People get a vicarious thrill out of that,’ admits Benedict Cumberbatch, ‘because Holmes doesn’t suffer mediocrity. He’s somebody who is constantly frustrated by the mediocre or everyday. But the audience like him because they don’t have to live with him, they can just sit back and enjoy him. He’s blissfully rude, entertainingly irreverent, bordering on sociopathic. People get a real thrill out of that.’

Certainly Sherlock must be hard to live with. Mind you, as anyone who has ever shared a flat will know, there are far worse habits to be found in one’s flatmate than playing the violin and not talking for days on end.

‘We had discussions right at the beginning with the BBC,’ says Mark Gatiss, ‘about whether it was possible to have an unlikeable hero at the heart of your show. Of course *House*



Sherlock Holmes: not the easiest person to like

proved that was fine; he's horrid but everyone adores him!'

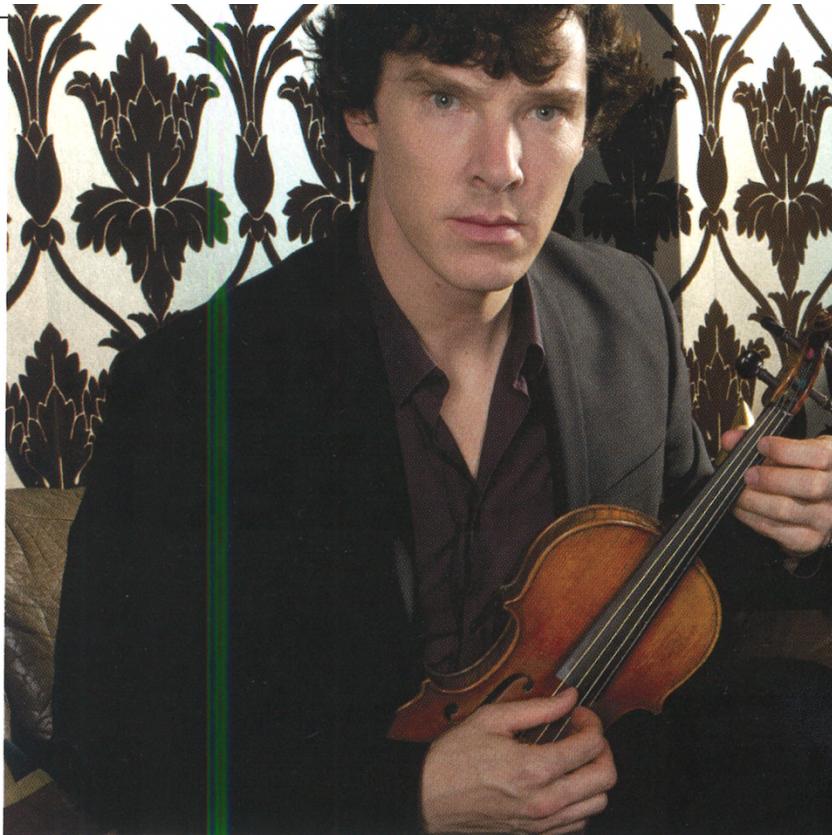
Indeed, *House* owes a great debt to Holmes, as acknowledged in the intentional pun of the title as well as the initials of his one true friend Dr James Wilson. Hugh Laurie's Gregory House does have more of a sex life – just – but this hasn't stopped Benedict Cumberbatch becoming something of a sex symbol, despite the fact that his character sees love as nothing more than a chemical imbalance. 'I was stopped on the street,' he says, 'and thanked on behalf of asexuals everywhere.'

Benedict has since been voted Sexiest Man in the World by readers of *The Sun*. Obviously Sherlock is managing to charm some people.

'I think he can be charming,' says Benedict. 'It's something he turns on in order to get something! But what's really interesting and powerful about him is his ability to see adventure in the smallest of detail. Everything is a potential spark for adventure, and that's a very thrilling thing.'

'We like our heroes to be complex,' he continues. 'We don't like two-dimensional stereotypes. They don't last very long. Also, for an actor, it's a lot more fun to play someone who has shape and edge than someone who has been softened and "vanillafied".'

Playing such characters can take its toll, of course. Jeremy Brett was warned not to take the part in the 1980s. Robert Stephens warned him

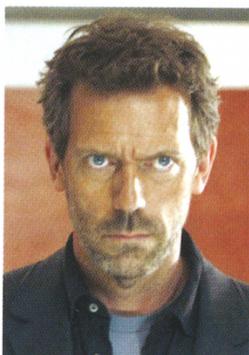


There are worse habits a flatmate can have than playing the violin

that it was a role that would send him mad. Was he right?

'With the greatest respect,' says Benedict, 'Brett was a very troubled man, and I think that advice was probably personally tailored. There's nothing about Holmes that's a problem if you're an actor that has anything else to do in their life. As long as he isn't *all-consuming*. I've played people who are far madder. I don't believe there's a mystical connection between a character and a performer. You can treat these things with too much care and the business of acting becomes bound in prurient superstition.'

'You get caught up in fear and worry and anxiety and then you can't play it. That's why I think Brett's interpretation, masterful though it is, is always going to be something of its own. It becomes something that isn't Sherlock Holmes.' He laughs. 'Still, I'm 36. I've got plenty of time to lose it yet...' ■



Hugh Laurie's House



Jeremy Brett's Holmes

taken from: Guy Adams: *Sherlock. The Casebook*, BBC Books 2012, p. 28-29.