

*Student Perspectives on
Sherlock Holmes*

The 2020 R. Joel Senter Memorial Essay Contest
Prize Winners

*Sponsored by
Mrs. Carolyn Senter*

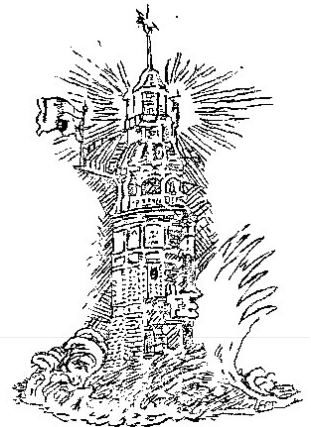
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The Beacon Society, a Scion Society of The Baker Street Irregulars*

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Contest Prize Winners**

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**Compiled by Stephen Mason,
Communications Committee, The Beacon Society**

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With thanks and gratitude to Carolyn Senter and the Senter Awards Committee:

Shannon Carlisle

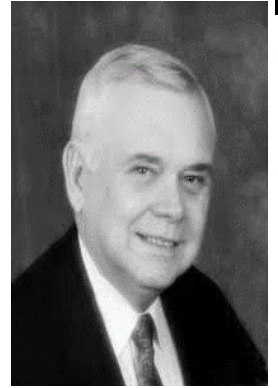
Debbie Clark

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Peggy Perdue

Art Renkwitz -- Chair, Awards Committee

R. Joel Senter



The R. Joel Senter Sr. Memorial Prize was founded by Joel's wife, Carolyn. Carolyn wanted the legacy of her husband to live on in the Sherlockian world after his death.

R(oderick) Joel Senter, Sr. (1930 - 2018) was a man of many interests and correspondingly numerous accomplishments. He played in bands, he performed magic, he taught mnemonics to Air Force personnel, he hosted a Dixieland jazz radio show, he wrote and produced Old Time Radio re-enactments (one of which won an award), and – probably best known – he and his wife, Carolyn, operated the premier Sherlock Holmes mail order catalogue for almost three decades.

Joel was a professor of psychology at the University of Cincinnati for 32 years. For about 10 of those years, he taught enormous-sized classes – from 300 to 800 students. Decades later, those students still remember his clear teaching and his dry wit. Joel also established and headed an Experimental Psychology Laboratory at the university and received numerous grants from government agencies. But he may have been even better known in the field of statistics.

A textbook he wrote, *Analysis of Data*, is something of a classic on the subject. One student, who himself later became a professor, recalled that he hated and feared math until he studied with Joel. "Astonishingly," he reported, "because of his way of teaching, I loved statistics."

Throughout all those years of professional achievement, Joel retained a passion for a certain consulting detective that he met in a high school English literature class via "*The Adventure of the Red-Headed League*." So, after he accepted an early retirement package from the University in 1988, Joel and Carolyn embarked on the great adventure of the rest of their life together. It involved the founding of Classic Specialties and eventually the *Sherlockian E-Times* newsletter. Classic Specialties was the Amazon.com of the Sherlockian world before there was Amazon – a place where one could buy all manner of Holmes-related books and other products. Many of those products were unique, the creation of Joel's fertile imagination.

The Senters traveled widely as members of several Baker Street Irregulars scion societies around the country. Along with the operation of Classic



readers about Sherlock Holmes. It brings together two worlds that meant so much to R. Joel Senter Sr. – education and the Great Detective.

Specialties, that gave them a network of Sherlockian friends far and wide. Drove of them appeared to offer condolences and messages of encouragement to Carolyn when Joel unexpectedly passed beyond the Reichenbach in July 2018.

Carolyn decided to give back to this supportive community, and at the same time keep green Joel's memory, by creating the R. Joel Senter Memorial Prize for essays by young

Joel was fond of quoting a professor of his who said, "He who toots not his own horn, so shall it not be tooted." But, as Carolyn pointed out, "he never followed his own advice and, indeed, even eschewed his own accomplishments."

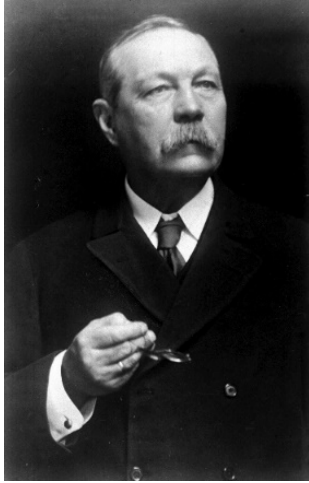
It is her hope that with this prize Joel's horn shall be un-tooted no more.

SOME WIT AND WISDOM FROM R. JOEL SENTER, SR.

- ❖ *When hearing or reading a statement/proclamation always ask: Who is the speaker and how the heck do they know?*

- ❖ *Always keep in mind when you hear a report such as 40% of some group does something bad or suffers from some disaster that (in this example) 60% didn't. The presentation of this kind of data is meant to shock. Always take note of the inverse.*

- ❖ *Educated does not equal smart.*



Sir Arthur Conan Doyle

Sir Arthur Ignatius Conan Doyle, best known today as the creator of Sherlock Holmes, was born

on May 22, 1859 in Edinburgh, Scotland. In addition to his stories about the world's most famous detective, Conan Doyle was a prolific writer whose other works include science fiction stories, historical novels, plays, romances, poetry, non-fiction, and writings on spiritualism.

He originally set out to be a doctor. From 1876 to 1881, he studied medicine at the University of Edinburgh. In 1882, Doyle established his own medical practice in the community of Southsea, a suburb of Portsmouth, England.

However, his early medical practice was not very successful, so he wrote fiction to supplement his income. His first Sherlock Holmes story, *A Study in Scarlet*, was published in *Beeton's Christmas Annual* for 1887.

Conan Doyle modeled the character of Holmes in part on one of his former

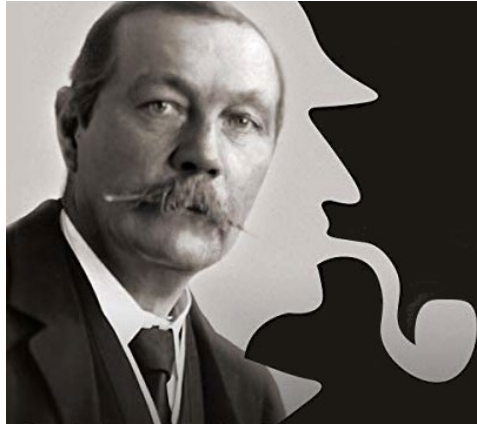
medical school professors, Dr. Joseph Bell. Dr. Bell had the ability to identify a patient's occupation, background, and many other details just by looking at him or her.

The second Sherlock Holmes novel, *The Sign of Four*, followed in 1890. But Holmes really took off when Conan Doyle hit upon the idea of a series of stories about the same character to run each month in a magazine. This had never been done before.

Conan Doyle pitched the idea to a new publication, *The Strand Magazine*, shortly after it began in 1891. The Strand initially published the first twelve Sherlock Holmes, which later appeared in book form as *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* (1892). They were an immediate hit with the public. The Strand ordered more stories – and then wanted still more.

At the end of the second set of stories, published as *The Memoirs of Sherlock Holmes* (1893), Holmes's friend, Dr. John H. Watson, related in

“*The Final Problem*” how the detective appeared to have died at the hands of a criminal mastermind, Professor Moriarty. Holmes came back, however, in perhaps his most



famous adventure of all – *The Hound of the Baskervilles* that ran in The Strand from 1901-1902. Three more books followed. In all, Conan Doyle wrote fifty-six short stories and four novels featuring Sherlock Holmes over a forty-year period ending in 1927. Conan Doyle wrote nearly 200

novels, short stories, poems, historical books and pamphlets, including *The Lost World* (1912) and *The White Company* (1891). He was knighted by Queen Victoria of England

in 1902.

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle died of a heart attack in 1930, at age of 71. He is buried in the churchyard at Minstead in the New Forest, Hampshire, England, beneath a tombstone that reads in part:

**STEEL TRUE
BLADE STRAIGHT
ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE**

**KNIGHT
PATRIOT, PHYSICIAN, & MAN OF LETTERS**

A detailed biography of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle can be found on The Sir Arthur Conan Doyle Literary Society’s website:

<https://www.arthurconandoyle.com/biography.html>

A Letter to Papa

Ryder Luneau, 1st Prize :: 4th – 6th Grade

Dear Papa,

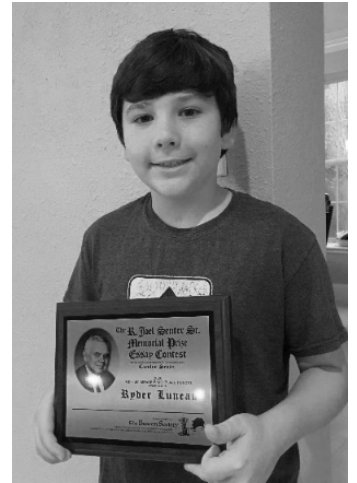
Thanks for telling me about Sherlock Holmes. I just read the “*The Red-Headed League*” this week. If you haven’t read it, I think that you would like it. Most mysteries that I have read start with the crime but this one started during the crime and I didn’t find out what was supposed to happen until the end.

In other mystery stories the book starts with a body but in this book it starts with a man, Jabez Wilson, going to Sherlock Holmes and telling him his problem. Mr. Wilson tells him his name and then tells him that he works at a pawn shop and that he was also a member of The Red Headed League. Mr. Wilson was upset that his job with the Red Headed League had



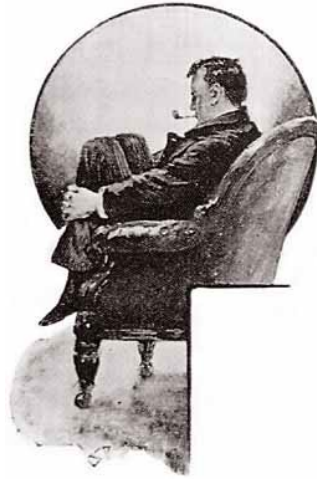
ended mysteriously. Sherlock Holmes was interested in The League and also the pawn shop assistant. Mr. Wilson explained that the business was not doing great, but he has an assistant that works for half price even though he is smart. This assistant also has a weird photography hobby that he will always go into the basement and process the film. Next, Sherlock Holmes goes to Jabez’s house and when his assistant answers he look at his knees and they are dirty. Why would they be dirty? Because he was digging. Then Sherlock Holmes had to figure out why he was digging, and to where. Other stories tell the case from the end to the beginning, but in this story, Sherlock Holmes goes to see for himself and then solves the case before they could even commit the crime. I won’t ruin the end for you.

I think Sherlock Holmes is cool. He observes things that I would not think



of thinking about. He must have been very smart! He knew that fish tattoos were from China, what work Jabez Wilson did based on how his hands looked, and he figured out that Vincent Spaulding was digging a hole to the bank without even asking him a question! All of the criminals having different names was a little confusing, but it all made sense in the end.

I know that you told me that "*The Adventure of*



the Speckled Band" is your favorite Sherlock Holmes story, but I think that you should read "*The Red-Headed League*" again. I also read *The Speckled Band*, and the crime is only told at the end of that story too, but I think the end of the *Red Headed League* was more surprising.

Thank you for sending me the Sherlock Holmes DVD. We will watch it the next time we go on a car trip.

*Love,
Ryder*



Sherlock's Methods for Solving The Red-Headed League

Nora Baker, 2nd Prize :: 4th – 6th Grade

My name is
Nora Baker and I

am going to be talking about the Redheaded league and what are Sherlock Holmes's methods for solving this mystery. Holmes is very smart and figures almost everything out. At first it is a little confusing and might not make sense at all, but when he explains it, it all folds out and makes so much sense.

At first in this story Holmes examined Mr. Jabez Wilson. He found out he writes a lot, is a laborer, owns a bank, and he got a tattoo in China. Holmes always examines the people he meets and figures out something about their life. When Holmes asked Mr. Wilson to describe Spaulding, I found it really confusing because Holmes rarely asked that type of question. Mr. Wilson said Spaulding spent a lot of

time in the basement. After Holmes got a little bit more knowledge of what was going on, he was very suspicious of the Red Headed League. After all Mr. Wilson was doing nothing for hours a day and getting paid a lot of money.

Mr. Wilson showed Holmes the sign that said the Red Headed League was closed, Holmes studied the sign for a little bit. When he went to the bank Mr. Wilson owned and started tapping the sidewalk, I was really confused and I didn't know why



he would do this. Watson did not understand why Holmes was tapping on the sidewalk either. He also told Watson, to meet him at the bank that night with his gun. Later that night, Holmes, the police, Peter Jones and Mr. Wilson arrived at the bank. At that time, Holmes told Watson that

there is a big shipment of gold coming from France and that he thinks there is going to be a big robbery tonight.

After the gold was delivered Peter Jones, the bank manager, Watson, and Holmes stayed in the basement with all of the gold. They sat there in the dark for hours. All of a sudden, they heard two voices and a light appeared through the hole. The voices grew louder and louder, then the floor opened up and there were two criminals just as Holmes expected. John Clay, the

most wanted criminal and Spalding were right in front of them.

Holmes explained that he knew something was up at first, and his method was to listen, observe, and comprehend everything. I think Holmes is a very intelligent and a great detective. Thank you for reading my essay about *The Red Headed League* and on What are Sherlock's Holmes' methods for solving the mystery.



The Copper Beeches: The Macabre Mood

Thomas Hébert, 1st Prize :: 7th – 9th Grade

The mood in “*The Adventure of the Copper Beeches*” (the last work in *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*) is delineated very well. Doyle expresses the eeriness from early on and manages to carry the suspense throughout the duration of the story. He keeps the reader interested, but not overwhelmed, with the perfect mixture of action and inactivity.

The mood at the beginning of the story, when we first make Miss Violet Hunter’s acquaintance, is that of repetition, as if Holmes is bored with a lack of ingenuity in cases. As he says, “Man, or at least criminal man, has lost all enterprise and originality.” He also believes that his “... own little practice... seems to be degenerating into an agency for recovering lost lead pencils and giving advice to young ladies from



boarding-schools.”

But soon Doyle grabs our attention with the strange request for Miss Hunter to cut off her hair, which is a red herring. Even Holmes agrees that the case may be a significant one, as he asserts, “I assure you that your little problem promises to be the most interesting which has come my way for some months.

There is something distinctly novel about some of the features.” Another sinister sign is the high pay rate they are offering her. It certainly raises suspicion. As Holmes pointed out, “Why should they give you [Miss Hunter] £120 a year, when they could

have their pick for £40?” From this point on, we have an uneasy feeling about the Rucastles, which is not lessened by Holmes’s intuition of danger arising in the case. As to what kind of danger, he cannot tell. “I have

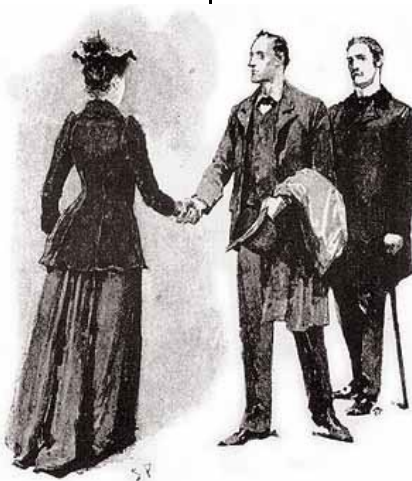


devised seven separate explanations, each of which would cover the facts as far as we know them,” he says.

That uneasy feeling persists when Miss Hunter summons them by telegram in the middle of the account. What has she experienced that made her contact Holmes again? It disturbs the reader. When riding past “... dear old homesteads...”, Watson exclaims, “Are they not fresh and beautiful?”, while Holmes remarks, “I look at them, and the only thought which comes to me is a feeling of their isolation, and of the impunity with which crime may be committed there.” Is this an omen? Could something related to their isolation be of some importance later? Regardless of that query, this is definitively setting the theme for the rest of the story. From then on, the theme shifts from anxiety and preparation to the action and activity of the climactic scene in the Copper Beeches house.

The general theme of “*The Adventure of the Copper Beeches*” is one of

mystery, treachery, and deception. Doyle keeps us in suspense by making certain details less evident, such as the fact that Miss Hunter has a look-alike (Miss Alice Rucastle) that, unbeknownst to her, she’s been hired to impersonate. He throws us off balance with the revelation of this fact. We have automatically assumed that the coil of hair she found in the drawer was indeed her own.



One recurring theme is the ominousness of the Rucastles and their house, the menacing Copper Beeches. We develop a troubling premonition about the Copper Beeches and its residents at the beginning of the tale, when we hear

Miss Hunter’s account of her first meeting with the Rucastles. As Holmes states, “... we are dealing with a very cunning man.” The Rucastles are certainly unusual people, what with their mastiff, locked rooms, and odd dress preferences.

Doyle expresses the story’s mood of cruelty and fear very competently. The way he blends mystery and

sinisterness is nearly flawless. We are left feeling slightly shaken, perhaps a little warier than we were before. However, it is a marvelous, engrossing

work that includes well-incorporated themes, lots of suspense, and is inauspicious but also quite enjoyable for Sherlockians young and old.

“Never trust to general impressions, my boy, but concentrate yourself upon details.”

– Sherlock Holmes

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Violet Hunter in "The Copper Beeches"

Abigail Natale, 2nd Prize :: 7th – 9th Grade

Violet Hunter, a young governess, was vital in this story. She was a very observant, smart, and logical woman. She was key to helping to solve the mystery at the Copper Beeches House.

Violet was searching for a job after her former employer, Colonel Spence Munro moved to America with his children. She was hired by Mr. Jephro Rucastle to be a governess to his family just in time seeing that she had ran out of money in her savings. She was thankful that not only did he offer her a job, but it was also earning much more than her last job.

Violet found that her new job came with some odd requests, such as cutting her hair and wearing a unique electric blue dress. In her dresser

in her room, she noticed a drawer that was locked. After finding a way to unlock it, she found the drawer to have only one thing in it, a coil of hair which was almost the exact same as her own. At last, she also found a wing of the home that was inhabited and kept locked at all times. Knowing that something wasn't right with the request, she decided to involve Sherlock Holmes.

In a letter to Sherlock Holmes, Violet wrote, "Please be at the Black Swan Hotel at Winchester at midday tomorrow. I'm at my wit's end".

Upon bringing all of these oddities to light, Sherlock Holmes decided to accept the case and help Violet.

Violet thought she was going to be doing a simple job of a governess to one child but she was



really in a great scheme to get money for Mr. Rucastle. A great deal of money would come to Mr. Rucastle if his daughter, Alice, did not marry the man who was in love with her. Before Violet's arrival at the house the daughter was made to look unappealing by cutting her hair and then locked in the wing of the home so that she could not communicate with her love. Violet looked similar enough to her that she was hired to dress and look like her so that she would be seen, and the young lover would think she was doing just fine without him and not question her absence and silence.

Throughout her time with the Rucastle's, she remained polite and



reserved, but always was observant as to the oddities surrounding her. Violet faced adventure as she had to sneak around the house to help to save Alice and even had to lock a co-worker in the cellar of the house so that their plan would not be interrupted by anyone else. And when the dog was let loose to attack Violet, Alice and Sherlock as they tried to escape, Violet shot the dog to save them from harm.

Violet's persistence and determination allowed her to save Alice Rucastle in the end and give her the opportunity to live out her happily ever after. Alice would continue on looking to

be a governess leaving the Copper Beeches behind her far in the past.

Mycroft and Sherlock: A Study in Contrasts

Adriana Zayia, 1st Prize :: 10th – 12th Grade

Though Mycroft and Sherlock Holmes are brothers, their observational and analytical abilities differ greatly. Many of these differences are seen throughout *“The Greek Interpreter.”* Sherlock raves about Mycroft’s abilities, but they are not as fantastic as the reader is led to believe. Mycroft makes several errors throughout the course of this story, and Sherlock comes to his rescue. Mycroft neglects to consider the practical approach to solving problems, makes errors in judgment, and possesses powers of deduction inferior to those of Sherlock.

Mycroft neglects to consider the practical approach to solving cases.

According to Sherlock, Mycroft “... was absolutely incapable of working out the practical points which must be gone into before a case can be laid before a judge or jury.” Although

Sherlock claims that Mycroft’s solutions to the cases which Sherlock brings to him always prove to be correct, Mycroft’s interest in these cases is primarily academic and not rooted in practicality. Mycroft leaves the details to Sherlock and doesn’t trouble himself with proving or disproving his own theories. “If the art of the detective began and ended in reasoning from an arm-chair, my brother would be the greatest criminal agent that ever lived.” The contrast between Sherlock’s practicality and Mycroft’s more academic approach is evident throughout *“The Greek Interpreter.”* A particularly clear example is when

Sherlock finds a way into The Myrtles by forcing back the catch of a window — an action that ends up saving Mr. Melas who was only moments away from death.

Mycroft shows a tendency to make errors in judgment



and does not think through the consequences of his actions. When Mycroft hears Mr. Melas's story, his first response is to put an advertisement in the daily papers asking for any information on Paul Kratides. He does this without taking into consideration that Mr. Melas was told not to tell anyone about his experience and that the advertisement would let Latimer know that Mr. Melas had sought help. Sherlock, recognizing Mycroft's error, immediately rectifies it by warning Mr. Melas to be on his guard because Mycroft's advertisement would lead the kidnapers to him. Sherlock perceptively observes that "...they must know through these advertisements that you [Mr. Melas] have betrayed them." Another example of Mycroft's erroneous judgment is when he receives an answer to his advertisement and suggests to Sherlock that they should find out what J. Davenport knows about Sophy Kratides. Sherlock immediately corrects him by saying



that the life of Paul Kratides is the more pressing issue. These examples show that Mycroft's intentions are good, but he is prone to mistakes when applying his intelligence to the practical problem of solving a case.

Though Mycroft possesses an excellent faculty of observation, his deductive powers lag behind those of Sherlock. In the beginning of *"The Greek Interpreter,"* Sherlock says, "... he [Mycroft] was my superior in observation and deduction." Sherlock said earlier that he would not exaggerate his brother's abilities

since he places a high value on the truth. However, as Mycroft's younger brother, Sherlock may hold a biased opinion of Mycroft. When Sherlock and Mycroft are observing the two men beneath the window of the Stranger's Room of the Diogenes Club, Mycroft, in a matter of seconds, ascertains many facts about one of the men — including one that Sherlock missed — showing that his powers of observation are indeed superior to Sherlock's. Although his

observational powers are extraordinary, Mycroft appears to be unable to make practical deductions like Sherlock. For example, upon arrival at The Myrtles, Sherlock — not Mycroft — immediately deduces that the men they are looking for are gone based on the tracks he sees in the mud. “Our birds are flown and the nest empty.” In spite of Mycroft’s extraordinary powers of observation, it is ultimately Sherlock’s deductions and decisive actions that save Mr. Melas’s life.

Mycroft possesses an excellent faculty for observation, but he is unable to solve cases with the skill and grace that Sherlock does. He is not willing to put in the effort necessary to work through every aspect of a case and often makes mistakes, forcing Sherlock to come to his rescue. Even

though Sherlock claims to present an unbiased account of Mycroft’s abilities, there is likely a bias because Mycroft is Sherlock’s older brother, whom Sherlock admires and would want to praise highly. Though he claims that Mycroft is excellent at making deductions, Sherlock receives the credit for the majority of the deductions made in “*The Greek Interpreter*.” There is no doubt that Mycroft is highly intelligent, but his powers are not very useful for solving cases.

“*The Greek Interpreter*” leaves the reader to wonder what might have happened if Sherlock and Mycroft worked in tandem as consulting detectives and pooled their abilities. They would certainly have made a formidable team.

"The Greek Interpreter" Essay

Olivia Richard, 2nd Prize (tie) :: 10th – 12th
Grade



When you think of Sherlock Holmes, which stories come to mind? *A Scandal in Bohemia*? *The Adventure of the Speckled Band*? *The Five Orange Pips*? Or perhaps *The Greek Interpreter*? Of the four stories previously mentioned, one of them is not like the others. In fact, it stands apart from all of the other Sherlock Holmes stories. If you guessed *The Greek Interpreter*, you would be correct!

Even though it is distinctly different, *The Greek Interpreter* is still very



popular among Sherlock Holmes enthusiasts.

What could be the reason for this? *The Greek Interpreter* does not have an overly dramatic plot, brilliant displays of Sherlock's mental

powers, or even a lengthy investigation. If you think about it,

Sherlock Holmes isn't even the one who solves the mystery! What does *The Greek Interpreter* have that keeps us coming back for more?

In this essay, I will discuss three possible answers.

To start, it isn't every day that we discover a blood relative of Sherlock Holmes! Mycroft is the only member of the Holmes' family that we are introduced to. However, the circumstances surrounding said introduction are quite strange. Most likely, it was not a coincidence that Sherlock's relations came up in casual conversation when Mycroft had a case for Sherlock to solve for him. It would be quite easy for Sherlock to steer the conversation to a place where he could mention his brother. Although Mycroft is not particularly helpful in the investigation of the case, his presence does add another layer of intrigue to the story. We, the

readers, have an opportunity to glimpse for the first time these two great minds working together, and imagine what it would be like if they joined forces more often.

We discover the existence of Sherlock's brother at the same time as Watson, and the feelings of slight betrayal are mutual. While Watson does not seem to notice, it is obvious that Sherlock has had many previous interactions with his brother behind Watson's back.

Mycroft and Sherlock seem to be quite comfortable in each other's presence, and there is none of the usual "catching up" that often occurs when two people have not seen each other for a period of time. So why would

Sherlock keep secret the existence of his brother from his best friend for so long? That is a question only Sherlock Holmes himself can answer.

Secondly, many characters come and go throughout the Sherlock Holmes Canon. Most of them come to Sherlock Holmes hoping that he will help them recover a stolen item or

solve a murder. Mr. Melas, however, did not come directly to Sherlock Holmes. He first told his tale to Mycroft, who, in turn, directed him to Sherlock Holmes. Typically, while a client is narrating their tale to Sherlock Holmes, he interrupts them to ask a question or clarify a detail. Interestingly enough, Mr. Melas is allowed to tell his lengthy story to Sherlock Holmes without a single interruption. This minor detail belies the fact that Mr. Melas possesses a

brain similar to Sherlock Holmes. The ability to tell a story clearly and concisely is a rare skill, especially when you are telling it to The World's Greatest Consulting Detective.

Although Mr. Melas came to Mycroft for

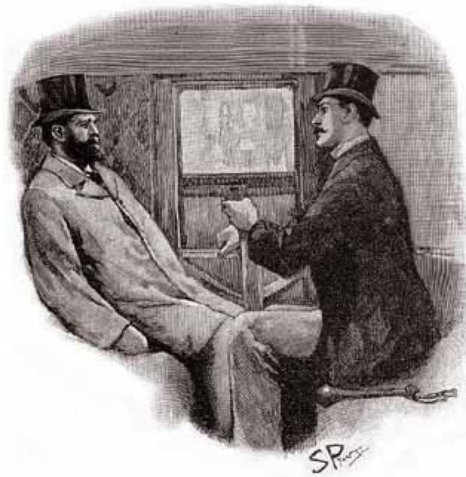
help, he solved the case himself. He recognized the clues, slyly created a method of gathering information right under the villains' nose, and cracked the case. Unfortunately, he was imprisoned and gassed before he could escape and alert the authorities.



Therefore, we can conclude that to solve a mystery, you do not need impressive mental powers, uncanny observational skills, or even a genius brother. The spirit of Sherlock Holmes is in all of us; he needs only to be awakened.

Lastly, for our first time seeing Sherlock Holmes and Mycroft work together, the results are not particularly spectacular.

Typically, Sherlock Holmes solves mysteries very tenaciously, usually almost breaking the law. (And sometimes succeeding in doing so.) It is quite apparent that Mycroft doesn't use the same method. He attempts to solve the mystery by exerting the least amount of energy possible, putting two men's lives in jeopardy while doing so. After hearing Mr. Melas' story, the only missing piece of information was the location of the house where the two victims were imprisoned. Mycroft's method of discovering this important tidbit of information was not exactly ingenious.



He simply posted an advertisement in a newspaper, inquiring if anyone knew the whereabouts of Paul Kratides or his sister Sophy X., the Greek prisoner whom Mr. Melas had glimpsed. This advertisement, while

allowing a certain Mr. J. Davenport to inform them of the whereabouts of the prisoners, left Mr. Melas vulnerable, for it alerted the kidnappers to the fact that Mr. Melas had betrayed them. Because the appropriate

measures were not taken to protect Mr. Melas, he was, of course, kidnapped again, but this time Sherlock and Mycroft could simply go to the address provided to them by Mr. J. Davenport to find them. Unfortunately, by the time they got there, the kidnappers had skipped out, taking Sophy X. with them. Mr. Melas and Paul Kratides were found in a closed room that was being filled with poisonous smoke. Dr. Watson saved Mr. Melas but was unable to revive Paul Kratides, who died from smoke inhalation.

All of this unpleasantness could have been easily avoided. Mycroft should have alerted the police and had a man tailing Mr. Melas at all times, so that when he was kidnapped for the second time, the carriage could be followed, leading them to the prisoners before the kidnapers left with Sophy X. after attempting to kill Mr. Melas and Paul Kratides.

Although the mystery was not solved most efficiently, the story of *The Greek Interpreter* does serve an important purpose. The absence of a strong plot allows us to focus primarily on the characterization of Sherlock Holmes and his brother. After all, you can learn a lot about a person by getting to know his family.

We analyzed three elements that make *The Greek Interpreter* such a unique story; the introduction of Mycroft Holmes, the use of Mr. Melas as an example for Sherlock's spirit in an average person, and the precious insight into Sherlock's character. The shock of realizing that Sherlock Holmes has a brother is a memorable event. Using Mr. Melas as a metaphor for the everyday person gives us the confidence that there is a little Sherlock spirit inside all of us. And lastly, the absence of a strong plot allows the reader to focus on the relationship between Sherlock and Mycroft, and what can be revealed about Sherlock through analysis of him and his brother. Altogether, these elements create a winning recipe for an unusual, but captivating addition to the Sherlock Holmes Canon.

An Essay on Nativism vs. Empiricism

Eleanor Hébert (as told by John H. Watson, M.D.),
2nd Prize (tie) :: 10th – 12th Grade



Sherlock Holmes is no doubt well known as an extremely clever detective. His reputation precedes him as one of the world's most adept crime-solving sleuths, but many are surprised to learn that he has an older brother, Mycroft, who is just as logical, if not more so, in his deductions, and to put it in Sherlock's words, "...superior in observation and deduction..." What is the origin of these two brothers? What similarities do they share and how do they differ from one another? How much of their amazing abilities of observation and reasoning can be attributed to their childhoods and experiences and how much can be ascribed as being hereditary?

Sherlock describes his ancestors as "...country squires, who appear to

have led much the same life as is natural to their class..." From a medical point of view, one can make the case that Sherlock's abilities were almost completely acquired through his own quest for knowledge, which seems a rational explanation. How else could he have attained his abilities, given his humble family history? Sherlock, on the other



hand, makes the case that his skills are hereditary and "in his veins." He theorizes that they "...may have come with my grandmother, who was the sister of Vernet, the French artist. Art in the blood is liable to take the strangest forms." He bases his claim on

the fact that his older brother Mycroft, in his words, "possesses them [abilities of deduction] in a larger degree than I do..." Is what he postulates true? Are one's abilities

determined by ancestry alone, or are capabilities due to early training, instruction, experience, etc.?

This debate is one that has been going on for centuries, its origin most likely ancient Greece.

Plato, the famous Athenian philosopher, believed, like Sherlock, that our traits and tendencies are hereditary. Known as “nativism”, it is the theory that one’s

personality, in other words, one’s temperament, is solely a result of inherited genes; it is natural and instinctive. Alternatively, Aristotle’s speculation is termed “empiricism.” He argued that one’s intelligence and abilities are not predetermined but are obtained over one’s lifetime, and influenced by factors like upbringing, education, and exposure.

Both theories provide answers to our question. According to nativism, their talents are the result of genetic inheritance; presumably their ancestors had similar abilities. Contrarily, in agreement with empiricism, Mycroft and Sherlock both procured their skills over time.

Therefore, we assume they had similar experiences and most likely similar education, allowing them to develop and discover their facilities.



As is Sherlock’s approach, all things should be carefully examined. Each of these philosophies, when given closer investigation, can seem plausible in its own right, yet how can one determine which is more precise?

Following Sherlock’s method, perhaps the answer lies in analysis of Holmes’ synonymy to his brother Mycroft and the diversity between the two.

Arguably their most defining commonality is their incredible facilities for deduction, logic, and reasoning. While it may appear that Sherlock acquired his skills through systematic training, when compared with the fact that Mycroft exercises them as well, and to a greater degree, the question arises: What is the common link which Mycroft and Sherlock both exhibit?

Also among their resemblances is their preference for silent and

reclusive activities, like reading. In other words, they both possess extremely introverted personalities. This becomes clear through the fact that socializing or carrying out detective work of any kind expends a considerable amount of energy from each. Sherlock, as one easily recognizes, despises every part of society, and Mycroft has a corresponding predilection. One distinction between the Holmes brothers is their motivation and drive. While Sherlock is a man of determination, Mycroft is the complete contrary. When Sherlock is caught up in a case, he is compulsive and passionate, driven by that relentless vitality and his ambition to solve the problem. Mycroft is both apathetic and inattentive, and it may be that Sherlock puts it best, "If the art of the detective began and ended in reasoning from an arm-chair, my brother would be the greatest criminal agent that ever lived. But he has no ambition and no energy. He will not even go out of his way to verify his own solution, and would rather be considered wrong than take the trouble to prove himself right...What is to me a means of livelihood is to him the merest hobby of a dilettante."

Another major discrepancy between the two is perhaps the most thought-provoking. In light of the fact that they both possess crime-solving capabilities, their morals and strictures, when it comes to their methods, differ significantly. Although Sherlock is often described as "cold" and "uncaring", at least when it comes to love, compared to Mycroft he is much more concerned about the well-being, and even survival, of his clients than his older brother is. While Mycroft is preoccupied with solving the crime connected to Mr. Kratides, Sherlock is already thinking about the consequences of neglecting to prevent the man from danger and urges his brother to move faster: "My dear Mycroft, the brother's life is more valuable than the sister's story...We know that a man is being done to death, and every hour may be vital."

Sherlock and Mycroft are similar and different from one another. They are both extremely talented but differ in their morals and ambition. As to the question of nativism vs. empiricism, one could argue either case. Is Sherlock correct, that he and Mycroft are naturally inclined to have attention to detail and make logical deductions, or is it more likely that

these gifts were something they developed? Or, as a third possibility, could it be conceivable that they are a result of both, that these abilities come somewhat naturally to them, yet were aided by various factors in their lives and experiences,

accounting for the differences in their personalities and ways? Ultimately, the old moral from the fable *The Country Mouse and the City Mouse*, “Each to his own,” might sum up the relationship of the Holmes brothers best.

Works Cited

- Doyle, Conan Arthur “*The Complete Sherlock Holmes: Volume I, The Greek Interpreter*”, 1996. Print.

"The Greek Interpreter"

Emma Bezek, 3rd Prize :: 10th – 12th Grade



"If the art of the detective began and ended in reasoning from an armchair, my brother would be the greatest criminal agent that ever lived. But he has no ambition and no energy. He will not even go out of his way to verify his own solutions and would rather be considered wrong than take the trouble to prove himself right. Again and again I have taken a problem to him, and have received an explanation which has afterwards proved to be the correct one. And yet he was absolutely incapable of working out the practical points which must be gone into before a case could be laid before a judge or jury." [1]

These were the words of Sherlock Holmes concerning his brother Mycroft. In "The Greek Interpreter" it was discovered that not only did Sherlock have a brother, but his brother possessed the powers of observation and deduction in greater quantities than Sherlock himself. The curiosity that a man of such intelligence should be widely hidden



and unknown is a question that naturally enters the reader's mind and is voiced by the chronicler of the adventure, the fictitious John Watson. The reason for this covert behavior on Mycroft's part was explained by Sherlock in so many words: Mycroft simply lacked the desire to put energy or effort into his theories and deductions to carry them to fruition.

Though Sherlock's powers of intuition did not equal those of his brother's; his will, effort, and intent of solving the mystery was what gave him his success. This point leads to the main

idea of this essay: by observing Mycroft's behavior in the story, his lackadaisical approach to life, what makes a person truly successful? Is it the skill they possess or the will they have to engage in the hard work necessary to see results? In the beginning of the story, there was a conversation between Sherlock

and Mycroft about a certain “Manor House Case” that Sherlock had solved. Mycroft had known who the culprit was from the very beginning (a Mr. Adams) but Sherlock was the one who proved him right. Mycroft’s strength and abilities were hindered in large quantities by a special weakness that he possessed. In the story he had an intriguing aversion to society and especially hard or strenuous labor. Based on the fact that he was able to frequent a gentleman’s club (the Diogenes club in Pall Mall) showed that he had wealth enough to support himself and so the gifts and talents which he had been given, were viewed as nothing more than the mere hobby of an uncommitted amateur. As Sherlock commented early in the story, Mycroft preferred to be considered wrong in his hypothesis and judgements then to

put any industry into proving himself to have solved for the truth. This lack of motivation not only made him out to be uninterested in the rest of society, but it also hindered perhaps greater and far more meaningful success. It is one thing to have tried with the most diligence a human being can possess and still not be able to come to a solution or triumph over an obstacle. It is another to have

never tried at all and failure be the result; regardless of whether one possessed the abilities or favorable qualities. The result of an enterprise is measured from the very beginning. To have never begun is to have forfeited the opportunity to finish, notwithstanding the outcome of one’s efforts.

Despite Mycroft’s apparent lack of motivation and unsociable tendencies, something about the adventure that Mr. Melas his neighbor had brought to his attention, intrigued the older Holmes brother enough to become involved in its solution. There are at least three possible reasons for this singular behavior: perhaps there was a loyalty to his brother Sherlock and neighbor Mr. Melas that

ran deeper and overcame his inveterate sluggishness. A second reason (and the most likely) was that the adventure and intrigue of this case fascinated Mycroft to the point of him joining in on the hunt for the hidden Kratidies siblings and later, his missing neighbor.

Perhaps the last reason was that though he was inclined to a sedentary lifestyle, there was no evidence in the



story that he was an unfeeling or unkind person. When there were lives at stake, he was not going to let them suffer without any attempt to help. There is something placed within the human heart that seeks to uncover, to bring to light, to make right, and to resolve. At the end of the day any person whose heart is still soft and feeling is going to come to the aid of another human being no matter what kind of work ethic they possess.

In everyday examples this is seen, no matter how great or small: whether it is strangers forming human chains to rescue swimmers pulled out to sea by the rip tide [2], or caring children raising enough money for a well in a less fortunate country. At the end of the story, whatever the reason, Mycroft made the right decision and his “redemption” so to speak leaves a

pleasant memory of himself in a reader’s mind instead of one of disgust.

Success is measured solely by endeavor. A person succeeds only to the extent in which they try. While Mycroft may have had all the answers to perplexing cases and intriguing mysteries, his lack of concern nullified his great skill. Vince Lombardi, a head coach of the Green Bay Packers, [3] was once quoted for saying, “The difference between a successful person and others is not a lack of strength, nor a lack of knowledge, but rather a lack of desire.” [4] With that said let those who may read this remember, the exceptional and the unfit alike, that it is one thing to be able to see the finish line but it is another matter entirely to actually reach it.

Sources Used:

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