

Sherlock Holmes

Key points

Gifted, intelligent, usually unemotional, rational, can be arrogant and cold, unromantic obsessive, relies on the “science of deduction”.

Context – early version of the fictional detective. Scientific method over hunches and emotions. Can link to Dr Bell, his real life inspiration, and the recent publication of Darwin, which argued for science over faith.

Character development – no significant character change. Structurally, the book opens and closes with Holmes taking cocaine because he is frustrated without a case. He springs to life when the case arrives.

Evidence

Start

Chapter 1

Holmes' obsessive personality and extraordinary intelligence are demonstrated.

“I abhor the dull routine of existence.” Abhor – forceful verb, routine (noun) suggests the pointlessness/ futility of everyday life. Shows Holmes' irritation, frustration and depression when his mind is not engaged with a case.

“data” – scientific diction used to highlight his logical methods

“I never guess” bold declaration highlighting his distaste for emotion and guesswork .

Middle

Chapter 6

Holmes is investigating the murder scene.

“Just sit in the corner there.” Imperative to Watson while he investigates.

Demonstrates the imbalance of their partnership, Holmes' arrogance and obsessive attention to detail.

“like a bloodhound” – simile showing genius and focus

“My dear Watson” adjective “dear” – patronising, speaking like a parent to a child. Ironic as Holmes does, in fact, use some of Watson's ideas (for example, advertising in a newspaper in Chapter 9).

Chapter 8

Holmes plays the violin to lull Watson so sleep.

“he began to play some low, dreamy, melodious air” group of three adjectives show Holmes' creativity and sensitivity at this moment. Example of tenderness between Holmes and Watson. Shows closeness, not always harsh/dismissive.

End

Chapter 12

Holmes is unimpressed with Watson's engagement to Mary Morstan.

“whatever is emotional is opposed to that true cold reason which I place above all things” phrase above all things demonstrates his obsessive, cold, unromantic approach. Start contrast to Watson's romance and passion. Link to duality of man.

“And he stretched his long white hand up for it.” Novella ends with Holmes moving back to cocaine because the case is finished. Verb “stretched” and adjectives “long” and “white” show how much Holmes has faded/lessened now the case has gone. Structural point – symmetry of opening and ending, highlighting how desperately Holmes needs cases. Makes him harder to sympathise with, less human in some ways.

Watson

Key points

The narrator – a human, warm, humble, emotional character who contrasts Holmes. Does not understand the complexities of the case as quickly or thoroughly as his partner. Also considers himself inferior to Holmes and admires him but is sometimes concerned about him or upset by him.

Sub-plot – Watson's meeting, admiration for and eventually marriage proposal to Mary Morstan.

Character development

Main development is the romantic sub-plot. Watson moves from admiring Mary to asking for her hand in marriage. Seems slightly more confident/secure at the end of the text.

Evidence

Start

Chapter 1

"you have an extraordinary genius for minutiae" – adjective extraordinary demonstrates Watson's admiration for Holmes' talents and methods.

Chapter 2

"What a very attractive woman!" exclamation mark at the end of this dialogue/declaration demonstrates his passion and excitement. Watson is besotted with Mary Morstan immediately, demonstrating his romantic, emotional nature.

Middle

Chapter 5 – outside Pondicherry Lodge

"we stood hand in hand, like two children" simile – demonstrates Watson and Mary Morstan's closeness, innocence and vulnerability.

Chapter 6

At the murder scene

"Just sit in the corner there." Holmes' Imperative to Watson while he investigates. Demonstrates the imbalance of their partnership, Holmes' arrogance and obsessive attention to detail.

End

Chapter 11

Final meeting with Mary, ending in agreeing to marry.

"Thank God!" Short sentence shows Watson is relieved that the treasure is gone.

Highlights his discomfort with the idea of her having status, but also uses the treasure as a motif/symbol to represent unhappiness and shattered dreams.

"Whoever had lost a treasure, I knew that night that I had gained one." Watson ecstatic to replace the real/tainted/unlucky treasure with his (metaphorical) treasure Mary.

Pronoun "Whoever" used to replace Mary to anonymise her loss and soften the impression of selfishness.

Mary Morstan

Key points

The main female character, Mary introduces the case to Holmes in Chapter 2. She is sensible, honest and methodical. Watson is instantly attracted to her and she reciprocates this. By modern standards, their relationship seems somewhat repressed, but to Victorians it may have appeared to be a rapid romance. Mary Morstan represents many 19th century views of women – she is vulnerable and tearful, and not involved in much of the action, risk or investigation. 21st century readers will often find her represent a sexist, backward view of women – The Angel in The House.

Character development

Her main development centres around the treasure and the romantic sub-plot with Watson. When Watson believes she may be wealthy, she slips out of his reach. When the treasure is lost in Chapter 11, their romance can flower.

Evidence

Start

Chapter 2

First impression as she arrives at the room in Baker Street.

“small” “dainty” “spiritual” “choking sob” – unassuming adjectives which suggest honesty and vulnerability. Tie in with the Victorian ideal woman, who would be angelic and meek. “he might be of... service to me” modal verb “might” demonstrates Mary’s gentle, unassuming tone but also her immediate interest in Watson.

Middle

Chapter 5 – outside Pondicherry Lodge

“we stood hand in hand, like two children” simile – demonstrates Watson and Mary Morstan’s closeness, innocence and vulnerability.

“Miss Morstan had remained behind with the frightened housekeeper” preposition “behind” shows the status/role of women in this text. They do not investigate, take risks, carry weapons.

End

Chapter 11

After finding out that she is not going to be wealthy after all.

“The treasure is lost,” said Miss Morstan, calmly.” Adverb calmly shows that she accepts this moment... could be seen as romantic but also could be seen as weak/meek.

“I say, 'Thank God,' too,” she whispered” repeating Watson’s dialogue.. verb “whispered” reinforces her gentle, meek personality. Romantic to 19th century reader, perhaps less so to a modern reader.

Thaddeus Sholto

Key points

The son of Major Sholto, Thaddeus has been sending pearls to Mary Morstan anonymously to compensate her for her father's share in the treasure. A generous, eccentric, comic character: a pretentious hypochondriac. Generally harmless but is arrested for his brother Bartholemew's murder until Holmes proves his innocence. Watson, Holmes and Mary Morstan recognise his generosity and innocence, care about him and want him to be released.

Character development

Does not develop as such. Is arrested, which makes him even more panicky. His role in the novella fades after the middle of the book as the narrative focus shifts onto Jonathan Small.

Evidence

Start

Chapter 4

Initial description of Thaddeus in his absurdly opulent room (in an unglamorous part of London).

"Two great tiger skins"

"An oasis of art in the howling desert of South London" – metaphor shows Thaddeus' vanity – link to context – Conan Doyle is mocking the aesthete, who focused on appearance and beauty. Contrast to Holmes' direct, scientific, unfussy philosophy.

"weak, watery blue eyes" alliteration shows him to be childlike, vulnerable

Middle

Chapter 5

Outside Pondicherry Lodge

"She cannot wait on the public road at this hour." The contraction "cannot" shows that he is caring towards Mary. Also represents the condescending Victorian attitude to women.

Inside the house

"expression of a terrified child" – adjective "terrified" again highlights his weakness, lack of masculinity, contrasts with the way Holmes is presented.

Later

Chapter 9

When Watson learns that Thaddeus has been released.

"Friend Sholto is safe, at any rate". Phrase "friend Sholto" highlights Watson's care for Thaddeus and the importance of justice.

Jonathan Small



Key points

A troubled man (“rover”) who left England for a better life in India but encountered a crocodile attack and the Indian Mutiny in 1857 before meeting the Four and becoming embroiled in murder and the theft of the great Agra treasure before becoming imprisoned on the Andaman Islands. Spends the narrative seeking treasure and revenge.

Not simply a villain – more complex than that.

Negatives - criminal, violent, cunning/calculating, obsessive, frightening

Positives – strangely honest and loyal, relentlessly focused, close to Tonga, a victim of injustice, poor judgment and bad luck.

Structure / character development:

Jonathan Small’s role in the novella grows as the narrative develops. He is a mysterious unknown figure in the early chapters, developing into the main focus of Holmes’ investigation in the middle of the text before taking over the narrative in the final chapter to share his life story.

Evidence

Start

“wooden legged man” – regular description in early stages of the text, from Thaddeus Sholto’s monologue in Chapter 4 onwards. Treasure Island was hugely popular and had been published a few years earlier. Conan Doyle is channeling the idea of piracy and adventure in the description of Small. Like Long John Silver, he is a complex character, not simply a villain.

“Keep him out! For Christ’s sake keep him out!” Major Sholto’s imperatives after seeing Small at the window (“wild cruel eyes”, “wild fierce face” – adjectives, repetition, alliteration).

Middle

“our wooden legged friend” Holmes is not afraid of Small, describes him this way when investigating the murder scene in Chapter 6 – irony, humour.

“ugly face” “outlandish talk” – Mrs Smith describing Small to Holmes in Chapter 8.

Unflattering adjectives (physical ugliness = spiritual/character ugliness, also his is ‘other’, exotic/different/non conformist but this is seen as an undesirable quality

Later

The whole of Chapter 12 is dedicated to Small.

“wild whirl of words” alliteration, shows his rage and sense of injustice.

“He was stanch and true, was little Tonga” – closeness, trust, beginning to hint at tolerance of different cultures, but this tolerance is often undermined.

“swarming with fanatics and fierce devil-worshippers of all sorts” – city of Agra – summarises the dark, unpredictable, corrupting nature of India (according to the world view of this novella). Alliteration, dehumanising the Indians, again exotic description but intended to inspire fear rather than admiration.

“A hundred times I have killed him in my sleep.” – discussing Major Sholto, show his obsession with the treasure and Sholto’s betrayal.

Athelney Jones



Key points

A detective / policeman. He is Holmes' rival, wanting to solve the mystery for himself. Jones is presented as a ridiculous and incompetent investigator who trusts emotion over reason and repeatedly contradicts himself. He could be a symbol for the 19th century police force, which had recently failed to solve the notorious Jack the Ripper murders in London.

Structure / character development

Initially absurd and unsympathetic in Chapter 6, Jones does become more accepting/appreciative of Holmes in the later stages of the book and eventually teams up with Holmes and Watson in Chapters 10 to 12 to track down Small and Tonga.

Evidence

(Athelney Jones does not feature until Chapter 6, when Bartholemew Sholto's body is discovered at Pondicherry Lodge).

Middle – initial description in Chapter 6 (range of adjectives)

“red-faced, burly, plethoric” – physically unfit, suggests a lack of mental sharpness

“very small twinkling eyes” – like a child or animal... naïve, unintelligent, gullible, lacks perceptive skills. All start contrasts with Holmes.

“Bad business! Bad business!” repetition of meaningless exclamation shows his sluggish pace of thought and reliance on emotion over logic

Chapter 8 – while reading the newspaper report of Athelney Jones' incorrect arrests

“The energetic Jones” “his powers of minute observation” “Isn't it gorgeous!” irony, humour

Chapter 9

“Your friend Mr Sherlock Holmes is a wonderful man, sir” respectful declaration shows a shift in perspective and increasing respect for Holmes.

Chapter 12

“sternly” “angrily” adverbs show his lack of tolerance for Small, contrasted with Holmes who has offered him a cigar and whisky to encourage him to speak.

Tonga

Key points

Not treated as a 'character' as such by the narrative's racist worldview. Tonga, the Andaman Islander, is given no dialogue, no development and no respect. Through Watson's eyes, this exotic, dangerous creature is seen almost as a dangerous animal, a chilling addition to an already outlandish case.

When you write about Tonga

- Discuss him as a symbol for India / otherness / foreignness. Descriptions of Tonga encapsulate the colonialism, imperialist world view.
- Comment on Tonga's possessions, weapons, tools.
- Mention the inhumanity of his description – how offensive it is to modern readers
- Comment on his relationship with Jonathan Small – the beginnings of tolerance and acceptance (but these are ideas are not embedded or developed).

Structure / development

His existence is gradually introduced. At the crime scene, Holmes and Watson become aware of an accomplice. Their research and investigation eventually lead them to Tonga, who briefly appears in Chapter 11 before being shot. This is a stark contrast to (white, European) Jonathan Small, who is given a cigar and whisky.

Evidence

Chapter 6

"a child has done this horrid thing" – Watson misinterprets the small footprints – shows Holmes' brilliance and adds to the macabre, confusing nature of the crime scene

Chapter 7 – describing the pouch of darts outside Pondicherry Lodge

"They are hellish things" "I would rather face a Martini bullet, myself" Holmes' infernal description of foreignness contrasted with a patriotic reference to the rifles used by the British.

Chapter 8 – researching the case

"A savage!" "naturally hideous.. misshapen heads" –shows otherness as a negative, dehumanising description, reinforcing the British sense of superiority.

Chapter 10 – meeting and killing Tonga

"a dark mass which looked like a Newfoundland dog" – simile which again dehumanises Tonga

"Never have I seen features so deeply marked with bestiality and cruelty" adverb and abstract nouns

Chapter 12 – Small on Tonga

"a fine boatman" "stanch and true" "exhibiting poor Tonga at fairs... as the black cannibal" signs of tolerance and respect but also manipulation.