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## Cerebral Analysis of Sherlock Holmes in Detection

A. Kayalvizhi, M.A., M.Phil., Ph.D. Scholar



**Sherlock Holmes**

### Abstract

This article analyses the prominent methods of detection practised by Sherlock Holmes, the legendary detective. Though his profession demands him his physical exertion

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12 : 4 April 2012

A. Kayalvizhi, M.A., M.Phil., Ph.D. Scholar

Cerebral Analysis of Sherlock Holmes in Detection

too, it is only his mental effort which plays the key role in the detection of truth. Hence the detective techniques of Holmes, which involve his brain, are taken into study.

## **Introduction**

The famous fictional detective Sherlock Holmes, the creation of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, is a brain-dependent person, and as a sleuth, he uses his brilliant brain to unravel the mysteries involved in his cases. Since he is single-minded in detection of truth, he knows how to use his brain to accomplish it. His brain, the fundamental instrument for finding out the criminals, also paves the way for him to make incredible deductions. His chief supremacy lies in the way he makes use of his intelligence to the core and only that eminent quality distinguishes him from the other investigators. It is indispensable for his brain to work continuously, that he says, "My mind is like a racing engine, tearing itself to pieces because it is not connected up with the work for which it was built" (Doyle, Short Stories 510). To Sherlock Holmes, the intellectual warrior, his brain serves as the primary weapon to combat with the criminals. Since it is multi-functional, it can carry out any mission the concerned case demands and provide a positive result, and the supreme powers among them are discussed here.

## **Observation**

Sherlock Holmes's primary method of collecting the facts was vigilant observation. Observation is the fundamental factor as far as detection is concerned, and Sherlock Holmes is a master in it, since his deductions are based only on observation. The outwardly trivial aspects of a crime scene and the minutiae of the case are vital importance for Holmes. He draws large inferences from the small clues he gathers by his acute observation. Observation for him is "second nature" (Doyle, Study 22). To quote Starrett:

Observation was a close and important second, but it was not always necessary for Holmes to *see* to understand. Pipe in mouth, with eyes half closed or shut, he could listen to a client's tale of mysterious horror and know the answer to the problem before the man had finished speaking. Whatever he might reveal to Watson, in advance of the ultimate revelation, reading the doctor's account of a recital in Baker Street one is always certain that Holmes, himself, is hot on the track. (19)

Language in India [www.languageinindia.com](http://www.languageinindia.com)

12 : 4 April 2012

A. Kayalvizhi, M.A., M.Phil., Ph.D. Scholar

Cerebral Analysis of Sherlock Holmes in Detection

Holmes could tell the personal details of anyone, just like a magician, within a few minutes of observation. He often baffles his clients by deducing some facts about them by his observation, that he states, “I have found it wise to impress clients with a sense of power ...” (640). In *The Red-Headed League*, he remarks about the client, “Beyond the obvious facts that he has at some time done manual labour, that he takes snuff, that he is a Freemason, that he has been in China, and that he has done a considerable amount of writing lately, I can deduce nothing else” (17). In *A Case of Identity*, Sherlock Holmes could tell immediately after his client’s arrival, that she is short-sighted and doing typewriting (32), and similarly in “*The Adventure of the Speckled Band*, his observation leads him to deduce that his client has come by train, had a good drive in a dog-cart, along heavy roads, before she reached the station (Doyle, Short Stories 98-99). Booth comments, “When he assessed a man’s occupation and immediate history just by observing him, the readers were captivated. This was for them, a unique experience. Sherlock Holmes seemed to have almost magical powers and yet they were always readily understood when the explanation came” (158). Holmes is good enough to explain Watson later how he derives the truth by observation, though it takes away the charm of his deduction.

According to his friend Watson, Sherlock Holmes is “the most perfect reasoning and observing machine that the world has seen” (1), and often he has been the subject to Holmes’s observations and deductions which offers him habitual surprises. Few moments of gazing at Watson enables Holmes to deduce that Watson, the physician, returned to practice, he got wet lately, and he has a most clumsy and careless servant girl(2). Sherlock Holmes explains the difference between seeing and observing to Watson:

“you have frequently seen the steps which lead up from the hall to this room.”

“Frequently.”

“How often?”

“Well, some hundreds of times.”

“Then how many are there?”

“How many? I don’t know.”

“Quite so! You have not observed. And yet you have seen. That is just my point. Now, I know that there are seventeen steps, because I have both seen and observed.”(Doyle, Short Stories 2-3)

Holmes’s observation goes on to the extent of entering the mind of Watson and reading his thoughts. By observing mere features of Watson, Holmes follows his train of thoughts and responds to it at a juncture. To the astounded Watson, his reply is, “The features are given to man as the means by which he shall express his emotions, and yours are faithful servants.”(Doyle, Short Stories 263)

Louis Pasteur states about observation, “In the fields of observation, chance favors only the prepared mind.” Hence, Holmes, whose senses are open and observant all the time, becomes more alert and focussed at the scenes of crime. His watchful eyes are not to spare anything out of ordinary and this vigilance, in many cases, directed him in catching the criminals, and *The Reigate Puzzle* is one of such cases. Holmes and Watson visit Col. Hayter, an old friend of Watson, at his country estate for taking rest, after having successfully completed an exhaustive case. Just prior to their visit, the home of Acton, the neighbourhood of Hayter, has been burgled of hodgepodge. Shortly after Holmes’s arrival, the coachman of the Cunninghams, another of Hayter’s neighbours, is murdered. The local police inspector Forrester asks for Holmes’s help in solving the case, and Holmes readily agrees in spite of his illness. A fragment of a note was found clutched in the dead man’s hand. As Miller opines, observation is the key to gathering the facts, upon which are built logical inference and theory. Therefore, Holmes, after observing the fragment in which seven words were written, deduces the facts that it was written by two persons alternatively, one of them is older than the other, the young one is dominant, and the men are blood relatives. All these deductions lead him to conclude that the Cunninghams are the criminals.

In *The Adventure of the Norwood Builder*, a young man named John Hector McFarlane is falsely accused of murdering Jonas Oldacre. Holmes decides to take the case in order to save MacFarlane though the official police are quite sure that he is the murderer. Ousby comments on the attitude of Holmes to defy the police: “Explaining the nature of his profession in *A Study in Scarlet*, he portrays himself as the man to whom officialdom turns when it is baffled, but in practice he is often the man to whom the private citizen turns when suffering from the wrongs and mistakes of officialdom” (167).

Language in India [www.languageinindia.com](http://www.languageinindia.com)

12 : 4 April 2012

A. Kayalvizhi, M.A., M.Phil., Ph.D. Scholar

Cerebral Analysis of Sherlock Holmes in Detection

Despite McFarlane's protestations of innocence, all the evidences are against him, that his stick has been found in Oldacre's room, and a fire was extinguished just outside in which a pile of dry timber burnt to ashes, with the smell of burnt flesh. Scotland Yard detective Lestrade, to assert McFarlane's guilt, shows Holmes, the next day, a bloody fingerprint of McFarlane on the wall. Fortunately, this clue leads Holmes to find that someone is playing a trick, because he examined that part of the wall the day before, and is quite sure that the thumbprint was not there then. He surveys the house consequently, and his acute observation shows him a hidden room where the so-called victim Oldacre is hiding. It turns out that Oldacre, who was the old suitor of McFarlane's mother and rejected by her, schemed to trap McFarlane into the guilt of homicide, in order to take vengeance upon McFarlane's mother.

Sherlock Holmes's observation of trivial things gives him many indications just as the empty wine glasses in *The Adventure of the Abbey Grange*. It is a story about the murder of a man called Sir Eustace Brackenstall, and the description of the incident, given by Lady Brackenstall who was in the crime scene, is that three burglars broke in the house, one of them, after tying her in a chair, bludgeoned Brackenstall to death, and moreover, they drank wine before leaving. Nothing arouses the suspicion of Holmes save the wine glasses. He finds the beeswing in only one glass and arrives to a firm conviction that he says, "That only two glasses were used, and that the dregs of both were poured into a third glass, so as to give the false impression that three people had been here" (Doyle, Short Stories 483). In spite of being a trifle, the clue he gets from his observation plays its part in proving that the narration of the lady is quite fictitious and leads Holmes to investigate the case thoroughly to find the real murderer. How remarks about Holmes's concern for the minutiae: "A clever fellow; a cool, calculating fellow, this Holmes. He could see the clue to a murder in a ball of worsted, and certain conviction in a saucer of milk. The little things we regarded as nothings were all and everything to Holmes" (62).

Observation is not something like having only watchful eyes. It demands all the five senses to be open to gather the available information and Holmes, a great observer, possesses that extraordinary trait. Holmes himself acknowledges: "I have, as my friend Watson may have remarked, an abnormally acute set of senses ..." (647). In *The Adventure of the Three Gables*, his ears are so intent that he catches even the breathing sound of the eavesdropper

while listening to his client. He tells his client, “I have been listening to her for the last five minutes, but did not wish to interrupt your most interesting narrative. Just a little wheezy, Susan, are you not? You breathe too heavily for that kind of work” (Doyle, Short Stories 666). Hence, the powerful observation of Holmes plays a major role in his detective work.

## **Inference**

Inference, which is based on observation, is the second step in detection. After observing the clues, the detective is to extract the meaning from the points observed, and deduce the truth. At this point, a number of possibilities and ideas may arise out of the situation and, to arrive at the solution, Holmes’s method is to list the alternative explanations, and exclude all but one. Holmes’s inferences are phenomenal and proved to be accurate as Starrett remarks: “Deduction, of course, was his principal tool of office, and seldom was he at fault” (19).

Sherlock Holmes picked up the habit of making systematic inferences in his college days. In fact, it was only his college mate’s father, who suggested Holmes, on seeing his precise deduction, to become a detective: “I don’t know how you manage this, Mr. Holmes, but it seems to me that all the detectives of fact and of fancy would be children in your hands. That’s your line of life, sir, and you may take the word of a man who has seen something of the world” (Doyle, Short Stories 216).

True to his words, Sherlock Holmes became the best of all detectives in the world with his extraordinary power of inference. As a roommate of Holmes, Watson gets many opportunities to watch his tremendous power of deduction. From the chalk mark perceived in Watson’s left hand, Holmes is able to infer that Watson does not intend to invest in South African gold fields. Though one could find no obvious relation between them, Holmes is clever enough to connect them by constructing a series of simple inferences. He explains his chain of reasoning to Watson:

1. You had chalk between your left finger and thumb when you returned from the club last night.
2. You put chalk there when you play billiards, to steady the cue.
3. You never play billiards except with Thurston.
4. You told me, four weeks ago, that Thurston had an option on some South African property which would expire in a month, and which he desired you to share with him.
5. Your

Language in India [www.languageinindia.com](http://www.languageinindia.com)

12 : 4 April 2012

A. Kayalvizhi, M.A., M.Phil., Ph.D. Scholar

Cerebral Analysis of Sherlock Holmes in Detection

check book is locked in my drawer, and you have not asked for the key. 6.  
You do not propose to invest your money in this manner. (351)

Holmes's skill in inference is not confined only to the present facts. He is capable of deducing even the past, as he inferred from Watson's slippers that he was ill the previous week (Doyle, Short Stories 203).

Holmes is not the only skilful master of studying the mankind and making inferences. As accepted by Holmes, Mycroft, his brother, is superior to Holmes in these qualities, though he lacks other requirements to become a detective. The exchange between these two observant brothers, regarding a complete stranger, is an incredible reflection:

“An old soldier, I perceive,” said Sherlock.

“And very recently discharged,” remarked the brother.

“Served in India, I see.”

“And a non-commissioned officer.”

“Royal Artillery, I fancy,” said Sherlock.

“And a widower.”

“But with a child.”

“Children, my dear boy, children.” (Doyle, Short Stories 277)

A miracle, it seems, to see them make precise deduction by handling the mankind as material on which they apply their power of observation.

It is not essential for Holmes to see the man in person to study his characteristics, for sometimes the inferences on the individualities of men are made even from their belongings. In *The Adventure of the Blue Carbuncle*, the hat of an unknown man is enough for him to deduce that the man was highly intellectual, wealthy within the last three years but not then, had foresight formerly which declined and his wife ceased to love him (86). Similarly in *The Yellow Face*, from the pipe of a man, he deduces offhandedly that, “The owner is obviously a

muscular man, left-handed, with an excellent set of teeth, careless in his habits, and with no need to practise economy” (Doyle, Short Stories 192).

Holmes used, in some cases, his skill of making inferences about the physical appearances of the murderers from their possessions as in *The Adventure of the Golden Pince-Nez*. In this story, an apparently motiveless murder happens and the dead man is Willoughby Smith, secretary to an old man, Professor Coram. A pair of golden pince-nez is found clutched in the hand of the dead man and Holmes, after examining it, deduces several things about the murderer, that it is a woman of good breeding, attired like a lady, has a thick nose, eyes close together, a puckered forehead, a peering look, and likely rounded shoulders, and she has been to an optician at least twice over the previous few months (Doyle, Short Stories 452).

The knack of Sherlock Holmes in inferring the truth goes further in *The Resident Patient*. When he arrives at the scene of crime, he is informed that Mr. Blessington, the dead man, has committed suicide by hanging himself. But after searching the room, where he spots some cigars, a screwdriver and some screws, he declares that it is a pre-planned murder. Moreover, he sketches out the past incident so minutely by his inference, that three men involved in the homicide, they have a confederate inside the house, and a discussion of some sort was held with Mr. Blessington. Additionally, he is even able to point out the positions of the murderers and Mr. Blessington while conversing (Doyle, Short Stories 273).

Sherlock Holmes excels himself when he infers the truth, not only from his own observation, but also from Watson’s report. In *The Adventure of the Retired Colourman*, an old man named Josiah Amberley approaches Holmes for tracing out his wife who eloped with her lover, for they have taken considerable sum of his money and securities. As Holmes is busy in another case, he sends Watson as a representative to investigate. Amberley shows Watson his strong room, with an iron door and shutter, from where his wife stole his money. The room is freshly painted, and the explanation of Amberley for it is that he was trying to distract himself from his recent trauma. But when Holmes hears about this from Watson, he suspects that the smell of the paint is to mask the smell of something else, and gets to the bottom of the problem. And as he inferred, Amberley painted the room to cover the smell of



gas which was used to choke the lovers to death. Thus the expertise of Holmes in making inference goes beyond the expectations.

### **Logical Reasoning**

Since Holmes is a scientific detective, his detection is the outcome of logical reasoning. He analyses the gathered data rationally, and any conclusion he arrives at is founded on logical basis. A wizard he is, when he pronounces his deduction; but when he explains how he reached the truth, it sounds quite simple. His inference never comes out of guesswork, for he opines, “I never guess. It is a shocking habit – destructive to the logical faculty” (Doyle, Sign 9).

Miller, a physician, acknowledges Sherlock Holmes’s greatness as a logician: “Sherlock Holmes epitomizes the logical thinker and teaches us more about deductive reasoning than any other character, literary or real. As physicians, if we read between the lines of Doyle’s famous stories, we can learn a good deal about the art of medical diagnostics.”

Holmes’s reasoning starts from trivial things and travels through minor inferences to reach the final destination of solution. For instance, from the absurd fact about one red-headed league and its abrupt close, he derives the truth about bank robbery plan in *The Red-Headed League*. Though these two facts stand apart, Holmes makes a chain by his logical reasoning to connect these two ends and gets a favourable result: The prevention of bank robbery. In this story, a red-haired pawnbroker called Mr. Jabez Wilson comes to Holmes with a peculiar problem that he was appointed in an organisation named Red-Headed League to copy out the Encyclopaedia Britannica, he was happily working since he got generous salary for four hours work, but after eight weeks the league was dissolved. Though it sounds funny, Holmes takes the case and enquires about his assistant who brought the advertisement for the job to his attention. Then he learns that Vincent Spaulding, the assistant, has been appointed recently and enjoys taking photographs and often goes down to cellar to develop them.

Holmes figures out that the Red-Headed League was a trick to get Wilson out of his shop. The mention of the cellar suggests him that Spaulding was digging a tunnel which he

confirms by checking his knees cleverly. Since the shop abuts a bank, it is clear to him that the tunnel is to get into the bank. He even infers that Saturday would be the day of robbery, as it gives the burglars two days of time to escape. So Holmes accompanied by his companion Watson, police agent, and bank director, goes down to the basement vault, and ambushes the robbers. Thus the bank burglary is avoided as a result of Holmes's shrewd reasoning.

Reasoning is a significant skill needed for a detective, and Bargainnier emphasises its importance by comparing the detective with the mythological hero:

The detective is the mythological hero who performs miracles, but he does not use magic or superhuman strength to perform them, rather “nothing but commonsense”, which, however, the detective uses to an uncommon, heroic degree,” and he uses it for the same purpose as the mythic “hero uses his magic powers and talismans – the deliverance of the population from a threat”. Perhaps “nothing but commonsense” should be replaced by “logic” or “reasoning,” but in any case, it is *his mind* which enables him to deliver the innocent from suspicion and danger. (13)

Holmes's reasoning ability is as much as that he finds out the solution sometimes just from the account of the client without any further inquiry. In *A Case of Identity*, Miss Mary Sutherland narrates the story to Holmes about her engagement with Hosmer Angel and his disappearance on the day of wedding. After listening to her, Holmes effortlessly reasons out that the only beneficiary of her money, if she remains unmarried, is her stepfather Mr. Windibank, and it is only him who disguised himself as Hosmer Angel to give false hope of marriage to Miss Mary Sutherland, and make her wait in vain for his hands forever by his disappearance. Even if he solves the mystery by his reasoning, he does not depress her by revealing the truth. Roberts observes Holmes's attitude, “The advice he gives her at the conclusion of the interview has reference to the girl's own peace of mind rather than to the problem of the missing bridegroom” (34).

If the above mentioned stepfather plays a trick for keeping the girl single, Dr. Roylott, the villain of *The Adventure of the Speckled Band*, goes to the extent of killing his

stepdaughter in order not to lose her money. Had it not been for the timely help of Sherlock Holmes and his skilful reasoning, Helen Stoner would have met the same fate of her unfortunate sister, Julia, who died in her bedroom. While examining the room, Holmes observes that the bed is fastened to the floor, and a dummy bell-pull hangs down to the bed from the ventilator between Julia's room and Roylott's. His reasoning competency enlightens him that a snake was sent through the ventilator to kill the person who sleeps in the bed, and thus enables him to save an innocent life. Furthermore, he is as brave as to be in proximity of danger and drive back the lethal adder into Roylott's room. Ousby comments on the courage of Holmes: "The chivalric knight is never more knightly nor more chivalric than in his protection of women. On a number of occasions Holmes rescues single women from dangerous situation, and these tales fall into the familiar patterns of sentimental melodrama" (166).

Holmes's tenet of logical reasoning in many cases is, "when you have eliminated all which is impossible, then whatever remains, however improbable, must be the truth" (Doyle, Short Stories 651). He applies this motto in the cases in which there are different possibilities of solution, and *The Adventure of the Blanched Soldier* is one of them. In this story, Mr. James M. Dodd consults Holmes, that his close friend Godfrey Emsworth was covertly put in seclusion in his outhouse by his own father who is covering it up with a lie that Godfrey has gone on a world voyage. Holmes analyses the secret logically with the certainty that the possible reason for the incarceration could be crime, mad or disease. Had it been a crime, Godfrey's father would have sent him abroad, and moreover, there is no unsolved crime in that district as well. So he eliminates the first possibility and moves on to the next one. If Godfrey is mad, he could not have come out of his confinement, and it is not illegal to keep a lunatic in a private place. Therefore he disregards the second possibility, and decides that Godfrey is suffering from some disease which needs segregation. Then he also finds out from further reasoning that the disease is leprosy.

Holmes, with his logical reasoning, even helped the official police at times of need. The Scotland Yard detective Lestrade is on familiar terms with Holmes, and whenever he is perplexed by some mysterious case he would approach Holmes for his advice just as in *The Adventure of the Cardboard Box*. A lady, named Miss Susan Cushing, was sent a packet containing two severed human ears, and she has no idea of what it means or who sent it.

Language in India [www.languageinindia.com](http://www.languageinindia.com)

12 : 4 April 2012

A. Kayalvizhi, M.A., M.Phil., Ph.D. Scholar

Cerebral Analysis of Sherlock Holmes in Detection

Since the motive is unknown, Lestrade seeks the help of Sherlock Holmes. Holmes, while inquiring the lady at her home, sees a portrait of three ladies upon the mantelpiece and he instantly reasons out that the addressee of the packet Miss S. Cushing means Sarah Cushing, the sister of Susan Cushing, whose residence was the same until two months ago. This brilliant reasoning guides him to commence the investigation in different aspect.

Grotesque or weird, some experiences may appear to others. But Holmes could identify the cause for every effect through his reasoning. Even though his clients suspect no criminal basis for their strange experiences, they are eager to find the purpose behind that, and therefore they approach Holmes. The “most incredible and grotesque experience” of Scott Eccles, a respectable man in *The Adventure of Wisteria Lodge*, is that few weeks ago a Spanish young man Garcia made an acquaintance with him, and became very intimate to such an extent that he invited Eccles to stay one night at his home (Doyle, Short Stories 510). Eccles accepted his friendly proposal, and stayed overnight at his home. But when he woke up in the morning, he finds neither Garcia nor his servants there. Shocked, as Eccles was of this experience, he wants to find whether it was a practical joke played upon him or something else. Sherlock Holmes reasons out that the friendship Garcia developed with Eccles was intentional, and the purpose of inviting him to his home was to prove an alibi for he had a criminal enterprise, and calling Eccles amidst his sleep unnecessarily and telling him that the time was one o’clock was to make him believe Garcia was at home until one. His intention was to return home before morning, but unfortunately he met his death at that night.

The questions Holmes asks his clients may seem irrelevant and insignificant to them sometimes. But Holmes never enquires for anything which does not hold any value for the investigation. To substantiate, when Mr. Victor Hatherley, the client in *The Adventure of the Engineer’s Thumb*, is describing his unpleasant experience that a man has taken him from the railway station to a secret place by a horse-drawn carriage, with windows closed, for a journey of nearly twelve miles, Holmes inquires him about the look of the horse before their journey, whether it was fresh or tired-looking. Though the appearance of the horse is beside the point, Holmes with his exceptional reasoning understands from the freshness of the horse, that the secret house is only near the station and the journey of twelve miles was only to deceive Hatherley.

## Imaginative Empathy

The ability to take another's role imaginatively in order to understand his feelings, actions, and thoughts is imaginative empathy. J.K. Rowling, the celebrated author of Harry Potter series, expressed her view in her commencement speech at Harvard University that empathy is a form of imagination, for possessing the ability to feel the hardships of others that one has never experienced is an imaginative act.

A detective should have the power of imagination, for that is where crimes are conceived and where they are solved, as Sherlock Holmes mentions in the film, *The Hound of the Baskervilles*. Holmes owns this extraordinary quality, and as a detective, he exploits his imagination to solve some cases. He puts himself in the place of the concerned person and imagines what he would do in such circumstances. This imaginative empathy never failed him to achieve remarkable results in his detection.

Holmes used his power of imaginative empathy for detection in very earlier days of his career. In the story *The Musgrave Ritual*, Reginald Musgrave, one of Holmes's old fellow-students brings a problem concerning his servants. Brunton the butler was caught in act of reading secretly the contents of a private document, what they call Musgrave Ritual, and warned by Reginald Musgrave to leave the house within a week. But after two days, he was found missing within the house at night, and his ex-girlfriend Rachel Howells turned delirious from then on. Three days later, she left the house unnoticed, after throwing a bag containing strange metal objects into the lake. To solve the mysteries of these missing servants, Holmes starts with deciphering the meaning of Musgrave Ritual which interested Brunton. And he finds the spot mentioned in the document which is the cellar. There lays the dead body of the unfortunate Brunton, but Holmes is unable to infer the reason for Rachel Howells's involvement. At this juncture he applies his imaginative empathy to learn their past actions. He later explains to Watson:

“I put myself in the man's place, and having first gauged his intelligence, I try to imagine how I should myself have proceeded under the same circumstances. ... He knew that something valuable was concealed. He had spotted the place. He found that the stone which covered it was just too heavy

for a man to move unaided. What would he do next? He could not get help from outside, even if he had someone whom he could trust, without the unbarring of doors and considerable risk of detection. It was better, if he could, to have his helpmate inside the house. But whom could he ask? This girl had been devoted to him. ... Together they would come at night to the cellar, and their united force would suffice to raise the stone.” (Doyle, Short Stories 235-36)

Gardiner expresses as the view of Sherlock Holmes in *The Whole Art of Detection*, “The good detective has a certain empathy with the criminal. This enables the detective to enter the mind of the criminal and thus anticipate what the criminal will do.” Holmes is certainly a good detective, for he empathised with the criminal in this case, and solved the mysteries involved. After discerning the reason for having Rachel as accomplice, Holmes moves on to detect the cause for Brunton’s death. He again makes use of his imaginative empathy, that he puts himself in the place of Rachel Howells. It enables him to conclude that Brunton could have gone into the hole, and handed up the contents to the girl who was waiting outside, and as Rachel had been wronged by Brunton, the desire for taking revenge would have been aroused within her when she saw him in her power, and she might have removed the support of the slap away to make him die.

In *The Adventure of the Norwood Builder*, a young man named McFarlane is arrested for committing the murder of Mr. Jonas Oldacre. In spite of the fact that all the evidences are against him, Sherlock Holmes is sure that he is guiltless and this certainty is the outcome of his imaginative empathy. He questions Lestrade, the Scotland Yard detective, who firmly believes in McFarlane’s guilt:

You do not add imagination to your other great qualities, but if you could for one moment put yourself in the place of this young man, would you choose the very night after the will had been made to commit your crime? Would it not seem dangerous to you to make so very close a relation between the two incidents? Again, would you choose an occasion when you are known to be in the house, when a servant has let you in? And, finally, would you take the great pains to conceal the body, and yet leave your own stick as a sign that you

were the criminal? Confess, Lestrade, that all this is very unlikely. (Doyle, Short Stories 341-42)

Though Holmes fails in convincing Lestrade, he succeeds in bringing out the truth through his investigation, and the cause for his invaluable intervention in this case is only his imaginative empathy.

In *The Adventure of the Abbey Grange*, Lady Brackenstall gives the account of the murder of Sir Eustace Brackenstall as committed by the burglars. But Holmes is unconvinced of her story, and suspects that she is covering the murderer for some reasons. According to Holmes theft of the silver articles is a blind, and having this in mind he imagines himself as the murderer who needs to get rid of the unwanted stolen silver. When he sees a frozen pond with a single hole outside the house, this empathy enlightens Holmes that the murderer could have thrown the stolen goods into it. Therefore he instructs the Inspector Hopkins to search the pond, and the reaction of Hopkins after searching is, “I believe that you are a wizard, Mr. Holmes. I really do sometimes think that you have powers that are not human. Now, how on earth could you know that the stolen silver was at the bottom of that pond?” (Doyle, Short Stories 486). Thus, through Holmes’s empathetic imagination, the theory of blind proved to be correct.

Similarly in *The Adventure of the Retired Colourman*, while examining the room where Lady Amberley and her lover were murdered, Holmes uses his power of imagination, and gets additional evidence: A short message written on the bottom of the wall. He tells the police inspector, “You’ll get results, Inspector, by always putting yourself in the other fellow’s place, and thinking what you would do yourself. It takes some imagination, but it pays” (Doyle, Short Stories 761).

Holmes’s art of detection is popular all over the world, and even the King of Bohemia is one of Holmes’s clients. He benefited from the imaginative empathy of Holmes in *A Scandal in Bohemia*. The story is that, the King was in love with an opera singer Irene Adler, but unwilling to marry her, due to the comparatively lower social status of her. Now he is planning to marry the princess of Scandinavia; consequently, Irene Adler threatens him that she would send the photograph in which they are together to his fiancée on the day of the

proclamation of their betrothal. Five attempts have been made to steal the photograph but with no success, due to the failure to find its hiding place. So the King comes to Sherlock Holmes as a last resort to secure the photograph. Holmes, endowed with empathetic imagination, does not need to ransack the house for the portrait; in fact, he made Irene Adler show where it is hidden just by playing a drama and using a fake fire. The psychological insight he possesses favours him to achieve a remarkable result. He opines about the nature of women to Watson:

When a woman thinks that her house is on fire, her instinct is at once to rush to the thing which she values most. It is a perfectly overpowering impulse ... A married woman grabs at her baby; an unmarried one reaches for her jewel-box. Now it was clear to me that our lady of to-day had nothing in the house more precious to her than what we are in quest of. She would rush to secure it. The alarm of fire was admirably done. The smoke and shouting were enough to shake nerves of steel. She responded beautifully. The photograph is in a recess behind a sliding panel just above the right bell-pull. (Doyle, Short Stories 13)

Holmes applies his imaginative empathy on animal too in the short story *Silver Blaze*. Silver Blaze, the most famous racehorse and the favourite for the approaching Wessex Cup, disappeared, and John Straker, its trainer, was murdered. Holmes discovers that the horse was taken out of its stable by the dishonest John Straker for doing a delicate operation to make it lame, and also that the murder was accidentally committed by the horse when it lashed out Straker in self-defence. And to find the whereabouts of the horse, Holmes employs his imagination, and tells Watson, "If left to himself his instincts would have been either to return to King's Pyland or go over to Mapleton ... He is not at King's Pyland. Therefore he is at Mapleton" (Doyle, Short Stories 183-184). His imagination proved to be precise, since the horse is hidden in the nearby stable Mapleton. Thus Holmes's imaginative empathy proves to be a beneficial tool for the discovery of truth.

## **Conclusion**



The brain of Holmes holds a vital place in his esteemed mission: The quest of truth. If it is not for the enormous capability of his brain, Holmes could not have achieved such tremendous accomplishments in his career. The success of Holmes represents the success of his brain, for he himself says, "I am a brain, Watson. The rest of me is a mere appendix" (Doyle, Short Stories 654).

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