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**Universitat Autònoma  
de Barcelona**

**TREBALL DE FI DE GRAU**

**Holmes and Watson or Sherlock and John: A  
homoerotic reading of Conan Doyle's Characters  
in BBC's *Sherlock*.**

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## *Introduction*

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes became already an iconic figure in Victorian London with his first appearance in the novel *A Study in Scarlet* in 1887; through the years he and his friend and companion Doctor Watson have been central literary characters, being the focus of multiple adaptations and interpretations of both the fifty six short stories and four novels. The newest adaptations of the short stories and novels to the cinema are the two films by Guy Ritchie with Robert Downey Jr. as Sherlock Holmes and Jude Law as Doctor Watson: *Sherlock Holmes* (2009) and *Sherlock Holmes: A Game of Shadows* (2011). Although Ritchie's films respect the original time frame, a recurrent trend in recent years is the updating of the Sherlock Holmes' stories to the 21<sup>st</sup> century, including the BBC series *Sherlock* by Steven Moffat and Mark Gattis; and the most recent one, the American adaptation called *Elementary* by Robert Doherty (2012). The starting points of these new adaptations are still the Sherlock Holmes short stories and novels, but the characters in them are surrounded by modern technical devices such as mobile phones or the internet; also by a society where there is much more sexual freedom than a hundred years ago. They face, in short, a new way of understanding the world and human relationships in it.

There are several aspects of the BBC adaptation in particular that could be mentioned, for instance the wittiness of the screenwriters to adapt the stories set in Victorian London to the London of today. My paper, however, is going to focus on another main aspect: the new homoerotic reading. There are many instances in all the episodes of the series of how the screenwriters play with the homoeroticism between Holmes and Watson, which is often discussed among the characters themselves and shown with "frequent meaningful glances"

between Holmes and Watson, who “obviously share a deep and satisfying rapport” (Lavigne 2012: 13).

This interpretation, however easy it may be to see it from the point of view of the present, does not work so well if imposed on the short stories and novels. This entails that although the works written by Doyle have instances in which the reader can read the homoeroticism between the lines, they can still be read ignoring the homoerotic subtext if the reader wishes to do so; whereas in the series the audience find themselves facing an open discussion regarding the nature of the relationship between Holmes and Watson. In this paper I intend, thus, to analyze and compare these scenes of the BBC series applying the theories of Queer Studies to both the short stories and the episodes, and to ultimately discern why the homoerotic reading works very well for the series but not as well for the short stories.

### *The Short Stories*

As noted, the BBC series *Sherlock* is a modernized update based on the works by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. Even though it is more difficult to see the homoerotic undertone in the literary works, there are some scenarios in which the reader may stop for a moment and think what the real nature of Watson and Holmes’ relationship is, since although the series is fairly recent (the first season aired on July 2010) the examination of homoeroticism in Sherlock Holmes is not new and there is, in fact, criticism about the existence or nonexistence of this undertone in the original literary works.

The first story that calls our attention is “A Scandal in Bohemia” originally published on *The Strand Magazine* on 1891. At the beginning John Watson – who is the narrator of most of the stories since he is supposed to write his adventures with Sherlock Holmes –

describes Irene Adler, also known as *The Woman* and perhaps the only person that may be of interest to Sherlock Holmes, aside from Watson. Some prefer to consider her as Holmes' equal on terms of intelligence, which may be the origin of his interest. When reading the first paragraph, the reader faces the difficult situation of deciding whether John Watson is jealous or not:

To Sherlock Holmes she is always *the woman*. I have seldom heard him mention her under any other name. In his eyes she eclipses and predominates the whole of her sex. It was not that he felt any emotion akin to love for Irene Adler. All emotions, and that one particularly, were abhorrent to his cold, precise but admirably balanced mind. He was, I take it, the most perfect reasoning and observing machine that the world has seen, but as a lover he would have placed himself in a false position. He never spoke of the softer passions, save with a gibe and a sneer. They were admirable things for the observer—excellent for drawing the veil from men's motives and actions. But for the trained reasoner to admit such intrusions into his own delicate and finely adjusted temperament was to introduce a distracting factor which might throw a doubt upon all his mental results. Grit in a sensitive instrument, or a crack in one of his own high-power lenses, would not be more disturbing than a strong emotion in a nature such as his. And yet there was but one woman to him, and that woman was the late Irene Adler, of dubious and questionable memory <sup>1</sup>(9)

According to Jesús Urceloy's comments on the short stories, with the description of Miss Adler, Watson "quizá trata de enmascarar una homosexualidad platónica hacia Holmes" (Urceloy 2003: 1581). What is interesting in this paragraph, however, is that it is fairly contradictory, since in the span of just a handful of lines Watson makes several statements in conflict with each other.

On the one hand, Watson states that for Holmes "she is always *the woman*"; the italics implying that she is the only one whom Holmes has been interested in and indeed, a few scholars have considered that Holmes perhaps was in love with Irene Adler, although it also seems that he is attracted to her by her wittiness, not sexually. On the other hand, a few lines later Watson says that Holmes cannot be in love with her or anyone else simply because he is

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<sup>1</sup> Octopus Publishing Group Ltd (ed). Chancellor Press, 2000.

a “trained reasoner”, perhaps implying that in being so rational, sentiment would put him in a vulnerable position. Additionally, at the end of the paragraph he concludes that despite all of this, “there was but one woman to him”, a woman whom he thinks is not the best of all women, “of dubious and questionable memory.” It is striking how Watson, instead of granting Adler the ability to startle and confuse Holmes or even acknowledging that he can, to some extent, understand Adler’s attraction to Holmes, hints that he disapproves of the woman.

Comparing “A Scandal in Bohemia” to the other stories, it is quite clear that Watson does not depict Holmes as a cold dehumanized person, but rather that he tries to portray him as fully human, therefore capable of love. However, “at the same time, Watson does not want to consider the possibility that Holmes could love, simply for the reason that a Holmes in love would result in a Holmes no longer interested in Watson’s company.” (Nekosmuse 2007: 47). What this may be telling us is that Watson wants Holmes to be capable of love but he also wants to be the object of this love, and since it is not him but Irene Adler who captures Holmes’ attention, he prefers to say that Holmes is incapable of such a feeling, even though he has been suggesting precisely the opposite (Nekosmuse 2007: 47). This links with what Urceloy claims about their “platonic homosexuality (Urceloy 2003: 1581) since Watson is not describing Holmes in any sexual way, he is merely talking about his feelings (or lack of them). It is not clear what Watson truly means about Holmes and Miss Adler’s relationship or why he describes her in such a way, but it is curious how he manipulates the reader into not having a very good opinion of Miss Adler from the start.

This is not the only case; there are other scenes in the short stories that could be mentioned when looking for this implied homoeroticism. From a story where they sleep together in the same bed (“The Valley of Fear”) and where “the physical proximity of the two men is mirrored by an emotional closeness, with Holmes, on several occasions,

complimenting Watson and indicating his extreme gladness at having Watson as a companion” (Nekosmuse 2007: 90); to a story in which Watson is injured by a gun and is able to finally see the deep love that Holmes feels towards him:

I had a vision of him sprawling upon the floor with blood running down his face while Holmes rummaged him for weapons. Then my friend’s wiry arms were round me and he was leading me to a chair.

‘You’re not hurt, Watson? For God’s sake, say that you are not hurt!’

It was worth a wound – it was worth many wounds – to know the depth of loyalty and love which lay behind that cold mask. The clear, hard eyes were dimmed for a moment, and the firm lips were shaking. For the one and only time I caught a glimpse of a great heart as well as of a great brain. All my years of humble but single-minded service culminated in that moment of revelation. (88).

The last paragraph shows a deep bond between Holmes and Watson, one that could go beyond friendship or not, but it is there nevertheless. “It was worth a wound – it was worth many wounds – to know the depth of loyalty and love which lay behind that cold mask”; here we not only see Watson’s obvious love for Holmes and his expectations about the detective’s side, but we also see how the detective reacts when his ‘Boswell’ is hurt. In this moment Holmes’ feelings for Watson are revealed, and we are to understand that up to this point Watson was not entirely sure about Holmes’ appreciation for him. It is true that this particular interpretation depends on what the reader understands for the word ‘love’, but in any case this passage unfolds quite clearly the possibility of a homoerotic reading, not only after Holmes’ words when he notices Watson is wounded, but also and most importantly in reading Watson’s feelings when facing his friend’s worry.

### *The Theory*

There are, however, a limited number of scenes that could be read as having this subtext between the lines and this is due to the anachronistic reading that we apply to the



stories. One must bear in mind that the stories of Sherlock Holmes were published between 1887 and 1926 but that “[t]he body of abstract theory and applied readings that came to be known as “queer theory” (Hall 2003: 1) was originated at the last half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, especially during the 1980s and 1990s with scholars like Judith Butler, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Diana Fuss or Teresa de Lauretis. Unlike today, in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century medicine and psychology established paradigms and even legislation that set up a distinction between what was legally allowed and what was not, and homosexual, or rather, sodomitic practices were severely punished (Oscar Wilde is a clear example). According to Michel Foucault “[s]exuality was carefully confined; it moved into the home. (...) On the subject of sex, silence became the rule. The legitimate and procreative couple laid down the law” (Foucault 1978: 3). Taking Oscar Wilde as an example, he was sent to prison for two years not because he was considered homosexual, but because he had engaged in homosexual practices which were punished by law; yet this act of indecency did not in any way question his sexuality as personal identity. (Adaut 2005: 214-215).

Nowadays, however, boundaries are confusing. On the one hand, our society is organized on the basis of the dichotomy heterosexual/homosexual, being the heterosexual the norm and defining itself in opposition to everything else, which is labelled as homosexual (although within homosexuality there are several minorities including lesbians, transsexuals, bisexuals, intersex, and so on; which in most recent times and due to the activism of these minorities within the collective, the label of “gay” has stopped to define all that was not heterosexual by definition and it is usually now referred to as LGBTBI):

El análisis de estos códigos culturales dedica una especial atención al binomio masculino/femenino y al binomio heterosexual/homosexual. En terminología *queer*, estos binomios son ‘categorías de conocimiento’ que estructuran el pensamiento y la experiencia y contribuyen a que las jerarquías sociales se perpetúen (...) Sedgwick, Fuss y Butler prestan especial atención al binomio heterosexual/homosexual que obliga al

individuo a identificarse como perteneciente a uno u otro componente del binomio y a erigir identidades de protección y de exclusión del 'otro' miembro del binomio. Según esta dinámica, el sujeto homosexual se convierte en víctima del control social además de víctima de la jerarquía implícita en el par binario según la cual 'heterosexual' como término no marcado, determina la negatividad de 'homosexual' como término marcado del binomio. (Segarra & Carabí 2000: 149)

On the other hand and contrary to Victorian customs, one single slip may mean the total shift of one's sexual orientation. That is, as noted in Wilde's example, when he was tried and condemned there was no question of his sexuality: he was punished because he had *committed an act* of indecency (Adaut, 2005); whereas in the society of today one is heterosexual unless proven the opposite, albeit this heterosexuality has to be pure, without any doubts or cracks. One single 'slip' and that sexual orientation will change.

Furthermore, we no longer know whether the fact of seeing two men kissing each other's cheeks is a sign of homosexual behaviour or not; we are no longer able to distinguish between two men who are simply very good friends and two men who are actually a couple without falling into the stereotypical image of the gay person; and yet we try to categorize and label every single individual according to their sexual orientation as an essential and defining part of their being. Taking into account that the parameters of behaviour have changed and thus everything can be suspicious of homosexual behaviour, we find ourselves facing a paradox.

When reading Holmes and Watson's relationship as homoerotic, one must bear in mind that these paradigms are different, that what homosexuality and heterosexuality means to us and what it meant to Doyle's original public has changed. That, added to the fact that although Victorians did punish homosexual practices by law there was no clear and sharp distinction between legitimate and illegitimate relationships between men, is precisely what allows us to be able to read Sherlock Holmes and John Watson's relationship as homoerotic.

Having reached this point, I must make a distinction between *queer* and *gay*. In the 1990s the word *queer* was used for the first time in an academic work by Teresa de Lauretis, in a special number about Queer Theory for the magazine *Differences* (1991). Both Lauretis and the scholars that would follow would use the term *queer* as a “[r]eivindicación de carácter positivo de una terminología sexual que hasta entonces se había usado peyorativamente en contra de lesbianas y gays.” (López Penedo 2008:36). In other words, gays and lesbians start to use the term *queer* to describe themselves positively, using the same word that was used as a pejorative:

“Queer”, a term commonly used to deride and vilify same-sex desiring people, was reclaimed by Queer Nation and others as a umbrella term to celebrate, rather than castigate, difference from the “norm” at a time when the oppressiveness and implicit violence of that norm was clear and undeniable. (...) “Queer theory” as it burst onto the scene of English and cultural studies departments in the 1990s was only describing, analyzing and giving certain intellectual nuance and depth to an already existing phenomenon. (Hall 2003: 53)

The basic difference between *queer* and *gay*, apart from being genderless and thus able to refer to a male or female without distinction, is that *queer* is a constructivist and “performative” term (as Judith Butler would call it), which means that we as individuals “perform” a certain kind of sexuality, thus being anti-essentialist:

La teoría Queer considera la categoría de sexualidad como una construcción social y ponga de relieve los diversos grados y diferentes espacios del poder que se distribuyen en todas las categorías sexuales, incluyendo la heterosexualidad. Los teóricos queer niegan la existencia de una normalidad sexual, basándose en autores como Locan o Foucault que afirman que la sexualidad está construida socialmente (...) En este sentido entiendo la sexualidad en la línea en que la planteó Michel Foucault como un atributo no esencialmente personal, sino como una categoría cultural disponible.” (López Penedo 2008: 24)

This conflicts with the concept of *gay*, which is essentialist and plainly implies that we are born with a certain sexuality that cannot be changed. (López Penedo 2008: 35-37).

## *The Episodes*

What this primarily tells us is that, following Judith Butler's premises, we should not claim that Holmes or Watson are *gay* because it is clear they are not gay, we could consider Watson as heterosexual (the general consensus of scholars – achieved by looking at the dates Watson tells in the stories – is that he married three times but there is only one wife of whom we know the name, Mary Morstan) and Holmes as asexual or simply celibate. However, there is a difference between celibacy and asexuality: according to Rebecca Seal “[w]hile people may dip in and out of celibacy, asexuality tends to be a permanent state.” (Seal 2010), that is, while celibacy is a free choice that does not entail any further implications – apart from being nowadays linked with certain religious circles – asexuality is the lack of sexual attraction towards any particular gender, either male or female. In Holmes' case, it is not clear whether he is asexual or whether he simply decides to ignore his sexuality as something that defines him. Perhaps that is the reason why he always avoids being labelled, from the first episode (which will be discussed further) where Watson tries to pin a label on him, either heterosexual or homosexual, by asking about his relationships; to the first episode of the second season *A Scandal in Belgravia* where Holmes, after believing that Irene Adler is dead, starts composing sad songs and Watson asks Mrs. Hudson (their landlady) whether she knows about any relationship he may have had. The answer from Mrs. Hudson is negative: “It's Sherlock! How will we ever know what goes on in that funny odd head?”

This difficulty in reading Holmes' sexual interests brings us to a concept that now is almost obsolete but which had a central importance in Victorian times: the bachelor. It has various definitions but according to Snyder a bachelor is “an unmarried man of marriageable

age” (Snyder 1999: 20). This concept is important because in the last episode of the second series, *The Reichenbach Fall*, Watson comments on the word:

SHERLOCK: Why is it always the hat photograph?

WATSON: (*Reading the newspaper*) Bachelor John Watson... bachelor, what the hell are they implying?

SHERLOCK: Is it a cap? Why does it have two fronts?

WATSON: It’s a deerstalker. (*Quoting*) Frequently seen in the company of bachelor John Watson.

SHERLOCK: What do I do with that? Throw it?

WATSON: Confirmed bachelor John Watson!

SHERLOCK: Is it a death Frisbee?

WATSON: Okay, this is too much; we need to be more careful.

SHERLOCK: It’s got flaps. Ear flaps, it’s an ear hat John! What do you mean ‘more careful’?

WATSON: I mean this isn’t a deerstalker now; it’s a Sherlock Holmes’ hat. I mean that you’re not exactly a private detective anymore; you’re this far from famous!

SHERLOCK: It’ll pass.

WATSON: It better pass. The press will turn Sherlock, they always turn, and they’ll turn on you.

SHERLOCK: It really bothers you.

WATSON: What?

SHERLOCK: What people say. About me. I don’t understand, why would it upset you?

WATSON: Just try to keep a low profile, find yourself a little case this week, stay out of the news.

In this scene one can see that the concept of bachelor, which is not used as Snyder describes it and whose meaning did not have a negative connotation in the past, is used now on anachronistic terms to imply that there is something else between the two characters. It is clear Watson’s outrage when reading what the press says about him, since the newspapers use the term ‘bachelor’ to imply that it is perceived as odd to see Sherlock Holmes always in the company of Watson and no one else, stressing the fact that Watson is not married. Watson’s angry question “what the hell are they implying?” is fairly self explanatory. However, the term poses the question on Watson’s sexuality, not on Holmes’, and throughout the episodes the audience is left without learning what Sherlock is interested in.

In other words, from the beginning of the series the audience are to believe that Watson is supposedly heterosexual (stressed by the fact that he dates several women in the

course of six episodes) but they do not know about Holmes' sexual preferences. Due to the fact that the nature of their relationship is questioned throughout the whole series, following the *queer* theories previously explained, thus, we are able to discuss not whether Holmes and Watson are gay, but whether their performative enactment of their masculinity is sometimes *queer*.

The problem arises when applying this view to the short stories. As stated before, many of the stories are more than one hundred years old and the differences regarding homosexual practices are very marked. However and also as stated before, men could have very strong friendships without it being a threat to heterosexuality; two men could walk side by side holding hands or by the arm and it was not considered as a sign of homosexuality nor was it a threat for the normative masculinity of the time. This means that it is difficult to apply the discourse of the 21<sup>st</sup> century to stories that are a century old and expect that they work. They may be applied to some of the scenes of the short stories, but the Queer Theories do not allow us to distinguish clearly whether Holmes and Watson's relationship might be homoerotic or not. This also explains why the homoerotic reading fits so well the series but not to the stories; it is mainly due to the relation between the modernization of the stories and the presence of these terms in our society. If the show was a mere adaptation, as many others that came before, this homoeroticism would probably not work as well as it does.

It is worth mentioning, though, that this view of the partnership of Holmes and Watson as something that may imply something deeper is not new on television. Many other series have also count on the presence of two male characters as protagonists whose relationship is also ambiguous, so to speak. One clear example of that is the series directly inspired by

Sherlock Holmes, the American television show *House M.D.*<sup>2</sup>. Its protagonist is Gregory House (an added similarity to Holmes' surname, since House and Holmes are pronounced almost in the same way), a brilliant doctor who uses the deductive method to understand what the patient is suffering from, many times in a race against time, and who is addicted to Vicodin (a pain killer that is very addictive). His partner in this case is James Wilson, an oncologist who has to endure the endless list of troubles that House puts him in and still stays by his side and helps him; because despite his horrible temperament he knows that House is lonely.

House's deductions are very similar to the ones Holmes uses and Wilson is the perfect copy of John Watson; a man who stays beside House as a loyal and patient friend. It is no wonder that between these two characters there has appeared what is called 'bromance':

A portmanteau of "bro" and "romance", a bromance designates a significant bond between men, described in *Time* as "the strong emotional attachment of one man for another" and more narrowly defined in *Merriam-Webster* as "a close non-sexual friendship between men". (Thomas 2012: 38)

One must be careful, however, when dealing with the term 'bromance'. It may seem at first that 'bromances' are stories between men which apparently are not homosexual but have a latent homoeroticism within them, when in fact it is the opposite. It is a device used from the heterosexual point of view that, according to actor Jude Law in Thomas' essay (Watson in Ritchie's films), "portray[s] a bromantic couple who, although more equal partners in Ritchie's adaptations, maintain a close but distinctly heterosexual friendship" (Thomas 2012: 37). In other words, 'bromance' is not used as a term to describe a homoerotic relationship between men on TV or films, but it is rather a term to depict the opposite, a very close but still 'respectable' heterosexual friendship between two men. The 'bromance' does not appear in

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<sup>2</sup> The interview where the writer, David Shore, explains his inspiration to create Gregory House can be found on Youtube <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d4Ly44rfb5s>

BBC's *Sherlock*, precisely because the series is constantly posing the question of their sexuality in the air, and it comes as no surprise then that when *Sherlock* aired on 2010 with a display of homoerotic subtext in the first episode some members of the audience quickly took it as a base for a deeper relationship between the two.

This possibility has posed questions that some scholars have already tried to answer despite the novelty of the series. In the essay written by Carlen Lavigne "The Noble Bachelor and the Crooked Man: Subtext and Sexuality in BBC's *Sherlock*", she points out that the TV series does not attempt at all to hide the homoerotic reading from the audience, but rather the opposite, showing it from the beginning. In the first episode Watson and Holmes are in a pub and Watson asks Sherlock:

WATSON: You don't have a girlfriend, then?

HOLMES: Girlfriend? No, not really my area.

WATSON: Mmm. Oh, right. Do you have a... boyfriend? Which is fine by the way.

HOLMES: I know it's fine.

WATSON: So you don't have a boyfriend.

HOLMES: No

WATSON: Right, Ok. You're unattached, like me. Fine. Good.

HOLMES: John, um... I think you should know that I consider myself married to my work, and while I'm flattered by your interest I'm really not looking for any kind –

WATSON: No, I'm not asking... no. I'm just saying, it's all fine.

HOLMES: Good. Thank you.

From this conversation one could consider that Watson – which states his heterosexuality throughout the series – is heterosexual and the workaholic Holmes asexual; that would clear the matter. However, this is not the case in the series since these hints and conversations about both character's sexuality appear in all the episodes. As Porter observes:

On a subtextual level, however, Holmes' ambiguous response leaves the character suspended within a realm of permanent possibility; (...) he *could be* gay, straight, bisexual, asexual or pansexual. He does not commit himself in any way. (Porter 2005: 18)



This would be stressed by the fact that whereas Watson always denies being gay, for instance in the pilot episode at the scene at the pub (“I’m not his date!”) or when Irene Adler tells him they *are* a couple and says “Who the hell knows about Sherlock Holmes, but, for the record, if anyone out there still cares, I’m not actually gay”; Holmes does not deny anything, contrary to his usual behaviour of correcting anyone nearby. Also and as stated before (see page 11), Holmes resists the labelling, as if his sexual orientation did not influence in any way how he sees himself. In fact he “consider[s] [him]self married to [his] work”, and Watson finally labels him as ‘unattached’, perhaps finding the situation of facing someone who does not consent to be categorized under any of the two composers of the binomial too odd.

### *The Limits*

So far we have seen a bit of implied homoeroticism in the literary works by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, how this homoeroticism is a bit more obvious and openly discussed in the series, and other examples of homoeroticism between two male characters also derived from Conan Doyle. Judging by what we have seen, one could be inclined to think that there are no limits to the homoerotic subtext and that perhaps it could be openly exposed without any kind of problem.

The fact is that there are limits, clearly delimited restrictions. Thanks to both the BBC adaptation and the two films by Guy Ritchie *Sherlock Holmes* and *Sherlock Holmes: A Game of Shadows*, and probably due to the obvious display of the existence of this homoerotic reading in the BBC adaptation, Holmes and Watson are currently the object of an increasing number of slash fiction, “amateur fan-authored works that feature favorite characters in non-canonical and often graphic same-sex relationships” (Lavigne 2012: 14). This phenomenon

was born with the “pairing” or “ship” Kirk/Spock (often read as *Kirk slash Spock* and where the term *slash* for male/male relationship comes from):

With the growth of television in the 50s fanfic spread globally. Sci-fi fanfic then morphed and its subtexts became dominant. Slash fic is sub-genre in which buddies from classic TV become gay lovers. The first slash fic novel to be published was “The Ring of Soshern”, a 105-page by Jennifer Guttridge (1968). In it Spock and Kirk find themselves stranded on a remote, deserted planet. Spock goes into the state of "Pon Far": the violent "on heat" fever that comes to Vulcans, during which they must "have sex or die" (...) The violent-sounding "slash" is so called because of the "/" separating the names of the two characters involved in homoerotic love or pornographic sex, for example Holmes/Watson, Spock/McCoy, Harry Potter/Ron Weasley, Starsky/Hutch, Jesus/Judas. (Morrison 2012).

Since the worldwide presence of the Internet intruded in our lives, fan arts and fan fiction about the detective and his loyal friend and companion are very present and very easy to find. It is obvious that fan fiction is not in any case a form of academic study; it is, though, a way in which readers defend alternative interpretations of their favourite texts.

There is, however, a gap between what can be read implicitly and what could actually happen between these two iconic literary figures. In our current society it is much easier for writers of fan fiction and for fan artists to share their art through the social networks. Nevertheless, this can also have disadvantages, since everyone can have access to them and some sectors of the audience would not like that. In a TV interview carried out by Graham Norton<sup>3</sup>, Martin Freeman, who plays Watson, was shown a few illustrations drawn by fans, depicting Holmes and Watson openly engaged in homosexual activities. Freeman somehow managed to smile and even joke about these drawings, whereas the other two people that were with him in the program did have a negative and, to some extent, expected homophobic reaction to this kind of fan art.

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<sup>3</sup>The video of the interview can be seen on Youtube:  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mAk3Bm4vfe0>

This reaction plainly shows that while some readers see this homoerotic or even homosexual reading and accept it, some others not only do not accept it, they even reject it. To me, this seems to suggest that this resistance of some readers to accept the homoerotic undertone as something that could enrich even more the iconic literary figure of Sherlock Holmes and his companion, even if it was overtly expressed, is precisely why this reading would never work if it was explicitly made.

### *Conclusions*

As seen in this paper, the homoerotic reading works in the BBC series *Sherlock* precisely because the series is not an adaptation but an update to a modern world, and the tools we have to analyse the characters' behaviour can work. In the short stories and novels, however, this interpretation does not work as well as in the series precisely because it is anachronistic. The fact that the series is a modernized version opens the door to this possibility that is harder to find on the short stories.

The limits to this interpretation are, however, clear. If the screenwriters of the show wanted to stretch this reading and make Watson's and Sherlock's possible homosexual romance clear and overtly exposed, it would not work for two reasons. On the one hand, the show is based on the original stories by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, where this reading can be discussed but it is by no means openly displayed; and the episodes are faithful to the stories – or as faithful as they can be taking into account the modern world in which they are set. On the other hand, the resistance from readers and viewers to accept Holmes and Watson's relationship not just as homoerotic – something that you can always ignore – but as overtly gay makes it difficult to display it.

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