

The sixth Euclid's theorem, or, Love from all angles

by mazaher

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This piece finds its origins in the exhaustive, detailed, at times vividly controversial, and at all times delightful, discussion about *Sherlock & John-- How do you see it happening? Discuss.* started by todaysgoneby on 2011-01-31 14:11:00 at <http://sherlockbbc.livejournal.com/1813099.html>. Many thanks to all who contributed their brilliant observations and unusual points of view to the abovementioned thread.

I came late to the party, but I'd been meaning to add a few ideas of mine all the same, when I realized that they fit fiction even better than meta. So here it is, my attempt at criticism as literature-- for better or worse. It more or less wrote by itself.

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John Watson: *I shed my blood with you, I broke the law with you. I followed you blindly into your fight against criminals and their hate for us. How could you ever believe I wouldn't follow you in the endeavour of love?*

-- Apocryphal deleted scene from ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE, *The Adventure of the Empty House* (1903)

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For the last 11.7 years, Sherlock had believed that the whole question of sex was settled for him.

In the interest of scientific method, as soon as the necessary tools --so to speak-- had been at his disposal, he had dutifully given it a try. He was hearing such wonders about it.

He had started with girls, cautiously going for someone slightly older and presumably (hopefully) more experienced than he was: Violet Graves, the new neighbour. The immediate results being less than satisfactory, he had proceeded in order from a girl of his same age (Carolyn Lloyd, second row on the left in 6B) to a slightly younger one (Joan Waters, the daughter of his dentist), but he still failed to get the appeal sex seemed to have for each of his partners, as well as for the public at large.

So he had turned to men. During his first two years at uni he had shagged --that was the term, he believed-- no less than four: one in his same course (not his roommate, cohabitation would have been awkward afterwards), one junior postgraduate, one last-year student who was in the rowing team, and the son of the janitor. The postgraduate (Medieval philosophy) was rather brilliant in Occam's formal logic, but when Sherlock, during the Long Vacation of his 20th year, had sat down to evaluate data from his five year long campaign, the conclusion was clear.

Sex was messy, confusing, mostly uncontrollable, ultimately pointless, and basically unhygienic.

He archived the whole matter once and for all, and promptly deleted all data pertaining to his tentative partners.

They got home half an hour ago, tired and splattered with mud. Death by drowning tends to be a messy business for the deceased as well as the rescue team. Sherlock has disappeared without a word in the direction of the bathroom, and has emerged twenty minutes and a hot shower later, clad in his bath towel like a Roman in a toga and carrying his damp clothes in a

bundle. John, trying to make himself comfortable in his armchair on the left of the fireplace (and failing), hears a soft thump as the bundle is discarded on the floor in Sherlock's bedroom. Sherlock reappears, wearing his peacock-blue, silk dressing-gown and (John suspects) nothing else, and throws himself supine on the sofa.

By then, Sherlock had learned quite a number of things about himself, among which the fact that he had constitutionally less problems coming into contact with dead body parts (human or otherwise) than with live bodies (especially human ones). He had much earlier, for completely different reasons, given up on love as a practical impossibility. Now he gave up on sexual intercourse without a second thought, as something quite superfluous. Why waste time, energy and precious mindspace for something which required so much --mostly unproductive-- effort, when he didn't even *like* it? When, out of boredom or sheer physical need, he indulged in a wank, he didn't have a human being (of whichever gender) in mind. The rush of sensations --faceless, blessed sensations-- was in itself more than enough.

John stands up gingerly: his leg is giving him some pain after their latest brisk efforts in the early spring rain. He straightens up, coughs softly, and comes to sit on the sofa. Sherlock, who was sprawled in all his considerable length with the backs of his ankles primly set on the armrest, draws his legs up and back, folding into a neat bundle like a five-piece Chinese screen and leaving one-third of the sitting area to John, who sets himself snugly between back and armrest.

There was the problem of others, though. All those people, men and women alike, who insisted on finding him sexually desirable. Who stubbornly wanted --all of them at some point wanted-- to engage in coitus with him. Even the clever ones, the brilliant ones, the ones with whom he'd like to hold real conversations, bypassing all of the usual dull babbling demanded by social manners and going straight for the things that matter. How the hourly shift in the wavelength of sunlight changes the colours of the leaves in Regent's Park. Mandelbrot equations applied to whorls in fingerprints. The way bodies shrivel in sand, decay in acidic and in loamy soil, and are preserved in turf. He'd have loved being able to talk things over with the few people --one in about two hundred and sixty, was his estimation-- who seemed to understand why these things mattered. But the pressure was intolerable.

There would come a moment, usually in a lull between topics, when he would feel their eyes search his, and their desire press on his chest like a pair of hands.

It frightened him. He was stronger, more agile and better versed in self-defence than most, both men and women, but knowing that didn't help. He still felt frightened.

They wanted something from him, something that wasn't even his to give-- yet. There was a lot of trust to be built before he'd be comfortable with another's touch; and a huge amount of affection on top of that, for his own desire to have a chance to bloom. And no-one seemed to feel Sherlock was worth the wait. They all pressed forward, much too soon.

He learned to anticipate those moments, cutting the conversation short or shocking them into silence by being purposefully bad mannered, enough that either he managed to get away unhindered, or they left.

He also discovered that talking openly about sex is quite an effective smokescreen. He was aware that his shyness about sexual matters was all too often seen as a weakness (how different, the Zeitgeist of this age, from what had been the norm a mere century and a half ago!) and he soon discovered that, whenever they perceive a weakness in their neighbour, most people instinctively go for the jugular. Sherlock's ace up his sleeve was diving into candid discussion of sexual practices sooner and faster than the other expected, which gave him a chance to take his leave, on average within the next 90 seconds.

With time, he trained himself to make the most of such encounters. He grabbed what he could, bits and pieces of human contact, and made them do until next time, with someone new. Someone who didn't know him well enough yet to catch and trap him. Someone from whose grasp he could slip easily, any time he wished.

Sherlock closes his eyes, leans his head back until it hangs down from the opposite armrest, and allows his right arm to fall until the tips of his fingers just graze the red Persian carpet. His

dressing-gown drapes itself on his lean body. John half-rises from his corner of the sofa, stretches himself, holding to the top of the backrest with his right hand, and watches him.

It had taken him years to develop a suitable armour: layers on layers of carefully cultivated behavioural stereotypes, arranged just so, masking the real Sherlock and making him invisible. People would believe anything, provided it was presented under a recognizable and credible label. *Rude. Asperger's. Sociopath.* A panoply of deflecting shields, keeping him safe, if alone, and allowing him the pride of manipulation instead of the social approval he knew he could never have.

The price, he thought, was about right.

John's left hand comes to press on Sherlock's forehead for a moment. Sherlock doesn't open his eyes and savours the tactile sensation: gentle, warm, a little bit humid, like a closed-mouthed kiss.

Lestrade had been a danger of a different kind.

In a world crowded with people who blindly followed the implicit social imperative to lie (to themselves, to begin with, and then to others), Gregory Lestrade shone like a beacon of honesty and truthfulness. He may be limited, even frustratingly slow at times, more often than not tied up in the annoying habit of following regulations-- but, since the very beginning of their acquaintance, his no-bullshit, no-nonsense attitude was a relief Sherlock hadn't realized he'd been missing. When they were side by side at a crime scene, or face to face after a final debriefing about a solved case, Sherlock recurrently felt a frankly annoying urgency to put down his armour and risk being **seen**. He'd feel this itch to discover what this one good man would think, upon meeting the Sherlock inside.

Then he'd remember Anderson, and say something cutting, just to stop himself short from answering to truth with truth.

Lestrade would look at him in puzzlement, frown, sigh, and turn away.

Sherlock would draw a breath, walk or take a cab back home, and maybe slap on a new nicotine patch.

Now John slides his hand over Sherlock's eyes, his nose, then he cups his cheek.

Then John had come, and suddenly everything had been a thousand times worse than with Lestrade.

That first night, at the restaurant, had been touch and go. In his own quiet, understated way, John had already shown as quick and deep an aptitude for enthusiasm as his own. Was it reality or illusion? Just for that once, Sherlock hadn't found it in himself to doubt. It felt too much like a miracle.

Sherlock knew about enthusiasm. He knew that showing enthusiasm in public is dangerous, and showing it to someone whose opinion you value is lethal. But, with John, he couldn't help himself. He found he was taking risks he'd sworn to himself he'd never take again.

He'd asked John to follow him on the battlefield, and it had been a game of chance. One win didn't mean much by itself; he'd tested his luck a second time on the cab, with the conjuring trick about Harry's cell-phone, and he'd won again. Third time is the charm, they say: and when John had kept up with him all along, not batting an eyelid at how Sherlock worked a crime scene, he'd felt like he'd won again. They also say one shouldn't mess with a winning streak, and so he'd gone as far as taking John to Angelo's, even knowing that Angelo would notice the unusual occurrence, and likely put up a bit of well-meaning fuss.

But there his good fortune had seemed to take a nosedive. John's inquiries, prompted by Angelo's meddling, sounded sincerely interested and earnestly good-natured, but all the same Sherlock had felt a chill run along his spine. He didn't want John to leave, or leave John himself. Not this time. He'd tensed in his corner, uncertain... It had surprised him, that he couldn't --would not-- go through his usual disengaging routine.

Then, "...you're unattached. Like me. Fine, good." John had said, and Sherlock had picked that tiny chance as a possible escape to safety. He listened to himself, and shivered realizing he was speaking the truth instead. Or part of it, at least.

"I think you should know that I consider myself married to my work, and while I'm flattered, I'm not really looking for any--"

He readied himself to face an embarrassing silence. John's disappointment. Probably, a parting of ways-- it was highly unlikely that even such a promising candidate would consent to become his flatmate after such a conversation.

But miracles have a way of pushing through the most awkward situations, and emerge as shining and terse as sunlight after a summer shower.

John had backed down.

"I'm just saying, it's all fine," he'd said, and it rang so true, and honest, and easy, that Sherlock had been flooded with a warm wave of relief.

"Thank you," he'd breathed, and he didn't remember an occasion when he'd felt as grateful.

John's hand slips lower along Sherlock's neck, and Sherlock sighs quietly. In complete silence, John parts Sherlock's dressing-gown with practiced fingers, baring his chest.

When he'd left for Afghanistan, John had believed that the whole question of sex was settled for him.

He liked women. He liked them a lot. He'd discovered that on his very first try, when he'd been seduced by a schoolmate on the first day of the summer holidays after fourth form. Becky Hull was her name, and for the whole year she'd been no more than an inconspicuous lump of mostly genderless humanity, slumped and half-hiding behind her desk in the opposite corner of the classroom. But then he'd met her that mid-June afternoon at the ice-cream shop. She was the inconspicuousness, together with the drab black school overall: she was wearing a flowered dress and a radiant face, and John thought he'd never seen anything so pretty in his whole life. That she went out of her way to also make herself approachable was definitely a bonus.

From then on he'd never turned back. He found that he didn't even have any marked preferences in appearance and build nor view of the world, as long as it was consensual, easy, and cheerful.

Mind you, it's not like he was out to beat some record. Sex was not even the most prominent item in his mental landscape: medicine was. He also was a keen observer, and he soon ascertained that neither the number of his partners or the frequency of his encounters ever set him anywhere above average among his peers. But his enjoyment didn't wane in time; on the contrary, the expertise he gathered enhanced his enthusiasm. By the time he turned twenty, he knew that sex was definitely an area in which the adage *ars longa, vita brevis* did apply. He, for one, planned on making the most of a prospected lifetime of learning.

There was one point he was doubtful about: he'd never fallen in love, not really, and sometimes the thought bothered him. But he was still so young-- not everybody had the perfect love story with their high school sweethearts. He banned the matter from his mind and whistled as he carefully combed his hair, tip of tongue just showing, as he checked himself in the mirror before going out on this weekend's date.

John's left forefinger begins tracing lazy curves on Sherlock's chest, spiraling inward to centre on his nipple and then out again, changing direction in figure-eights and curlicues and arabesques.

Sherlock concentrates on the problem of how to keep breathing.

Then he'd gone to war, and everything had changed. Now "too busy for sex" meant something frighteningly different from what it had during his days at uni. It didn't mean he'd be cramming for his end-of-year examination: it meant he'd be stitching up someone's ripped-up belly while crouching behind an upturned van, trying to prevent wind-blown sand from sticking to the oozing wound.

Despite this, he'd managed to add a new continent to his log with women. He'd also had some first-hand experience about shagging men. There had been times when mere survival was an aphrodisiac in itself. There had been times when sex was the only fitting language in which to celebrate the joy of being still breathing. And there were times when worship was due --and duly given-- not to an individual, to a comrade or to a friend, but to the astonishing, stubbornly hardy fact of life itself.

It had not been any kind of shock for him; having a determinedly out-of-the-closet lesbian older sister had gone a long way with him to dispel prejudice and unfounded assumptions. Moreover, his medical training meant he'd started at an advantage and had not been unduly hindered by any technical glitches.

Sherlock's self-control only works up to a certain point. Beyond that, sunt leones. His right hand snakes up and his long fingers grab John's hair just above the nape of his neck. John lets go of his invisible calligraphy and allows his head to be pulled back and up as Sherlock holds fast and shakes him a bit, making the roots of his hair tingle.

When they'd sent him home, he'd been too broken, inside and out, to care about sex. For one thing, he had nightmares. He'd never been the one to get dressed and slip away at once after getting what he wanted; in fact, he liked to cuddle afterwards, and stay the night, much to the delight of most of his partners. But now that was not possible anymore. Violent dreams which made him gasp and cry were inevitably due to throw a spanner in the works where cuddling was concerned.

Then Sherlock pushes himself up, and without letting go of his hair, he rises to kiss John, who whimpers softly and in his turn strokes his own hand along Sherlock's temple and through his curls as he answers the kiss.

Before meeting Sherlock, he'd been considering resort to paid company. But he couldn't afford an upscale call-girl, and cheaper whores didn't really attract him.

Yet he felt a need, a yearning, to be in the company of a woman, to get off with a woman. As though re-establishing what in his former life had been one among the most pleasant of his habits, could maybe have the power to finally unhook him from his addiction to the battlefield. He'd read a couple of lines somewhere, from James Hillman's book *A terrible love of war*, which had stuck with him. The quote was about how in our contemporary societies there are rites of passage for entering a war, but no rites of passage to step out of it. The mindset of war remains ingrained, like a sort of alien parasite, making the world of peace and its works look like an illusion. It seemed to explain so much of what he felt had been happening to him - or rather, not happening-- but even so, there appeared to be little that he could do, on his own, to set things right. In his innermost heart, he knew he didn't really want the war to stop. He still had shivers, like he'd had as a boy, when he recited to himself a bit of poetry by Friedrich Schiller he'd learned in middle school: *Saddle up your black steeds, o my friends, comrades in arms: / your hearts will leap at the din of the spears. / Youth smiles at life and its charms; / your fervent horses assert their worth. / Do not spare your blood, your honour, / which is the prize of victory: / Glory would turn away in disgust.*¹

John knew in his mind that war was not only an addiction, but a lethal trap. Yet his heart refused to cooperate.

Sherlock pulls back and stares at John with eyes wide and dark with desire. John blinks, licks his lower lip, and smiles on one side, like he does when he's expecting something nice. Sherlock doesn't smile; he presses the palm of his hand lightly on John's already bulging crotch. John slides back on the sofa until he's supine, his head on the armrest, mirroring Sherlock's earlier position.

John had always had a strong sense of reality. There was no use in trying to change himself; things were what they were. And if they'd never be quite right again, well, that happened. But "if" doesn't equal "since", and hope does tend to be the last survivor even in the direst straights. What Dr. John H. Watson could in fact do, was to keep doing his best not to sabotage such a convenient arrangement himself.

Then Sherlock had burst into his life.

Truth be told, during those first few hours he'd felt shell-shocked more than anything. 27" of Sherlock's conversation and 4'49" of his brother's² had done him more good than months of

¹ John is probably quoting --with some imprecision-- from *Wallenstein's camp*, scene XI.

² Yes, I timed it on the DVD.

psychotherapy-- but mental well-being didn't come without a price tag. John had felt like he was riding a roller-coaster, until... Until he'd shot the cabbie.

The clarity of vision as he took aim, the precise feel of the trigger under his fingertip, the sound of the bullet being shot and the fainter (perhaps just imagined) slap as it found its living target: these sensations --at once familiar yet every time different-- had grounded him, restored his focus, and cleared his mind.

Now he knew what he wanted to do.

Many things were still more than a bit wrong: to mention but one, Sherlock's heartfelt sigh of relief while thanking him for accepting his declaration of marital status at the restaurant meant he'd not be in a condition to act out on what promised to be a serious bout of infatuation on his part.

But, in one evening, he'd found a reasonably priced flat, a crazy, fascinating flatmate, a nice motherly landlady, and a reason to live.

On the whole, he considered himself rather lucky.

He wasn't yet aware he'd fallen in love.

Sherlock slides his hand up and under John's sweater, teasing his shirt and vest out of the waistband of his trousers and slipping inside, up to his nipples, which he pinches in succession. The other hand is busy with the button and zipper, and then with John's briefs. John closes his eyes, exhales, and reaches blindly for the sash of Sherlock's gown, but Sherlock bats his hand away. "Later," he whispers. "Lay still."

They both knew they were coming to this partnership (for want of a better term) from very different places, looking for very different things. John wanted to feel alive, Sherlock wanted to feel loved. John was used to starting with sex and allowing it (if it so happened) to build into affection; Sherlock began (if he ever did) by risking his affection and this, sometimes, in the long run, may enable him to desire sex.

Someone who saw them together in the very early days, and who knew Sherlock's attitude very well indeed, once commented that "...if he were to have those feelings for anyone, ever, it would be John."³

The question remained, what feelings were those?

Sherlock's hand is warm on John's crotch, and John can't prevent himself from pushing a little. But Sherlock lets go of him, and takes his hands instead, holding them at John's sides and curling down on him. He doesn't touch him with his mouth: he only breathes on him, warm and cooling at the same time. John's cock stirs and bobs and John feels like a god is breathing life on him, giving him a second, completely different soul, made of wonder and mystery.

It is unlikely that answers present themselves to problems which the involved party or parties refuse to investigate. The exact nature of John's and Sherlock's respective feelings for each other stayed unexplored for a further 7.5 weeks after that first night, while they worked on four more cases together and John took care to define his role for himself. Sherlock was a warrior, and so John's colleague; John was a diagnostician, and so Sherlock's colleague. One thing he was not, and he wouldn't tolerate any misunderstandings in this regard: he was not a battlefield tourist, and Sherlock was not his guide.

None of the cases had been as complex or dramatically interesting as the Case of the Blind Banker, but one of them involved dealing with a gang of old-fashioned jewel robbers, and when they were finally cornered, there was a violent scuffle. At one point, John's gun was lost when he was tackled from behind; Sherlock got rid of his own opponent with a punch to the solar plexus, but as he was throwing himself at the man trying to strangle John, another turned up with a knife. John had kicked his man in the shin, turned about, and quickly stuck his thumbs in his eyes; then he'd made a dive for the bloke with the knife, rolling him over and knocking him out with a neat sock under his jaw. He'd not normally hit a man on the ground, but since the beginning this one fight hadn't gone according to any known rule.

³ The insightful observer is lavellington, in a comment posted on 2011-02-01 12:32 am at the page mentioned above.

They could hear the Met's sirens in the distance as they had stood face to face, hands on knees, catching their breath. Lestrade would be there in a minute. Their eyes had met. And suddenly, without warning, John had left a cursory, very small, rather apologetic kiss on Sherlock's lips, as though he knew that nothing would ever come of it, but he just couldn't help himself. Sherlock hadn't reacted, but John had felt his lips tremble.

Sherlock keeps breathing, and sniffing, and holding John's hands which are warm and a little wet with sweat, until John can't stand it anymore. "Sherlock... Stop. Now."

It hadn't been easy for either of them to bring out in the open at last the question of how matters stood between them. Some rather surreal conversations had taken place between kitchen table and sofa, before sessions were finally moved to John's bedroom-- Sherlock's being uninhabitable, according to John's standards of hygiene.

"I liked that."

"Want more?"

"Of the same, or...?"

"Either. Both. Whatever you wish."

"Yes."

"Yes to what?"

"Everything. One thing at a time. Even polar bears shag once a year."

Sherlock pulls himself up, peels his gown off like the skin of a ripe peach. He's half-hard. He grabs John's trousers and briefs and pulls them down to his knees. Then he shuffles forward and takes position. "Wait," John moans. "It's all right," growls Sherlock. "Let me. I got myself ready earlier, hoping... anyway, you know we've both tested clean," and he lowers himself slowly. John lets out a gasp.

They're making discoveries as they go.

John discovers the surprise of never having enough of Sherlock. He wants more, more of everything: the good, as well as the bit not good, and the frankly bad. After a whole night spent cuddling, he still wishes to pass every moment of the day with Sherlock, to the point when it hurts and he goes for a walk alone to try and get off this high, which has nothing to do with morphine but threatens to be so very much more addictive.

Sherlock discovers in himself the truly horrible feeling that he **cares**-- something he'd not allowed himself to feel since his hamster had died of some undiagnosed ailment, and he'd dissected it to try and find an answer. He'd been reproached both for being too upset about a critter, and for having no respect for its dead carcass. The occasion had given him, at the early age of five years and three months, the clear and indelible measure of how illogical adults really are.

*John comes fast, while Sherlock watches him, stroking his face with both hands. As soon as he can speak again, "What do you want?" he asks. "Hold me...?" Sherlock says, and John knows it's enough, because it's **more**: more of anything Sherlock had thought possible in almost twelve years. So John slips out, settles himself with his face nuzzling Sherlock's neck, and he holds him tight as Sherlock makes a purring noise in the back of his throat and then slowly falls asleep.*

Both have discovered the need for this, whatever it is, to never end. Ever.

Now, whenever sleep takes them while they're both in the same bed, they always unconsciously fall into spooning, Sherlock holding John's back, John curled back against Sherlock's chest. And they both sleep deeply.

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