

Season Three, or Why Sherlock Breaks My Heart with Observations on fennishjournal's meta and five Digressions

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Premise

I love John Watson. I really do. But his dark side, revealed in flashes in s1 and s2, is taking hold in s3 and I don't like this, don't like this at all.

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Generals

1. Sherlock doesn't like stereotypes
 - save the underdog: he is one
 - the hat, the collar, the swirl, the mind palace: he is not one
 - marriages: he hates them, but organises John&Mary's
 - Christmas dinners: he hates them, but brings John&Mary
2. Sherlock is back, but John isn't
 - beats him after his repeated apologies
 - won't thank him
 - won't forgive him unless in (assumed) point of death
 - misses that he's hemorrhaging
3. Sherlock feels like The Hound Dog
 - only worth for his usefulness
 - social misfit
 - undeserving of someone else's commitment
 - disposable
4. Sherlock doesn't like not knowing because surprises are always of the unpleasant sort. Surprises come most often from women (exception made for Mrs. Hudson, who on the other hand is most surprising to everybody else). Lack of factual knowledge leaves a void which, unless carefully guarded, tends to be filled by that treacherous fluid, hope: a sure recipe for disaster.

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In detail: 1, Sherlock

In order for John and Mary to stay together, Sherlock is ready to go on **wanting** forever and never getting. He is resigned to this fate: after all, he had no good reason to hope that John would respond to his devotion. So he tries to make do as best he can. He sits on John's chair: if he can't have his back held by John, he'll have it held by John's chair. Even, if he can't have his John, he'll try to **become** him...

John wants Mary, therefore Sherlock wants her to stick with him and vice versa. Moreover he wants them not only in a stable relationship, but in a relationship based on truth, which is after all Sherlock's specialty-- all the more so as he's recently experienced firsthand how devastating lies can be on John's trust. It helps that Mary, far from being jealous, has surprised him by promising to "talk John 'round".

Mary's welcoming attitude prevents Sherlock from attacking her like he used to attack John's former dates: Sherlock works like a well-adjusted dog in that respect. This does not mean,

however, that he can adapt easily to the prospect that having John for himself once again in no more on the cards. Sherlock's private talk with David is a textbook instance of displaced aggression: if *I* can't have John in the name of his domestic bliss, much less will I allow an inferior form of life like you to break it. More or less the same process by which sheepdog guard sheep from wolves.

Sherlock not only forgives Mary for shooting him, immediately and implicitly. He has removed himself from the John&Mary scenario so completely that he sees his own survival as irrelevant. By the end of season 3, Sherlock has saved John's life and future happiness by jumping from the roof, by pulling him out of the bonfire, by switching off the bomb on the Tube and by shooting Magnussen. None of these has been in any way acknowledged by John.

After defusing the other, metaphorical ticking bomb of her lies, Sherlock does all he can to put Mary in the best possible position for John to want her again: the position of a client, the alternative at the moment being the position of the repudiated wife.

The plan works, and John isn't even required to leave his anger aside. Sherlock does all the work himself, so that John can play reluctant and nurse his righteous rage: "Always your way", yes, because John's way would have been to break with Mary once and for all, and of course not in favour of Sherlock. If Sherlock hadn't intervened to clear the air and provide a new basis for a healthy relationship, John would have turned into a chronically depressive, prematurely aged, lonely, angry-with-the-world, sexually frustrated gambling addict with a drinking problem.

Sherlock is basically writing fanfic about Mary with his very blood in order for the story to go on. *Their* story, not his. Appropriately, his bleeding is internal. He only needs to survive until the Mary-as-client point—after all, if death obliterates him, so be it. Since John reacted to his reappearance with unsuppressed, unmitigated anger, Sherlock has been a dead man walking anyway.

Mycroft asks Sherlock why he hates Magnussen. The answer is "because he attacks people who are different and preys on their secrets". Like Sherlock himself: he values truth above all else, but he has been forced since his school years to keep hidden a large part of who he is, or he wouldn't have been able to survive on the fringes of society. On top of that he's a loner, without even the resources an organised minority group could provide.

Conversely, Sherlock, like me, is obsessed by the fear that something vital is lying just out of his field of vision, something which everybody else can plainly see. A taxi-driver, a photographer, Jim from IT, Harry for Harriet, etc. Missing such an element fires a vicious circle of anxiety, because once he's missed it, he won't come to the right conclusions, therefore he will prove useless, therefore he'll become disposable. "Mummy and Daddy are very displeased, Sherlock".

Yet in season 3 more than ever before Dr. Watson may be the one who saves lives, but only because it is Sherlock who timely brings him where there are lives to save.

In the case of Sholto, it is actually Sherlock who primarily saves his life by having him focus on someone else rather than on himself. Sherlock is intimately acquainted with the psychology of suicide. Such outward, self-effacing focus must be something Sherlock is used to need often, and more than ever during the hiatus, in order to stand loneliness and pain, both physical and mental.

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In detail: 2, John

John reacts at the reappearance of Sherlock by choosing to hold on to his grief for Sherlock's death rather than to Sherlock himself. John asked for the miracle of having Sherlock back, yet once he has he finds no better way to express his feelings than violence. Note that Sherlock

doesn't fight back, although it must be a harsh test of his self-control after what we saw him suffering during the hiatus.

John expects that his belated and qualified "I'm sorry" to Mrs. Hudson will excuse him for his silence, yet Sherlock's apologies (something which he knows doesn't come easy to Sherlock) don't stop him going amok. John at this point is like a mentally unbalanced dog, who doesn't react to the surrender of his opponent!

From what Sherlock admits to Mrs. Hudson, it seems that John literally told him to piss off. If we go back to their very first cab ride in season 1, ep. 1, this means that John is knowingly expressing agreement with the mass of those who since Sherlock's childhood couldn't find any better comment than that when faced with Sherlock's brilliance. Which, by the way, is the best he thinks he can offer. John is being an idiot.

John doesn't thank Sherlock for any of the times Sherlock has saved/saves his life. Not even for pulling him out of a lit bonfire, moving burning branches without any protection, although this time it was not Sherlock's fault that he was in danger.

John doesn't realise or acknowledge that Sherlock's comment about him having shaved his moustache off is the identical opposite of the comment Sherlock made about Molly's lipstick on the very day he met John. He didn't want Molly, but he does want John, and the dickhead doesn't even notice, nor does he notice when Sherlock offers him a case rather than a cup of tea.

John doesn't express any objection at Sherlock's raw self-flagellation during his best man's speech. His hug at the end means no more no less than "I like how you admitted at last to your shortcomings".

Dr. John H. Watson doesn't show any hint of worry about Sherlock's health during his escape from hospital after a near-fatal gunshot wound, which by the way was all on John's behalf, nor does he see how grave is the danger. It seems that Dr. Watson is more alert and ready to save the life of a hemorrhaging guardsman than that of his hemorrhaging alleged best friend.

John's "forgiveness" of Mary on Christmas day amounts to as much as blackmail: "I am very pissed off, and it will come out now and then". John had a golden opportunity to be generous. Instead he chooses to hypocritically clinging to his status as the wronged party, while pretending to be truthful. If I were Mary, I would not take staying in the relationship as a given, not even for the good of the child (most especially not for the good of the child).

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A few minor notes on Mycroft:

-- He keeps a crystal ball on his desk...

-- ...and food pictures in his gym room!

-- He shares with his brother a low opinion of his sociability: "...delighted not to have me hanging around". However, he seems to have adopted a more active attitude about "others": wielding power over them and therefore keeping himself safe, at least as long as he can stay on top of the game. An exercise which Sherlock finds boring, limiting and probably despicable. (From Mycroft's role in Sherlock's Mind Palace, I suspect that Sherlock was the first of Mycroft's guinea pigs for manipulation).

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A few minor notes on Mary:

-- while Irene was completely unreadable, and therefore enigmatic, Mary is completely readable, but (surprise!) no less enigmatic.

-- Mary runs after John who runs after Sherlock (like Ariosto's Bradamante, but with less chances). As soon as one stops, the whole carousel stops. (See above about John without Mary).

-- Mary, this Mary, is the door between John Watson, Afghan war veteran and best friend to Sherlock Holmes, and an ordinary life. Mary also *wants* an ordinary life after having had an extraordinary one. She can be for John the model Sherlock never would be. Sherlock in turn is the element which anchors John&Mary's shared dream of normality to the factual reality of their separate, extraordinary pasts and their present, shared ambivalence between inclination and project.

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Observations of fennishjournal's meta

1. TRF

"Sherlock isn't very amused at having to put on the hat": Sherlock doesn't like being stereotyped, whether as Donovan's "freak" or Riley's "newspaper hero with the funny hat". However it seems he's resigned to it; it's quite possible that the people in his like who ever saw him as a person rather than a bag of tricks can be counted on the fingers of one hand. I'd say Mrs. Hudson, Lestrade, and John; Molly? perhaps, but after all she's got a "type", and imo she really saw through it only when she noticed how sad Sherlock looked.

It is very sad that by TFR even John is allowing himself to be swayed by the wave of public recognition, and begins to say things like "don't do The Look".

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Digression no.1: I find it positively strange that the topic of John's own responsibilities in The Fall has not been addressed at all, not in the script, not by the fandom. I mentioned at the time to a number of fellow writers how it seems to be John who glories in the notoriety of his blog about Sherlock, while Sherlock is dismissive and occasionally annoyed by the sudden fame. It is not a paradox: Sherlock has only ever cared for the good opinion of the very few people he considers worthy of his attention. What a pity that he can't see the danger implicit in his new position (because Donovan, Riley and the general public are idiots, and therefore irrelevant), and what a shame that John is never troubled by a second thought about the consequences.

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"He has no idea how important he is to John or how loyalty and or empathy works when directed at him": all the same he can't help hoping, and this frightens him because hope in his experience has always been followed by disaster.

"My Emotions Don't Matter, starring John Watson": which btw may be why he thinks nothing of using them as an excuse for hurting others, e.g. Mrs. Hudson right after he met her in ASiP and whom he leaves alone in her grief during the hiatus, Sherlock at the reunion, his tentative dates in s2, etc.

"Sherlock clearly does not understand why he comes over as a know-it-all during the trial or why that might be a bad thing": Sherlock was actively *trained* to be a know-it-all (I wrote fic with more details about it, "Five doors of perceptions: 3. Sight"). He is not flexible enough to hold his flame under the bushel,

"Sherlock – who has trouble with emotional nuances – thinks he and Moriarty are similar when they really, really aren't": true, but it's easy to understand how this may happen. What they have in common is intelligence, and if in Sherlock's worldview only intelligence matters, then they are indeed similar, even the same.

(Curiously, this thought process which sorts out facts to extract the one and only relevant element, and on that alone construes a conclusion, was historically formalised in the criminal trial by jury).

"Sherlock is an ASS to the headmistress": perhaps he's been really telling off *his* headmistress of his school years for her negligence.

"Sherlock looking sad when he thinks no one can see him": imo he feels sad because he knows by now that he will have to die. No Lazarus plan can cushion the feeling. For one thing, not even Mycroft can be sure that the plan will work, so the risk is there. For another, again imo Sherlock feels that of things are at this point it means he has failed. He was not clever enough to prevent being cornered in a way that spells ruin for himself and for the lives entwined with his own. Which leads me to

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Digression no.2: In Sherlock's mind, the wages of idiocy is failure and the wages of failure is death. There is one detail in THoB which seems to have gone lost to the fandom; once again, I discussed it at the time and wrote fic about it ("You ain't nothing").

The voice in his mind that made him call himself "stupid" on the staircase in ASiP, and that in HLV is revealed as belonging to Mycroft, gives unsubtle hints in THoB that Sherlock's natural role is that of "a hound-dog", and that if he can't catch his rabbit, glowing or not that it may be, it will mean that he's useless and undeserving of having a friend.

In s3, judgment is given and the conviction executed: when Mary shoots him because he didn't foresee she would be at Magnussen's, he feels he's been "put down" like Redbeard.

Restarting his heart in order to have time enough to set John's future life to rights is nothing more than a delay in the execution. From that moment on, Sherlock accepts his status as a walking corpse, disposable, irrelevant except for the intended use of allowing John&Mary to build a truthful relationship, safe from impending disaster.

Digression no.3: Sherlock makes a point of dealing with the worst crises alone not only because in his past help was rarely offered and never requested (after all, needing help is for idiots), but also because I suspect that whenever help was available, it was counterproductive. Sherlock does things in unusual ways, which means any help would have been given along different, commonplace lines, and therefore would have hindered Sherlock's way of doing things rather than enabling it.

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"Sherlock is on the side of the angels, yes, but he will happily play at having an anti-social personality disorder to get Moriarty where he wants him. Still, telling the man he has loathed so intensely that "I'm you" must have cost him something." I think Sherlock actually believes he's a sociopath, so deeply that he never made time to update the obsolete label. Of course, he milks the term for what it's worth whenever he needs it, but I believe that it must have felt at one time like the only fitting word for the chasm Sherlock saw between himself and everybody else (except Mycroft). Said "others" in turn don't seem to have done anything to bridge the gap and make Sherlock feel included!

The handshake with Moriarty comes after a lapse of time when every person Sherlock touched was shot by Moriarty's killers. Moriarty has made burnt land around him, and Sherlock himself has had to send John away in anger in order to enact the Lazarus plan, so Moriarty at that time is *literally the only person Sherlock can touch*. "I am you" imo means at least two things: one, that there is a subset in society where only these two elements, Moriarty and Sherlock himself, are classed; two, that Moriarty's debt ("I owe you") is paid, because creditor and debtor are identical, therefore the same, untouchable person.

Sherlock "does not understand that others don't realise what's going on inside his head and heart and is hurt and confused by this as well as annoyed". Yet they pose as omniscient... This

paradox must have taken hold in Sherlock's mind at an early age, and I tend to believe Mycroft had a hand in this. Which brings me to

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Digression no.4: I tend to think that Sherlock's worldview, opinion of himself, and work ethics, have been shaped in his childhood by someone who was very clever, very manipulative, surely well-meaning, but also very young and cut off from reliable input about parenting. Mycroft is an obvious suspect in this regard. In fact, he has more than one point in common with my mother.

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2. TEH

"Non-verbal emotions people are trying to hide": I'm afraid I agree with the "horrifying interpretation" that Sherlock can't read correctly subtle non-verbal expressions. It rings true to what I witnessed myself, i.e. the non-verbal hatred of parents for each other, concealed by verbal expression of fondness for their child. (Unsurprisingly, said child grew up being more than a little not good at social interaction).

The "tragical" interpretation that Sherlock is trying to be helpful, protecting him from trusting people who in fact hate him, sadly fits with Sherlock's relationship with Mycroft, who loves him very much indeed but makes a show of detesting him... All the more so if we assume Mycroft was the main influence on Sherlock's *Weltanschauung*.

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Digression no.5: There is a chilling feeling of déjà-vu in Sherlock's return. It's a bit like the return of Peter Pan, who finds his loved ones now love someone else. The difference is that Sherlock was away fighting very real dragons and shedding very real blood, all the while holding on to John's image and voice to get through his ordeals. Yet, on his reappearance, John treats him as though Sherlock had tricked and left him to go on a holiday alone, with the difference that John is physically violent.

I think Sherlock underrated the circumstance that John has been accustomed to be under fire for less personally relevant reasons than Sherlock's safety, and would take being left behind as an implicit insult to his courage.

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At this point, I am sorry to say that despite everything, I still don't like Sherlock's attitude to Molly. He used her to perform the Fall and uses her again, testing her as a possible surrogate for John. His words in both occasions are just those commonplace compliments he knows she's going to fall for. As I see it, Sherlock's only completely sincere address to Molly were his apologies at the Christmas party. The best I can say about TEH is that he makes an effort (and a rather clumsy one at that) because he knows he owes her. Plus, her boyfriend means Sherlock is safe to interact with her safely enough when the need arises.

Ok, the train scene.

Sherlock managed to stay alive and to return at last, only to be beaten bloody by John. Sherlock *apologises*, not once but repeatedly, to no avail. Will he accept that John will never forgive him, even after learning of Sherlock's reasons for faking his death? No, he won't. Sherlock needs to be forgiven for saving John's life, although at a cost which didn't only fall on Sherlock's own shoulders. Therefore, when chance offers him a way, he takes it. Apologies don't work on John in standard conditions? They may work in point of death.

Pity that John's forgiveness, given in that situation, is suspicious. Right then and there, John believes there is going to be no future for either of them, so it doesn't matter whether he says the words or not. They're worthless, like gold nuggets to a starving digger in a snowstorm.

I agree that Sherlock's laugh is relief, pure and simple, at the surprise of knowing himself forgiven, but I think he tries to hide it under the pretense that he played a practical joke because he feels he can't trust *this* John who hurt him so deeply in body and heart, not yet at least.

I find it very sad that at the end of TEH Sherlock puts on the hat and "goes out to be Sherlock Holmes". Imo it's a way to go along with John's tastes and wishes: Sherlock slips into the positive stereotype he hates, because John used to enjoy it... and in fact John joins him on the pavement and preens as "The Hero's Blogger".

John wants a Hound-Dog to show and win prizes, while Sherlock wants his friend back.

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