

**Meta: BBC Sherlock , series 1, episode 1, A Study in Pink (ASiP)**

by mazaher

February 5, 2013

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Being my contribution to the BBC Sherlock rewatch, hosted by [fennishjournal](#) at this page:  
<http://fennishjournal.livejournal.com/48533.html>

Caps from <http://sc.aithine.org>: great job, thank you!

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**John and PTSD, 1 – nightmare and aftermath**

Great acting by MF since the very beginning, that sitting up all of a sudden.



Great directing also, with the heavy breathing coming on slowly, as it actually happens when you wake up from a nightmare and the physical world seems to come online a bit at a time. And the bed next to the radiator for warmth—nice touch, aching shoulder, aching leg, home from warm climates, and the chill of dejection.



Pet bit of head! canon: John doesn't miss \*war\*, he wouldn't be a doctor if he liked destruction; he misses \*teamwork\*, the sort of harsh, real-world teamwork you get when you're keeping each other alive (and not when you're watching a game in a pub). Sorry, Mycroft, but you're not completely right for this once.

John sitting alone in his room, \*barefoot\*. He will be sitting barefoot again after TRF. Barefoot, no boots, means not going anywhere, his freedom of movement gone. (in the same context, I used to dream I was missing my bicycle).



John raises his chin, but not his withers (7th cervical); defiant, but losing, he keeps a defensive position with neck retracted



Apple and RAMC mug... An apple a day keeps the doctor away, and this is also symbolic, esp. with carrion crows as background noise.



## John and PTSD, 2 – therapy

Other bit of head! canon: John's trust issues have little to do with Ella, and a lot more with the war. Some breach of trust on the part of the commanding officers is my bet, bringing death to part of the team and grievous harm to John personally. Rewatching this early therapy session, I see already in place those signs which I got much more easily after TRF: John doesn't mistrust Ella as much as he doesn't *\*want\** to feel better. He feels he hasn't the *\*right\** to feel better, given that he's alive and someone else who should be is not.



He lies to Ella in such a recognisable way (knotted brow, tense, fingertips bunched for focus) that it's clear to both he's doing it in order to be left alone, preferably without a fuss. I like Ella. She's doing her best while lacking the basic experience of combat, and she's doing well. She's learning from John as much as he's learning from her. What is he learning, you may ask. He's learning the pov of someone who is willing to be led where he comes from. Not so easy to find.



She also knows that "it will take a while" to adjust to civilian life: because there should be rites for that, and there are not, so a former soldier is left alone trying to redefine himself. (John is going to be lucky with the redefining, as Sherlock is going to help in a critical way a little later—one up for Sherlock).

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### **John and PTSD, 3 – taking a walk**

Seen from the shoes up: shoes, determinedly trying to go somewhere; giving himself the order to take a walk, so that he won't shoot himself before dinner.



\*But\* stuck in a rut, banked with "no"s: no London on an Army pension, no job, nothing happening, not the John Watson everybody including himself knew, no self-definition, \*loss of competence\* even just in walking, no help, no flatmate...  
\*Bang\*! a stroke of luck is coming, and perhaps it's the first time John gets one as much as it's the first time Sherlock is \*being\* one.

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### **Sherlock and sex, 1 – Molly**

"I refreshed it a bit" – (Ah, here she is at it again, someone else who wants \*that\* from me and wastes my time; better be rude and keep her at bay).  
The first personal interaction we see Sherlock having with a human being (and one of the most innocuous among them, if annoying) is keeping said human being at a distance.



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## **Sherlock and John , 1 – texting and flatmates**

"I prefer to text": less personal involvement (oh, how I understand him!)

Then John offers his \*and Sherlock thanks him\*, still a bit wary, but unexpectedly pleased: how long since anyone offered Sherlock anything he wants/needs?



So, Sherlock takes him up on the flatmate proposition, at the same time testing him to see whether he will be intimidated by riding crops, mortuary frequentations and apparent mind-reading. Fact is, what puts others off doesn't intimidate John in the least; he has the face of one who is trying not to make too much of the first \*thing\* which happened to him in a very long while.

What's interesting is that there is a verbal enumeration of facts about John and none about Sherlock, but it is clear to both that Sherlock has made as much known about himself as he deduced about John.

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## **Sherlock and John , 2 -- first time at 221b**

Sherlock \*waits\* for John to climb the stairs.



Then "straightens things up a bit", then clearly hopes for John's good opinion about his website, and doesn't give him up for lost when John doesn't deliver.

Then he allows John to \*see\* his happiness at four suicides, just as later, after the chat in the cab, he will admit that he "didn't expect to be right about everything".



Dear me, how starved is he for approval?  
Lestrade breaks my heart when he nods his thanks to Sherlock.

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### **Sherlock's ethics, 1 – why not a criminal?**

"My husband was just the same": a criminal executed in Florida!  
Which brings me to a point Donovan makes later, and which I discussed with athens7 the other day:

Why doesn't Sherlock act, or also act, as a criminal?

He could have a great career, or second career, and (note this carefully) he would beat boredom once and for all, because he wouldn't have to *\*wait\** for someone else to do something interesting: he could do interesting things of his own accord.

Imo, he doesn't do that precisely because of a sense of justice. Catch is, it is a sense of justice all of his own. When Sherlock goes out of the field of sheer empirical experience and into the realm of principles, he gets into frightful trouble (e.g. my head! canon for THoB: how does one learn to face fear? by watching the best). But the question is exactly this: that he does go into principles, if nothing else because working on principles allows him to keep a distance from the actual human beings.

It is obvious that, for all his positivistic attitude, Holmes is much more at ease with principles (the idealistic principles of the era, underlying all education in those times) than Sherlock is in this post-modern era. Holmes' ethics is human ethics, although at times wielded with a slant of his own. Sherlock's is not human ethics, and if it is, it's not an adult human's ethics.

(I am reminded of one ep in "Ai confini della realtà", where a kid with super powers kept his family and friends prisoners in his house and gave them all that *\*he\** considered good, and was torture for them: only chips and chocolate for food, endless tv, no baths, etc.)

But my point is, it *\*is\** an ethics of sorts, and Sherlock is ascetically consistent in following it. Nothing of that "do what I say, don't do what I do". He is not self-righteous (and don't make me quote about heroes and angels). He doesn't pose as a moral compass—he will soon be very happy to count of John for that.

So imo Sherlock does have his own, totally not-garden variety sense of justice. As for self-awareness, he can barely help lacking *\*that\**! His loneliness must not be underrated. It's hard to imagine what one's face looks like if there are no mirrors around.

(Btw, Irene Adler may have been seen as a potential mirror; as Moffat (?) said, Sherlock goes "Oh, look, there's another of me!".)

It's even worse if, once you get a reflecting surface at last, the rest of the world starts calling you a narcissist.

At the very least, anyway, Sherlock does have enough self-awareness to know he can't pose to society as a model of ethics.

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## Sherlock helps John redefine himself

Here we have John, a broken man (all the pieces are there, but in a chaos). Here we have Sherlock, a man who sees. Watch how he brings the pieces back into order with a few choice questions and the implicit offer (\*not\* order) to be once again a part of a team, the sort of team John never imagined could exist in civilian life.



Why does Sherlock do this?

One answer may be, because he needs an assistant. But he's taken good care so far to avoid any entanglement with "people" (pronounced like "fffriends" in THoB). He would be doubly careful with someone who will likely share rooms with him.

It must be something else. What?

Imo, the sheer heck of it. Here is something brilliant he can do, something fine which is broken and he can mend. Why should he not? Again quoting from earlier discussion with athens7, kindness. A rare one for Sherlock, but here it is.

Sherlock won't take care of making another's day a little better (he'd see it as a waste of his time), but he will exhaust himself in order to make their whole lives a lot better, even knowing that the best he will get is "piss off". Donovan is right: why the hell should he only work on one side, and not the other, or both? Hint: \*this\* sort of kindness. Which is imo not so different from Forsythe's Holmes.

And watch how uncertain he is under all his tall-slim-beautiful self-assurance.



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## John helps Sherlock define himself

Have you noticed that the theme music sounds like rather sad circus music? Sherlock is the star tiger in a three ring circus, dealt with by whips and chairs.

When Sherlock asks for John's questions, he's expecting the usual piss-off outcome with a probability he can calculate with spockian precision to 98.57%. He goes full steam ahead all the same, because he's not a man who will cherish illusions, only to have them explode in his

face at the most inconvenient moment. Better to make or most likely break the deal here and now. The small sigh after he says "The police don't consult amateurs" makes me want to have a one-on-one on each of the people who broke his heart and then said he didn't have one to begin with.

Bless them both, he's in for a surprise.



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### **Donovan, 1 – freak**

"Hello, freak"—and Sherlock doesn't bat an eyelid. This has been going on for a very long time, and Sherlock's had to learn to disregard other people's attitudes completely. He lives and moves in enemy territory, so to speak, and is clever enough to do it visibly and proudly, instead of hiding out somewhere or keeping a low profile. How the cost in ...resignation?



You know the feeling, being so deprived of other people's approval, or even just their understanding, that you find a way to approve of yourself, just so that you can get to the end of another day without losing the last shred of feeling of self-worth in the face of the rest of mankind.

That said, until TRF I rather liked Donovan, making her way in a hard men's world as a very good officer. I still can't forgive her, although I do understand her; the trap she falls into in TRF caught a lot of other people, good people, among which ...i-won't-tell-who.

"Do people usually assume you're the murderer?" – "Now and then, yes" (chilling, now that we know about TRF).

Btw, twice already Sherlock used the word "friend", one for the skull (making clear that he/she wasn't what is usually termed a friend) and now Donovan. In Sherlock's own idiom, "friend" is a bad word! He worries when John says he's met a friend of his, relaxes when John says he's an enemy... (I have my musical theories about THoB, but I'll air them when we'll rewatch that).

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### Crime scene, 1 – thought processes

Sherlock's thought processes are verbal, but not syntactical. The words appearing and disappearing are a stroke of genius, the nearest thing to showing biologically non/pre-human thought processes at work after The Upanishad.



"What mistake?" -- "Pink!"



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### Crime scene, 2 – Dr. Watson

Sherlock is careful to address John with his title and as a colleague (which sets a precedent John will however often forget: colleague is fine in Sherlockese, friend is not; remember the mix-up with Sebastian, but I'll analyse that in due time with TBB), consolidating his barely-reconstructed self-image.

John is in a difficult position as a bone of contention, and he deals admirably with both dogs.



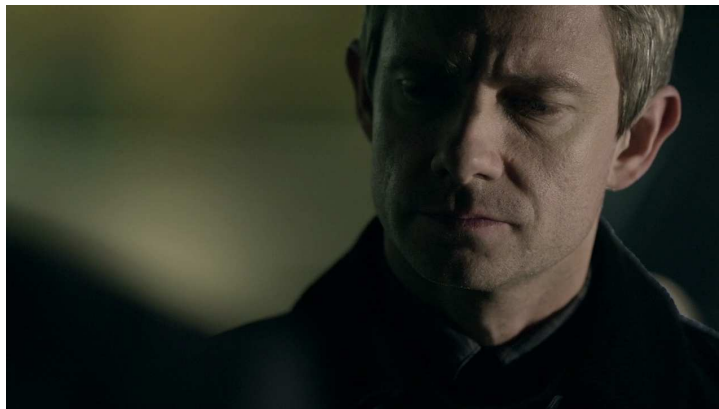
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## **Mycroft, 1 – testing**

More head! canon: both brothers in ASiP do testing on John. Sherlock to see 1. if John can interact tolerably with him (see above) and 2. if he's manoeuvrable (the give-me-the-phone stunt). Mycroft wants to see 1. whether John is safe to be with Sherlock (the nothing-you'd-be-uncomfortable-with stunt) and 2. whether he is manoeuvrable (the trust-issues stunt).



However unpleasantly worded and delivered, the final appreciation of John's hand being steady is high praise; Mycroft won't let John come apart (when he asks "who the hell are you?" even though it would probably win his hand if he wanted to keep John off Sherlock. (And how *\*perfect\** is Gatiss?!))



Btw, *\*both\** brothers think John passes with flying colours. The banter at 221b before they go out again is already Granada-grade (horrid pun, sorry, I won't do it again), and they literally begin to be on the same page (or rather on the same still) when Sherlock pulls out the pink suitcase.

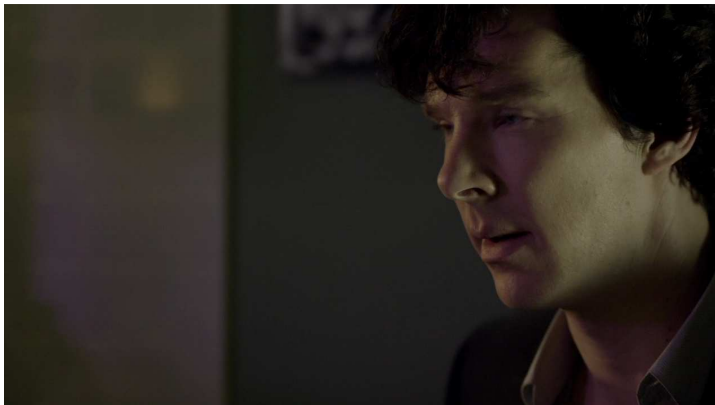


## **Sherlock and sex, 2 – John**

"Or a boyfriend? which is fine, by the way?" -- "I know it's fine", and Sherlock's expression changes to wariness and disappointment.



John seemed to be passing all the tests, but it was too much to hope. Like everybody else, he wants sex: dull, distracting, and dangerous, as intimacy with people always turns out to be. As for John, I'm still unsure whether he was actually coming on to Sherlock or not. He looks very ambiguous on the matter, and surely not at ease in his attempt at neutral conversation. What I find heartbreaking is Sherlock's thank you, so damn relieved.



Btw, the second thank you in 50 minutes's worth of ep...

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## **The team in action, or, the chase**

The running through the London map is gorgeous, and the team is working smoothly already. Sherlock is secretly so happy that John can run again!



Then the mess with Wilson being still upset at her daughter's death, and John knowing precisely what one thinks when he's about to die. Bit not good indeed, two bad faults in quick succession. What does a fighter do? Keeps going, because life doesn't have a pause button and much less a rew one.  
Being Sherlock is not relaxing at all.



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### **The team broken, or Sherlock's cab ride**

Sherlock goes off on his own whenever there is danger.



Because he's used to nobody being willing to follow into this level of danger.  
Because even if someone did, he'd have to take care of them, which would cramp his style and endanger everyone.  
Because he won't waste time being a tourist guide to the battlefield while there's a battle on.  
Because alone is safe(r) and alone is freedom to change tactics without having to explain and coordinate.  
Because, all things considered, he will risk his own life but not someone else's.  
"What kind of result do you care for?" The answer is, both.

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### **Public acknowledgment**

On one hand, Sherlock knows very well, out of his own experience, why serial killers want to be caught: "Appreciation!"  
On the other, as much as he craves for appreciation from people he appreciates in turn (Lestrade, Mrs. Hudson, and now John), he has much less desire for appreciation by the general public. And right he hasn't, given that the cabbie reaches him in ASiP because he's recognisable, and it will be exactly the public appreciation Sherlock scorns to give Moriarty the

chance to set his trap in TRF. And it will largely be John's fault, with his blog and everything. It must be a hard thought to bear, after.

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### **The team rebuilt, or, John goes into battle**

John not only runs to catch up with Sherlock, but he runs with remarkable athleticism and souplesse, bouncing down the stairs. His unit (of one, a literal unit) is under fire, he'll be there and save lives.

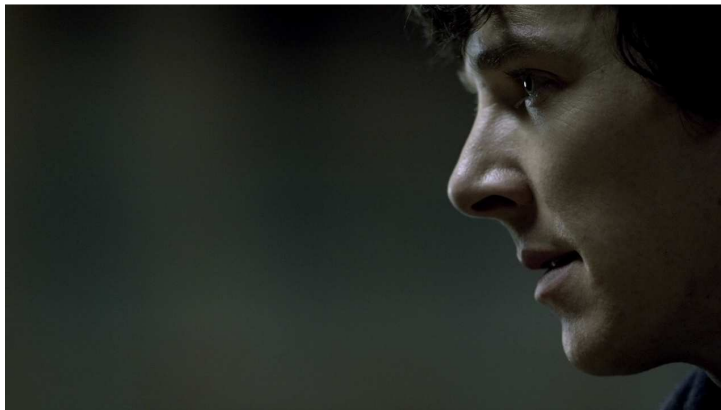


Which he does. "Nerves of steel".

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### **Is Sherlock suicidal?**

Yes. Whenever he's in presence of his own death, there is a little secret smile at the corner of his lips. He's indifferent to death after it happened; he's shattered at death happening in front of him (THoB, TRF...); but he smiles at his own like he would to one of those lovers one loves, hates, and can't be without for long.



No wonder that, although Sherlock could very well mark the two bottles and settle the matter with a lab test, he will take the pill he'd have chosen if he'd had to.

"Don't want to phone a friend?": oh shit, they planned TRF since the beginning!

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### **Poison**

I can't understand why everybody didn't choose the gun, and why nobody got angry (however possibly uselessly). The first time I watched, I didn't foresee that the gun was fake and that



Sherlock would notice, but it seemed totally obvious anyway that he would choose the gun, it's the only logical path to follow.

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### **Sherlock's ethics, 2 – no prisoners**

Sherlock has the ruthless practical sense of small children, who (Bettelheim know) grasp at anything to survive. Once they begin school, they get indoctrinated that the adults are there to take care of problems; so they get reduced to manageable idiots. The routine clearly didn't work on Sherlock (at the very least since Carl Powers, probably from much earlier). So, what does he do? What will forward his knowledge of a bigger plan that he formerly thought possible.



The cabbie is dying, he can't be saved and he has two precious bits of information: one relevant only to Sherlock, the other relevant to stopping a criminal organisation. Sherlock quickly leaves aside his own curiosity in order to get the name of the sponsor. He's not compassionate, but he's practical.

Fact is, compassion is not something children like Sherlock know. It's adult stuff, and is not taught at school. Good manners are what's taught there, quite a different matter, too dull for Sherlock to ever bother with them.

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### **Mycroft, 2 – Follow-up**

Mycroft is was scared stiff by what happened to his brother, and even more by what almost didn't.

Enough so that he opens up to John unexpectedly. I love Mycroft. The only person lonelier than Sherlock.



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