

This analysis compares the similarities and differences between two versions of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's, *Hound of the Baskervilles* as represented by Hammer Films/MGM (1959) and the BBC/2Entertainment series episode (2011/12 – titled '*The Hounds of Baskerville*'). The main points I wish to discuss are the characters themselves and how the film version differs from the series version, bringing it into a modern day surrounding.

The character of Sherlock Holmes in both versions are played by notable and well-respected, English actors, namely Peter Cushing and Benedict Cumberbatch. Both play the character as a quick-thinking, quick-witted, bordering on manic person with little regard for social etiquette regardless of which time period we set them in. The main difference between the two portrayals that I noticed was in the film version there was no reference to Holmes' drug addiction. Although I've heard on more than one occasion that this addiction appears in the books, the film version (1959) was made at a time when such topics were taboo for the screen. But the series version (2012) with Cumberbatch manages to touch on the subject quite tactfully by showing that addiction to cigarettes rather than to hard-core drugs. Nevertheless, from the opening of the scene there is an emphasis on the insinuation that it's hard-core drugs is what the dialogue is about. Presumably this representation is delivered in true BBC style in the way that it makes the subject more acceptable to a wider range of viewers. If memory serves, there was no reference to Holmes' addiction in the 1939 version of the same film with Basil Rathbone either where as the series version and the recent Sherlock Holmes films (2009 & 2011) with Robert Downey Jr. are able to approach the topic of addiction due to how it is a much more common and accepted subject in modern times.

Holmes' counterpart, Dr. John Watson (played by André Morell (1959) and Martin Freeman (2012)) while having scenes of their own are Doyle's way of making the Holmes character three dimensional. Doyle's Watson figure is the tool for communicating Holmes' thoughts, feeling, reasoning, motivations, etc., through dialogue and while Watson may be the subordinate or inferior character

he is portrayed in both (if not all) versions with a level of intelligence and charisma that the Holmes seems to respect. This is more apparent and made more of a point of in recent versions, such as with Cumberbatch's child-like hurt at upsetting his friend in Freeman in the BBC version.

Although Mrs. Hudson (Una Stubbs), Holmes' landlady/housekeeper, is seen in many Sherlock Holmes adaptations she does not appear in the 1959 Hammer film. She is a motherly figure in general and she, like Watson, shows us a lonely, childlike vulnerability in the Holmes character making him more likeable and/or endearing. This mother-son representation is carried through in the way she tolerates and berates Holmes' behaviour, albeit usually in a comedic manner.

Many of the characters names in the *Hound of the Baskerville's* story have been retained (presumably from the book), although their portrayal of those characters have been changed quite dramatically.

To summarise (film vs. episode):

Sir Henry (Christopher Lee) / Henry Knight (Russell Tovey)

The victim of our story. Both are affluent although the former has title and the latter does not. Both are susceptible to fear more than most; one through a heart condition, the other through drug-induced fear/paranoia.

Dr. Mortimer (Francis De Wolff, Sasha Behar)

Both are in care of our victim in some way. Wolff was a friend of Sir Henry and Behar cared for Henry Knight in a therapeutic capacity.

Barrymore (John Le Mesurier) & Mrs. Barrymore (Helen Goss) / Major Barrymore (Simon Paisley Day)

Despite the name matching, these characters roles were quite different, even switched with other characters. Barrymore and Mrs. Barrymore are two of the several characters who come under suspicion while Major Barrymore comes across as merely annoying and unco-operative. Mrs. Barrymore, without her husband having any idea, is guilty of nothing more than the misdeed of clothing her convict brother, the plot-line of which is carried over to Gary and Billy in the episode version...

Gary (Gordon Kennedy) & Billy (Kevin Trainor)

Gary and Billy are the counterparts of Barrymore and Mrs. Barrymore. Although there is no match with their names they share the relationship of being couples. The plot is the same, where one member of the relationship is unaware of the misdeed of the other. In the case of the episode, instead of one party providing food and clothing for a convict brother, the chef purchases meat for a vegetarian restaurant/pub. The film version depicted Cecile and Stapleton as the antagonists while the series turned the pub landlord and chef into red herrings by making their dodgy dealings of meat purchases a minor concern and thereby throwing the viewer off the scent of the film's (and book?) storyline.

Stapleton (Ewan Solon) / Dr. Stapleton (Amelia Bullmore)

Another case of redirecting the story in the hopes of possibly 'throwing the audience off' comes with turning the films antagonist into a victim.

Dr. Mortimer (Francis De Wolff) / Dr. Frankland (Clive Mantle)

In the film, it was Dr. Mortimer who was the friend of the family and seemed to have the most to gain from the death Sir Hugo (David Oxley) but the series gives Dr. Frankland a much smaller and friendlier role. We still have the bond of friendship connected to the victim's forerunners - In the case of the episode it is the father instead of the brother. It's also interesting to note that the initial appearance of Dr. Franklin is of him appearing in a mask which is a key point later on in the episode.

The stories between the film and the episode are vastly different. The 1959 film version was set in 1889 (Holmes notices a date of 1884 on Dr. Mortimer's cane making it five years old), while the episode is set in a contemporary setting, presumably around 2011/12. Whilst the episode is set in modern times, the first scene of Holmes and Watson in Holmes' home puts the viewer at ease with what they already have come to expect of any Holmes story by the means of the set being decorated with furniture and decor that is old compared its initial date setting. The furniture and decor seem to come from anywhere between the 1950's to 1970's but still retains a lot of the feel of the late Victorian period. This could be seen as a progressive step in the updating of the viewers expectations of the previous Holmes culture. It also includes some homage to the iconic deerstalker hat associated with the Holmes character but by way of ridicule rather than fashion.

Both versions begin with the compulsory action scene. The film version has a longer introduction (9:30 approx.) to the episode (0:55 approx.) which you may expect from an episode but the episode runs one minute (1:28) longer than the film (1:27). The shorter version plays well enough to capture the audience's initial attention and leaves eight and a half minutes of extra time to allow for more storyline. From the beginning of the episode you can see that this is going to be unlike previous versions of the story and any ideas or preconceptions of what you're about to see are going to be unreliable.

One of several scenes that do match between the film and the episode is the initial introduction to main characters at Sherlock's home with Dr. Mortimer and Henry Knight. Both characters relay their story to the frustrating Holmes only to be met with a demeaning response from Holmes himself. Mortimer and Knight are both left feeling insulted and belittled and both are about to leave when they are then surprised when Holmes goes into a quick-paced rant of varying clues (with extreme close ups) as to the characters recent history. Impressed, the characters then continue their stories until Holmes finally hears some clue that he deems of value. With the episode and the introduction of Holmes and Watson to their first character, it could be said that Holmes first encounter is with that of Mrs. Husdon where the same 'rant' is used to divulge her recent dealings also. The extreme close up of evidence technique is also used in the Downey Jr. films when Holmes analyses another character and when he's anticipates how a brawl is likely to play out with an opponent.

The biggest difference between the film and the episode is of the hound itself. In the film version the 'monster' is an actual hound which wore a mask to make it look more sinister. That approach was credible enough around 1959 while cinema was still fairly young. But today's audiences are a lot more 'savvy' and dealing with the monster in the same manner may leave them feeling somewhat short-changed. The episode cleverly tackles this problem by still including the mask motif but in the form of a gas mask worn by the antagonist and seen as monstrous by the viewer of the mask while in their delusional state from the real monster, a toxic gas. The moors in the film were also cleverly replaced with mine fields in the episode and the surname Baskerville now becomes a military base. There was also a light in both which was used as a signal. In the film a cliché candle was used to signal Mrs. Barrymore's escaped, convict brother and in the episode a light was also used as a signal which Watson misinterprets as Morse code, but to Watson's embarrassment it wasn't used to signify that the coast was clear as in the film, but as a beacon for a local 'dogging' location.

An unexpected turn in the episode then comes with Holmes becoming deeply troubled when he himself sees the 'hound', although his concern is more about his own self-doubt rather than any legitimate fear itself. This makes the audience reconsider the possibility that maybe the story is about a hound from Hell after all but the program seems to like throwing you off the scent. (Pun intended). After resolving the rift between Watson and himself (with the viewer seeing the need of Holmes to have a companion), Holmes then decides to drug his friend to test a theory that may be the cause of the mystery.

All these points, and others, show how productions these days need to have a lot more thought placed into them which wasn't as necessary several decades ago. Back then, people were more easily entertained, readily accepting anything they were shown without question. Through the passage of time people have evolved and more to the existence of film and television and they way stories are portrayed to the point that in today's viewing, people have a more questioning and analytical view of what they are shown with which production companies are having to keep one step ahead - if they wish to present people with something they haven't seen before. The *Sherlock* series seems to accomplish this very well. Bringing it into the present also opens a lot of doors for how the original stories can be told in way that can be related to on a contemporary level.

(1,878 words)

References:

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