

# Adaptation.

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Portfolio Assignment - (CAMF5004)

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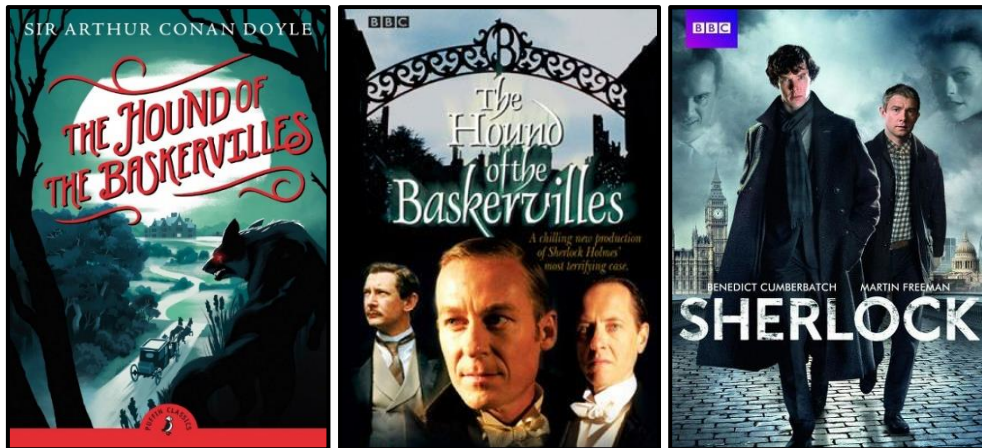
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**“The comparative analysis of two or more adaptations of the same source text.”**

- *The Hound of the Baskervilles* (1902) by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle

“The comparative analysis of two or more adaptations of the same source text.”



## FROM BOOK TO TELEVISION:

*The Hound of the Baskervilles* (Conan Doyle, 1901) *The Hound of the Baskervilles* (Attwood, 2002) *Sherlock: Season 2* (McGuigan, 2012)

*The Hound of the Baskervilles* is perhaps Sir Arthur Conan Doyle’s most beloved Sherlock Holmes novel. Ranker (2014) and BestofSherlock.com (2014) rank it as Conan Doyle’s best work based on the London detective, as voted by fellow Sherlockians. Perhaps that explains why it’s his most adapted work to date, even after 100 years since its first publication back in 1901. These adaptations have varied content, anything from faithful ones to those that take a more modern and self-aware approach to the source material. This stands as the criteria for the selections I’ve made, starting with David Attwood’s made-for-TV adaptation *The Hound of the Baskervilles* (2002) and the Mark Gatiss modern-update TV series *Sherlock* (2010-tba). Both take on a different approach to adapting the source material, making for a more comparative analysis of each other.

It’s fair to say that adaptations of Conan Doyle’s books are still going strong. Wheeler (2014) states that recently we’ve been treated to three different adaptations of the Holmes character. In *Sherlock*, Guy Richie’s *Sherlock Holmes* (2009) and *Elementary* (2012-tba) – bringing the character into modern-day New York. The approaches to these adaptations are different in their own way, either by changing character genders (Watson is female in *Elementary*) or turning the stories into something more action/adventure (which is Guy Richie’s approach). When talking to Thorpe (2010) for the Guardian, creator of *Sherlock* Mark Gatiss had this to say about his approach:

Everything that matters about Holmes and Watson is the same. Conan Doyle’s stories were never about frock coats and gas light; they’re about brilliant detection, dreadful villains and blood-curdling crimes and frankly, to hell with the crinoline. (Mark Gatiss, 2010).

It’s clear that Gatiss recognises what worked so well for Conan Doyle’s stories, and that their legacy isn’t built because of the nostalgic time they were set in, but rather for the memorable character of the two protagonists. This means a modern setting can be used to update some of Holmes’s most famous detections, rather than act as a gimmick. In *Sherlock*, Gatiss proceeds to do exactly this, update some of Holmes’s most famous stories. It was inevitable then, that Gatiss would eventually come to Conan Doyle’s most beloved Holmes detection – *The Hound of the Baskervilles*.

In contrast to this is David Attwood's adaptation of the famous Conan Doyle story. Ten years prior to *Sherlock*, the BBC (2002) announced that a major new version of the Sherlock Holmes story would be airing on BBC ONE that Christmas. Alan Cubitt, more famous now for BBC TWO's *The Fall*, wrote the script while David Attwood directed. Richard Roxburgh and Ian Hart starred as Holmes and Watson respectively. In terms of setting, Attwood's adaptation takes place during the era of the novel – but there are still aspects of this adaptation that are changed in comparison to the original story. Both adaptations are held accountable for this, be it for the best or the worse.

The original story begins with the suspicious death of Charles Baskerville, leading his nephew Henry Baskerville to take over the family's estate [fig.1]. But Sherlock suspects that Henry is in danger, and others believe this danger comes in the form of an infamous demon hound. This is a brief summary of the books starting plot, and it's one that the 2002 adaptation closely follows to start with.

However, the 2012 version seen in the TV series *Sherlock* dramatically changes characters and story.



Figure 1. Baskerville Manor (Attwood, 2002)



Figure 2. Baskerville Research Facility (Gatiss, 2012)

Mark Gatiss sums up his approach to adapting the famous story in an interview with the Radio Times (2012):

For Hound, I wanted to make it as scary as possible, and for it to be a proper horror story. But what didn't feel right was making it a haunted house story. So I realised that the thing we're most afraid of nowadays is faceless government and conspiracy theories. There's a conspiracy theory about everything and they're almost the modern equivalent of ghost stories. So rather than Baskerville being a big spooky house, it's a facility [fig.2] like Porton Down [the secretive UK military site], with dark rumours about the 'things' they're breeding there. (Mark Gatiss, 2012).

It's a wildly different approach when compared with the source material, but one that he justifies making because of how times have changed, especially when this particular Sherlock is set in modern times. It should work, as these changes come more as a replacement rather than something radically different – but in my opinion, the weakest part of *Sherlock's* adaptation is that it fails to capture the atmosphere of dread that the original emits so well. It's not just the absence of the haunted estate or the cursed family myth, but in terms of aesthetic it's all too plain-looking. You'd expect a build-up of scenes on the moors, with thick fog blanketing the hills, a suggestion that something is out there. But most of Dartmoor is shown in broad daylight, in a rather attractive manner. There are a few scenes near the end where the episode takes on more of a horror vibe, but by then it's all too late.

This happens to be the strongest part of Attwood's 2002 adaptation. Perhaps it's aided by the fact that it's set in the original time period, but what's created here is a haunting vision of Dartmoor, initially glanced at through windows, suggesting that something is out there. But soon it envelopes the Baskerville estate, creating a tense stay for Ian Hart's Dr Watson. His arrival is welcomed by lashings of rain, and rarely (if ever) is Dartmoor blessed with sunshine through-out the narrative. But

despite the haunting aesthetic of Dartmoor, there are areas where the 2002 adaptation falls short. And it just so happens to be the strongest part of *Sherlock* – Mr Holmes himself.



Figure 3. Richard Roxburgh – *Sherlock Holmes* (2002)



Figure 4. Benedict Cumberbatch – *Sherlock Holmes* (2012)

Richard Roxburgh's portrayal of Sherlock Holmes [fig.3] is mostly different than Benedict Cumberbatch's ten years later [fig.4]. He carries the same intellect of Mr Holmes, as do most of those who've portrayed the infamous protagonist, but his intellect never comes across as something believable. Perhaps this negative is enhanced by the fact that Roxburgh lacks the charisma and quirks that Holmes naturally possesses. Interestingly, Attwood brings in Holmes's drug use [fig.5], something he usually indulges in between cases as a way to relieve boredom. But Roxburgh's Sherlock seems to be using drugs to widen his thinking altogether, and definitely comes across as more of a habit. Another oddly stand-out moment is when Roxburgh's Sherlock roughs up a cabbie in order to get information. Definitely a more aggressive attitude than we're used to seeing.

Cumberbatch's Sherlock however, not only carries more charisma, but he makes his hyper-intelligent character more believable. This is not only portrayed through effective visuals, highlighting possible clues and at one point, literally entering the mind of Sherlock [fig.6], but Cumberbatch's fast-talking witty portrayal is far more entertaining. Also more convincing is his relationship with Dr Watson. There's a strong sense of friendship and trust between them in *Sherlock*, trust being the important word here. Although he may question Holmes's decisions from time to time, deep down Watson is accepting of Holmes's erratic behaviour because he trusts him. This is far from evident in Attwood's adaptation, and our suspicions are confirmed when Ian Hart's Dr Watson utters the very last line of the film: "I don't trust you".



Figure 5. Holmes using Heroin (2002)



Figure 6. Entering Sherlock's Mind Palace (2012)

There are some major changes to other characters in *Sherlock's* adaptation of *The Hound of the Baskervilles*. Dr Mortimer becomes a female therapist for Henry Knight, whom of course is the changed character of the original Henry Baskerville. Henry is no more than a mere man whose haunted by the death of his father, supposedly caused by the demonic hound. Initially, it may seem like changes are made in order to keep up with modern times and try and sway away from a much more male-dominated cast. This could be the case, but it's also in service to fans of Sherlock Holmes.



Figure 7. Richard E. Grant – Mr Stapleton (2002)



Figure 8. Amelia Bullmore – Dr Stapleton (2012)

The drawback of Attwood's adaptation is that it follows the source material so closely, that anyone who's read or seen the story before already knows how it's going to play out. Richard E. Grant's Mr Stapleton [fig.7] is the villain, but anyone who's familiar with the source material would have known that, or even those who haven't, it's obvious from his menacing performance. Upon reflection, he could have made a great Sherlock Holmes, with his defined features and tall stature. Because *Sherlock* has done away with the Baskerville manor and the family curse, a character like Mr Stapleton cannot exist. Therefore they change the gender and occupation of Mr Stapleton into Dr Stapleton [fig.8], a scientist working at Baskerville research facility. It's a change that's made in order to keep fans guessing about the mystery of what's really at play here.

It seems that both adaptations fall short in some way when it comes to portraying the infamous hound. Attwood's adaptation of the hound [fig.9] is a real beast that's controlled by Stapleton, a feral and wild thing that comes at the blow of Stapleton's dog whistle. *Sherlock's* is a real hound too [fig.10], but ones whose demonic features are apparent because of a gas that's dispersed through specific areas of the moors. Despite a clever justification for its appearance, *Sherlock's* incarnation is slightly dampened by the fact that it's not entirely real. The CGI effects aren't exactly state-of-the-art either. The 2002 adaptation, in my opinion, is a scarier hound, helped by the fact that it's not an illusion either. Its movements don't hold up all too well, thanks to some brief obvious moments of special-effects. But it has the excuse for being over 15 years old.



Figure 9. The Hound (2002)



Figure 10. The Hound (2012)

Both of these are almost-worthy adaptations of Conan Doyle's most famous piece of work. One brings in faithfulness while the other tries to do something more interesting. It could be said that Attwood's adaptation was an effective piece of drama for it's time. It brings together an atmosphere of dread and hold's it together throughout the narrative. It's a shame that not all of it's parts work as well as others. *Sherlock*, however, has many excellent working parts throughout its runtime, most especially is Sherlock and his relationship with Watson. It admirably tries to do something different to subvert the expectations of audiences but fails to bring together these parts in a way that makes for something as effect as the source material.

It seems the perfect adaptation of *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, is yet to arrive.

**Word Count:**

1672

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