

# Sherlock Holmes and Inspector Morse

## - Two contrasting detectives

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## Introduction

The title of being the master in detective literature has had many contenders through the years, but two writers in particular are to be seen as candidates to the title. Two of the most readable are the crime solver Sherlock Holmes, created by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, and Chief Inspector Endeavour Morse, whose character is invented by Colin Dexter.

Detective stories have always been popular throughout history, and the thrilling adventures about Sherlock Holmes and his assistant Dr Watson, as well as the mystery novels about Morse and his partner sergeant Lewis, have captured readers throughout the years. The two master detectives have solved cases both in literature and on film, and have subsequently contributed to a great number of readable novels, which also have been made into successful screen versions. The adventures of Sherlock Holmes have frequently become film through the years, with a number of different actors in the role of the master brain. The best known who entered the screen role of the famous detective was Basil Rathbone in *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, and *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*, both released in 1939. In these films, the faithful friend and colleague Dr Watson, was played by Nigel Bruce.

Additionally 12 films followed these two from 1942 to 1946. Basil Rathbone has also played Holmes in 219 radio performances, on TV and on stage. In *Without a Clue* (1988) Holmes was played by Michael Caine, and Watson by Ben Kingsley. In 1965 followed *A Study in Terror*, starring John Neville and Donald Houston, which was claimed to be the most literary script and high quality production ever in a Sherlock Holmes film. Through the years, other actors like Peter Cushing and Nigel Stock as well as Jeremy Brett and David Burke have performed the roles of the detective and his assistant.

The life of Inspector Morse is quite similar to Holmes's in this aspect. From the beginning he was introduced to the public in *Last Bus to Woodstock* (1975), and this was where the public met him and his assistant Lewis for the first time. The first Morse mystery was then followed by an additional 12 novels between 1975 to 2000, when the last novel was published. The novels were successful and Morse was a popular detective, which between 1987 to 2000 led to a TV series of thirty-three episodes, based on the mystery stories. In all the episodes, John Thaw and Kevin Whately performed the role of Chief Inspector Morse and his assistant investigator. Noticeable is also that Colin Dexter, the creator of Inspector Morse, had small cameo roles in all but three episodes of the TV series. The last episode was called *The Remorseful Day* (2000), after the last Morse mystery novel, which became the end of Morse's career both in literature and on screen.

This essay will consider differences and similarities between the two detectives' characters and illustrate their ways of solving crimes. Equally, it will illuminate the different approach of the two fictional detectives. Chapter One contains two autobiographical notes on the authors, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and Colin Dexter, the creators of Sherlock Holmes and Inspector Morse. In Chapter Two the essay explores the characters of the two detectives, and will give a closer description of their characteristics and habits. In Chapter three, the essay will analyse the differences and similarities that are found between the characters, which in some ways affects their approach and ability to solve crimes. In the following conclusion, the analysed results will be considered in an attempt to define which one of them who will obtain recognition as being the greatest master detective in fiction.

## Chapter 1. Autobiographical notes on the authors

### 1.1 Sir Arthur Conan Doyle

Sherlock Holmes's creator, Arthur Conan Doyle, was born in Edinburgh as the son of Irish parents who had immigrated to Scotland. He studied medicine at Edinburgh University between the years 1876-1881, and after his exam he went on a voyage to the West African coast serving as a ship's doctor. In 1882 he started a practice in Plymouth, and was awarded a doctorate in 1885. His medical practice was not very successful, and while he waited for his patients, he began to write short stories, and he published his first literary work before the age of twenty. After moving his practice to Southsea, his interest in literature increased, and in 1887 his first significant work *A Study in Scarlet* was released, and was the first novel where the public came to meet the master brain Sherlock Holmes. In addition, this novel was followed by three books, called *The Sign of Four* (1890), *The Hound of the Baskervilles* (1901), and *The Valley of Fear* (1914). This novel collection about Sherlock Holmes was subsequently followed by additionally 56 short stories up to *The Casebook of Sherlock Holmes*, in 1927.

In 1885 Doyle had married Louise Hawkins, and in 1890 he went to Vienna to study to be an oculist. The year after, in 1891, he moved to London and started an oculist practice. Now his possibilities to write increased again and in November the same year he wrote a letter to his mother: "I think of slaying Holmes ... and winding him up for good and all. He takes my mind from better things."<sup>1</sup> During the period 1891 – 1906 he wrote six historical novels along with his other works. Subsequently, in December 1893, he decided to dedicate more time and energy to his historical works. So, in 1894 the story *The Final Problem* was published, and Holmes was

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<sup>1</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arthur\\_Conan\\_Doyle.1/4](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arthur_Conan_Doyle.1/4), 2005-09-12.

killed off. Doyle's killing of Holmes was not accepted by the readers, who created an outcry and two years later in 1896, the detective was brought back to life. The motives for re-rescuing Holmes were not known, but whatever the reason, Doyle kept him alive and alert in his short stories for a further quarter-century.

After a period of pressure from the public, Doyle wrote *The Hound of the Baskervilles*. This novel was published in 1901, and was set before Sherlock Holmes's death. The mysterious story was a success, but the public was not satisfied with a posthumous Holmes. In 1905, Doyle brought his famous and eagerly awaited detective back to life, and in the story *The Adventure of the Empty House* came the explanation that Holmes had miraculously survived, and had only arranged a temporary death. Then in 1906, Doyle's wife Louise tragically died of tuberculosis and he was left alone with two children. In 1907, he married Miss Jean Leckie, with whom the family was extended with additionally three children.

At the turn of the century, the Boer war in South Africa broke out, and the British conduct there was condemned from all over the world. Doyle followed the war, and wrote a short pamphlet about it, which was called *The War in South Africa: Its Cause and Conduct*. The pamphlet was translated worldwide in order to justify Britain's actions in the war, and became a success. According to Doyle, the pamphlet was probably what led to him becoming knighted in 1902 and appointed as Deputy-Lieutenant of Surrey. In the year of 1900, he wrote a longer historical book on the subject, called *The Great Boer War*. Doyle was also involved in the campaign for reforming the Free State of Congo, and in 1909 he wrote another pamphlet about the horrors that happened there, called *The Crime of the Congo*, in which he denounced the horrors in the area.

In the beginning of the twentieth century Doyle ran twice for parliament, but was not elected. In 1912, Arthur Conan Doyle wrote the first Professor Challenger adventure called *The Lost World*. This adventure story was followed by four additional novels about the character, covering a time span from 1913 up to 1928. In his late years, Doyle became interested in spiritualism, and in 1926 this influence led to a Professor Challenger novel, called *The Land of Mist*.

Two statues are erected in the honour of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. One is placed at Crowborough Cross in Crowborough, East Sussex, England, where he lived for twenty-three years, and another in Picardy Place, Edinburgh, Scotland, close to the house where he was born. Arthur Conan Doyle died in July 7<sup>th</sup> in 1930, and he is buried in the churchyard at Minstead in the New Forest, Hampshire, England.

## 1.2 Colin Dexter

The British author *Colin Dexter* is the creator of the fictional detective character Detective Chief Inspector Morse. His whole name is Norman Colin Dexter and he was born in Stamford, Lincolnshire on the 29<sup>th</sup> of September 1930. In 1948-50, he did his Military Service with the Royal Corps of Signals, where he by a coincident became a Morse-code operator. After this period, he studied Classics at Christ's College in Cambridge, from which he graduated in 1953.

In 1954 he went to East Midlands, where he began his teaching career as an assistant classics master at Wyggeston School in Leicester. During this period he met Dorothy Cooper, to whom he married in 1956, and the couple were blessed with two children, a son and a daughter. For some years, he worked as a senior Classics teacher in Northamptonshire, where he stayed until 1966, when he was forced to retire from teaching because of the onset of deafness. This handicap did not stop him from working, and he entered a post as a Senior Secretary at the Oxford Delegacy of Local Examinations in Oxford, and stayed there until he retired in 1988.

Colin Dexter's writing career started in 1972, in the middle of a family holiday. It was a day of bad weather, and Dexter states: "We were in a little guest house halfway between Caernarfon and Pwllheli. It was a Saturday and it was raining – it's not unknown for it to rain in north Wales. The children were moaning...I was sitting at the kitchen table with nothing else to do, and I wrote the first few paragraphs of a potential detective novel."<sup>2</sup> The novel he wrote was the first Morse Mystery, called *Last Bus to Woodstock*, which was published in 1975. This was the first novel where Chief Inspector Morse solved his first case and was introduced to the world.

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<sup>2</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Colin\\_Dexter](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Colin_Dexter), 1/2, 2005-09-12.

Morse was characterised as an “irascible detective” with “penchants for cryptic crosswords, English literature, real ale, and Wagner”<sup>3</sup>. These reflected Dexter’s own passions, as he had won a title as British champion of solving crossword puzzles. As his debut with *Last Bus to Woodstock* came at the age of 45, Colin Dexter started rather late as an author. In return, he has established himself as being a very skilful writer, much due to his interesting facts and complicated intrigues. All the Morse novels take place in Oxford or in the surroundings of the town. They are also characterised by very realistic descriptions of the characters and environments. Another characteristic feature of Colin Dexter is that he likes to deceive the reader and draw the attention to a specific person who seems to be guilty. All facts and clues in the case lead to the suspect and the net is drawn tighter, but then the author adds new facts to the case, and the hunt of the real murderer can begin.

From the first novel *Last Bus to Woodstock*, Dexter published thirteen Novels in the time span between 1975-2000. Some of the most readable are *The Silent World of Nicholas Quinn*, 1977, *The Riddle of The Third Mile*, 1983, *The Way Through the Woods*, 1992 and *The Remorseful Day*, 2000, which was the final Inspector Morse mystery, where Dexter arranged for his death.

The Crime Writers’ association has awarded Colin Dexter’s authorship with two daggers of Silver and two of Gold, but in 1997 the ultimate recognition came as he was awarded the Diamond dagger for a lifetime’s achievement in crime writing.

Another interesting sign of recognition for Dexter, are his Hitchcock-like roles in his TV films. The tradition started in *The Death of Jericho*, and then he continued to appear in small parts in every one of the following episodes. He has also made a habit of making odd appearances in his own works. One example is in *The Inside Story* (1993), where he appears as the anagrammatic character Rex de Lincto, who is

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<sup>3</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Colin\\_Dexter](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Colin_Dexter), 1/2, 2005-09-12.

described as “The short, fat, balding, slightly deaf, Oxford Book Association Chairman”<sup>4</sup>. Another example is found in *Neighbourhood Watch* (1992), where the character Dr Eric Ullman has much that is reminiscent of Dexter, as he is described as “a small, bald-headed man with a beer belly and an NHS hearing-aid in his right ear.”<sup>5</sup> The mystery novels of Chief Inspector Morse have been successful and are translated and read all over the world. In the last book *The Remorseful Day*, Colin Dexter killed off Morse and there has been no sign of a resurrection.

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<sup>4</sup> Bird, 57.

<sup>5</sup> Bird, 57.

## Chapter 2. The Characters

### 2.1 Sherlock Holmes

Sherlock Holmes was introduced for the first time in the novel *A Study in Scarlet* (1887), and lived on through four novels and fifty-six short stories up to the last crime adventure, *The Final Problem*, in 1927. Holmes is seen as a detective with a remarkable ability of finding clues and solving crimes, and is one of the most readable investigators in literature. In Arthur Conan Doyle's *The Memoirs of Sherlock Holmes*, Dr Watson says:

“You have formed a theory then?” “At least I have a grip of the essential factors of the case. I shall enumerate them to you... and I can hardly expect your co-operation if I do not show you the position from which we start.”

Holmes, leaning forward with his long thin forefinger checking off the points upon the palm of his left hand, gave me a sketch of the events which had led to our journey.<sup>6</sup>

Holmes ability to find clues is always precise, and with the help of his friend Dr Watson there is no crime that remains unsolved. Equally, the phrase, “Elementary, my dear Watson”,<sup>7</sup> has been a sign of recognition for Sherlock Holmes, although this utterance never appeared in any of the sixty Sherlock Holmes detective stories. Holmes often makes remarks based on logical and simple conclusions, which he speaks about as “elementary”, but the phrase itself had not been used until in the end of the film *The Return of Sherlock Holmes* in 1929, that is the first sound film about the master detective.

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<sup>6</sup> Taken from: Leslie Klinger, *The New Annotated Sherlock Holmes*, (New York, W.W. Norton & Company Ltd, 2005), 389.

<sup>7</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sherlock\\_Holmes](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sherlock_Holmes) , 1/19, 2005-10-07.

The crime investigator Holmes is a man of many skills. He creates a masterpiece of having a huge amount of evidence gathered through his observations, and he makes quite simple inferences about things such as for instance footprints, poison and cigar ashes, and weighs facts, explanations and evidence together to solve the case. The logical and astute observations are what make Holmes famous. If Sherlock Holmes were to describe himself, it would be as “a consulting detective expert who is brought into cases that have proven too difficult for other investigators”<sup>8</sup>.

His speciality is to solve unusual cases by using observation and logical reasoning, which are his two main powers. These skills are often shown to his new clients, and his observations of their personality and most recent activities are impressive and seldom wrong. From Holmes own telling he describes himself as “a competent cryptanalyst, that is fairly familiar with all forms of secret writing ... the author of a trifling monograph upon the subject”<sup>9</sup>. He also mentions that he has “some knowledge” of *baritsu*, the Japanese wrestling system, which helped him to escape the death grip of his worst enemy, Professor Moriarty.

Holmes’s famous address at Baker Street, London, No 221B, was where he stayed during his professional years along with his friend Dr Watson. From the beginning, the two friends share the flat because of economic necessity, before they start working together to solve crimes. Further information of Holmes’s background is given in two of the earliest stories, *A Study in Scarlet*, and *The Gloria Scott*. In these stories, Holmes is introduced as a quite independent student of Chemistry with a huge variety of mystical interests, of which many of them are directed towards his ability to solve crimes. The father of a college friend also mentions that the main reason for him becoming a detective was because of his deductive ability, of which

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<sup>8</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sherlock\\_Holmes](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sherlock_Holmes), 1/ 19.

<sup>9</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sherlock\\_Holmes](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sherlock_Holmes), 2/ 19.

he gets very high compliments. “But how did you do it, Mr Holmes?” Asked Dr Mortimer, looking at my friend. “How did you know?” “Well this is my special hobby.” “I observe the differences of print between different newspapers.” “Elementary, really, to the expert in crime.”<sup>10</sup>

The character of Sherlock Holmes had traits and characteristics taken from Joseph Bell, who was a former professor to Doyle from his time at the University.

A popular myth regarding murder mystery fiction is that it was Sherlock Holmes who gave rise to the whole genre, which is not the case. Holmes was influenced by Auguste Dupin and the technique he had for solving crimes, and this was what originally gave inspiration to the genre of detective stories. Dupin, who was created by Edgar Allan Poe, was a fictional investigator to whose existence Sherlock Holmes himself often refers. “ Now in my opinion, Dupin was a very inferior fellow...He had some analytical genius, no doubt; but he was by no means such a phenomenon as Poe appeared to imagine”.<sup>11</sup>

Holmes’s faithful friend and assistant Dr Watson is the narrator in most of the Sherlock Holmes adventure stories. Out of the sixty published novels and short stories, Sherlock Holmes himself has narrated two, and additionally two are written in the third person. As for most of the fictional detectives, the assistant has a very important role for the master brain and his possibilities to solve difficult cases. The role of Dr Watson has a classic role in crime fiction, comparable to Morse’s Sergeant Lewis, as being the master detective’s right hand.

Sherlock Holmes’s first meeting with Dr Watson was during his time in college, and then their co-operation continued for a long time span. Holmes moved to London, and at first he took a room in Montague Street, but in 1881 he decided to

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<sup>10</sup> Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, (Sangill bogtryk & offset, Denmark, 1993), 23.

<sup>11</sup> [HTTP://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sherlock\\_Holmes](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sherlock_Holmes), 4/19, 2005-10-07.

find somewhere else to live. He finds “a most desirable residence” to live in, and the readers are introduced to 221 Baker Street, flat 221B, which will be his well known address for his whole professional career. The economic circumstances however required him to share rooms, and through an acquaintance of his, he was introduced to John H. Watson.

Watson was recently invalidated out of the British Army, and was searching for a room. Holmes’s former dresser Stamford introduced him, and from that moment both Watson’s and Holmes’s lives were changed forever. “Dr Watson, Mr Sherlock Holmes... “How are you?” said Holmes. “You have been in Afghanistan, I perceive. “How on earth did you know that?” replied Watson.<sup>12</sup>

In March 1881, Holmes was brought in to assist on solving a mysterious murder case, and he suggested that “if Watson had nothing better to do, he might accompany him on the initial investigation.”<sup>13</sup> This was the basis for the first adventure *A Study in Scarlet* (1887) and the starting point for the partnership between Sherlock Holmes and Dr Watson. Holmes’s practice had began slowly, but by 1889 he claimed to have investigated “some five hundred cases “of capital importance” and a thousand in all by 1891.”<sup>14</sup>

In *The Sign of Four* (1890) the case is especially memorable to Watson, as it is the first occasion where he meets his future wife, Mary Morstan. She enters as a client to Holmes and Watson falls immediately for her charm. Watson recollects “I have never looked upon a face which gave a clearer promise of a refined and sensitive nature.” The couple married a few months after. After the marriage, Watson moved out of Baker Street and Holmes lived there alone, though their friendship and

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<sup>12</sup> Klinger, xlvii.

<sup>13</sup> Klinger, xliii.

<sup>14</sup> Klinger, xliii.

partnership in crime solving continued. "Without the talents of John H Watson, Holmes may well have been laboured in obscurity. "<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Klinger, lii.

## 2.2 Chief Inspector Morse

As for Holmes's colleague in crime investigation, Inspector Morse, the situation can at first seem quite similar. His partnership with Sergeant Lewis and their methods in solving crimes have also captivated readers for a long time, and Colin Dexter's literary crime investigator has lived on through a large number of mysterious crime novels. The partnership between Morse and Lewis though, is not described as being as jovial as between Holmes and Watson. From *The World of Inspector Morse* follows a dialog between Morse and Lewis:

'Yes sir?'

'We need some arc lamps.'

'It would help, I suppose, sir'

'Get some.'

'Me, sir?'

'Yes, you!'

'Where shall I get...?'

'How the hell do I know', bellowed Morse<sup>16</sup>

Utterances like this are significant for Morse, and his sullen temperament is something that follows him like a shadow through the novels. Despite his temperament, Morse is quite likeable, and a crime solver of many skills. About his character, Colin Dexter mentions:

Above all I wished to portrait Morse as a man of Alpha-plus acumen. At school, at university, at work I met people with such clear-thinking brains that I was

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<sup>16</sup> Christopher Bird, *The World of Inspector Morse*, (London, Macmillan publishers Ltd, 1998), 11.

deeply envious ... precisely that extra dimension of ratiocination, which I sought to give to Morse.<sup>17</sup>

The mystery novel *Last Bus to Woodstock* was followed by twelve additional novels, which made both the author and his characters well known in the genre of literary detectives. Morse introduced himself as an intellectual snob with a sullen temperament, a thirst for beer and special emphasis for opera music, particularly Wagner. Subsequently, signs of this description are found repeatedly through the novels. One example is called Morse's law. What follows is a dialogue from the film version of *The Silent World of Nicholas Quinn*:

Lewis: We should have arrested Martin straight away.

Morse: Why?

Lewis: Morse's law. You said there's always a fifty-fifty chance that whoever finds the body did the deed.

But now the Chief Inspector has changed his tune.

Morse: That's not Morse's Law, Lewis. Morse's Law is, there's always time for one more pint.<sup>18</sup>

Throughout the novels a number of different skills are credited to Morse. His strongest card is his ability to solve cases where codes and coded letters play a big part in finding clues as to the perpetrator. Morse's passion for crosswords is another thing that is significant for him, and is almost immediately evident in *Last bus to Woodstock*, where Lewis finds him solving the back side crossword in "The Times", which is his favourite paper.

"Ah, Lewis". He thrust the paper across. "Have a look at 14 down.

Appropriate, eh? Lewis looked at 14 down: Take in bachelor? It could do.

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<sup>17</sup> Bird, 7.

<sup>18</sup> Bird, 105.

He saw what Morse had written into the completed diagram: BRA.

What was he supposed to say? He had never worked with Morse before.”<sup>19</sup>

Although Morse has great abilities in solving crime, there are things that are considered strange for a detective of his calibre. He is full of phobias, which follow him and sometimes makes his detective work slightly problematic. For instance, Morse has always been afraid of the dark, as well as afraid of heights, of flying, and of spiders. He also has a sort of curious handicap, in that he has a horror of dead bodies. This fear of corpses has its basis in the fact that Morse on several occasions has been sick after viewing bodies of people who have met their death in strange or unnatural ways.

Besides his fear of dead people, the only thing that can possibly be considered an even more personal phobia for Morse, is his fear of revealing his own name. This is a preoccupation not easy to understand, as if revealing his name would hurt him in some way. On behalf of this phobia, his name remains unknown to the public, until in the end of the Novel *Death is Now My Neighbour*, where he writes a card to Lewis signed “Endeavour Morse.”

The passion for crossword puzzles follows him through the subsequent novels. In *The Silent World of Nicholas Quinn* (1977), Morse tackles a coded letter, and in *The Riddle of the Third Mile* (1983), he reconstructs a letter that has been cut in half, in order to solve the case. Despite being his favourite mental exercise, solving crosswords is essential for Morse’s well being, and his strong addiction to cryptic crosswords helps him think. This penchant of his is found on different occasions, as crossword puzzles appear now and then in the novels, sometimes referred to by Morse as paperwork that he has to finish.

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<sup>19</sup> Bird, 42.

What is a master detective without his assistant? Sherlock Holmes has his faithful and only friend Dr Watson with him, and Morse has Sergeant Lewis. The character of Sergeant Lewis is described as having the “classic crime fiction role”. He is the great master detective’s “straight man”, and seen as the counterpart who allows the master’s brain to take the credit for solving the cases. With his common sense and wisdom Lewis supports the master detective with clues and suggestions on how to analyse and solve the crimes.

An example of the relationship between Morse and Lewis is forthcoming in *The Riddle of the Third Mile*, where Lewis gets the question if he thinks that Morse is nice. “Well, I wouldn’t exactly call him “nice”. “Do you like him?” “I don’t think you “like” Morse. He’s not that sort of person, really.”<sup>20</sup>

Lewis is to be placed together with other straight men where Sherlock Holmes’s Dr Watson, Hercule Poirot’s Colonel Hastings and Lord Peter Wimsey’s butler Bunter can be found. Their role as the detective’s assistant, is as Christopher Bird says in *The World of Inspector Morse*: “They are there to serve - to do the legwork, carry the gun, drive the car, collar the suspect, and (in Lewis’s case) buy the drinks.”<sup>21</sup>

In Dexter’s first Novel, *Last bus to Woodstock*; Lewis is the one who first meets the public. When Inspector Morse arrives, Lewis has already checked for witnesses at the crime scene. From that moment, the crime solving partners Morse and Lewis are working together through all the mysteries up until the last novel, *The Remorseful Day*, in which Dexter kills off Morse. He dies in hospital from complications of his diabetes, which is repeatedly mentioned throughout the later novels. Unlike Sherlock Holmes’s resurrection, there has been no sign of bringing Morse back to life again. The Novels have been made into a TV series produced between 1987 and 2000,

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<sup>20</sup> Bird, 90.

<sup>21</sup> Bird, 90.

about Inspector Morse, which has been a great success. The TV character of Chief Inspector Morse is played by John Thaw, and his assistant Lewis by Kevin Whately. The two actors worked together throughout all the 33 two-hour episodes, and the last one was adapted out of the final novel *The Remorseful Day*. Ironically, John Thaw died from cancer after the last novel was filmed, and both the fictional figure and the TV screen character of Inspector Morse were gone.

## Chapter 3. Differences and similarities between the characters

This chapter will discuss differences and similarities between the characters Inspector Morse and Sherlock Holmes. In the first section, the essay will consider the differences, and in the second part the similarities. About the similarities between them, Christopher Bird writes about Morse: “In terms of other detectives, he occasionally cites the incomparable Sherlock Holmes as an influence, and certainly there is much of Holmes in his make-up.”<sup>22</sup>

### 3.1 Differences

What differences are to be found between the two master brains? The big difference between Sherlock Holmes and Inspector Morse is in method. Holmes is a detective who is strong on deduction, and he supports this by close research, keen observation and keeping precise records. Morse on the other hand makes random connections to see where they lead, a method which is condemned by Holmes. In *The world of Inspector Morse*, Christopher Bird considers this: “Holmes is big on deduction...keen observation, research and record-keeping. Morse has the police computer whenever he wants it, but his method...“blundering about”, he calls it – would be anathema for Holmes.”<sup>23</sup>

Another important aspect is the differences in their approach. Holmes is not at all “a stuffy strait-laced Victorian gentleman”, In his own words, Holmes describes himself and his habits as “Bohemian.” Apparently, he suffers from bipolar disorder...alternating between days of listless lassitude...intense engagement with a challenging case ...followed by reactions of lethargy.”<sup>24</sup> Opinions have expressed that Sherlock Holmes, due to these symptoms, is suffering from the ADD syndrome,

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<sup>22</sup> Bird, 77.

<sup>23</sup> Bird, 77.

<sup>24</sup> [http://Wikipedia.org/wiki/Sherlock\\_Holmes](http://Wikipedia.org/wiki/Sherlock_Holmes), 5/19, 2005-10-07.

since the causes of his swinging mood are not entirely arbitrary. Dr Watson describes Holmes as being “ a desiccated calculating machine”, and “as deficient in human sympathy as he was per-eminent in intelligence” and states that “all emotions...were abhorrent to his cold, precise, yet admirably balanced mind.”<sup>25</sup> Holmes is described as a human computer, he treats all he finds as data, and works as a machine that does not proceed without having all the facts of the case. He lacks a social life and either eats or sleeps. “So many regard him as a machine rather than a man.”<sup>26</sup>

Morse on the other hand, is described as quite likeable despite his sullen temperament, and John Thaw, his namesake in the TV series has said that he specially appreciated the character of Morse, who he considered more humane than many other classical detectives:

Morse was different from classic characters like James Bond and Sherlock Holmes. Morse was brilliant but he was not always right. He often arrested the wrong person or came to the wrong conclusion. As a result, unlike many classic sleuths, Morse does not always simply “bust” his culprit; ironic circumstances have the case end and the crime brought to him.<sup>27</sup> This description of Morse is in contrast with Holmes, as Morse is described as more “human”. He is introduced as a quite normal person who has his own physical and psychological problems to deal with, at work as well as in private. He has a neurotic psyche where his compulsive temper and his melancholia are his most distinguishing features, as well as illnesses and self-doubt.

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<sup>25</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sherlock\\_Holmes](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sherlock_Holmes), 7/19.

<sup>26</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sherlock\\_Holmes](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sherlock_Holmes), 7/19.

<sup>27</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Inspector\\_Morse](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Inspector_Morse), 2/4, 2005-09-12.

Another factor worth noticing is Morse's attractiveness to women. Although it seems like he possesses an enviable ability to make women feel understood, he does not seem to have the ability to have a relationship with one. Morse is a bachelor, but not without regrets, as he would not mind having a relationship. Holmes is a bachelor too, but on the other hand he has really no interest in women. Dr Watson states: Holmes has an "aversion to women", but "a peculiarly ingratiating way with [them]", and Holmes stated "I am not a whole-souled admirer of womankind."<sup>28</sup> Subsequently, "he found "the motives of women...so inscrutable...How can you build on such quicksand? Their most extraordinary conduct may depend on a hairpin."<sup>29</sup>

The issue of drugs is also a matter of difference between the two. Morse is fanatic for a good ale and Scotch Whisky, but when it comes to drugs, he has very negative opinions. In the TV episode *The Settling of the Sun* (1988) drugs have a spectral presence, which affects Morse very strong. The involvement of drugs in certain cases makes him feel miserable, and in one scene from the film it is said: "I can't handle drugs" Morse says despondently. "I can't work it out why they do it. Beyond me." Lewis's laconic answer to this is as pragmatic as ever. "Same reason you drink beer"... "Beer is food, he replies acidly."<sup>30</sup> Equally, in *Cherubim and Seraphim* (1992), he says, "All drugs are evil".<sup>31</sup>

Sherlock Holmes then, has a more liberal way of looking at the subject. Holmes is an occasional user of cocaine, described by Watson as his only "vice". Something however that Watson has not considered as a "vice" is Holmes's habit of heavy smoking. The two characters also differ greatly when it comes to literature. Morse is a reader, whose flat is described as "book-lined", and in *The Dead of Jericho*, he is

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<sup>28</sup> [Http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sherlock\\_Holmes](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sherlock_Holmes), 4/19.

<sup>29</sup> [Http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sherlock\\_Holmes](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sherlock_Holmes), 4-5/19.

<sup>30</sup> Bird, 59.

<sup>31</sup> Bird, 117.

frequently attending meetings of the Oxford Book Association. His greatest literary love is poetry, and he is familiar with the most monumental of all the Victorian poets, Tennyson – not initially out of free choice. In *Death is Now My Neighbour*, he cites “To strive, to seek, to find and not to yield”<sup>32</sup>, This makes his chief of police, called commissioner Strange disconcerted, and the following dialog takes place between them. “Strange: “Are you all right, Morse?”, Morse: “Tennyson, sir. My father made me learn it by heart.”<sup>33</sup> Sherlock Holmes on the other hand, is not described as having any literary interest at all. In *A Study in Scarlet*, Dr Watson describes Holmes’s literary skills as “Nil” (nothing), although there is some evidence that could prove he was wrong, namely that Holmes’s speech is replete with references to *the Bible*, Shakespeare and Goethe.

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<sup>32</sup> Bird, 94.

<sup>33</sup> Bird, 95.

## 3.2 Similarities

The two detectives do however, have some things in common. For both of them cerebration is seen as being a great means of solving crimes. Morse uses crossword puzzles and a pint of beer to stimulate the brain, while Holmes uses his pipe and “quiet analyses”, “during which no one speaks to the character while he works.”<sup>34</sup> Equally, both of them use “psychoactive substances”<sup>35</sup>. This refers to Holmes’s habit of smoking and his occasional use of cocaine, while Morse takes “a pint or three of cask-conditioned beer”. To continue, they are both bachelors, Holmes of his own choice, described as having “an aversion to women”, while Morse is romantic at heart, but has very little success in his attempts to build relations with women.

Another aspect the two have in common is that leisure and jollification have no appeal for either of them. Holmes describes himself as “Bohemian”, and Morse is described as a conservative, old-fashioned reactionary. Also, both of them have limited social lives with a few number of real friends. Holmes’s best and only friend is his faithful Dr Watson, and the same goes for Morse and his assistant Sergeant Lewis. The next issue that is similar between them is their tendency to use methods that are considered as being outside the law. Dr Watson describes this side of Holmes as having a “tendency to bend the truth and break the law (lie to the police, conceal evidence... housebreak...but not murder...) when it suited his purposes.” Also, “a modern reader must accept actions which should be out of character for a ‘law-abiding’ detective...of a later time.”<sup>36</sup> On the same issue Christopher Bird says about Morse: “Morse may claim to ‘do work with what’s laid down’ but he does not care much about proper procedure...Morse – is interested first in the puzzle and

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<sup>34</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sherlock\\_Holmes](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sherlock_Holmes), 2/19, 2005-10-07.

<sup>35</sup> Bird, 77.

<sup>36</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sherlock\\_Holmes](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sherlock_Holmes), 5/19, 2005-10-07.

second in justice.”<sup>37</sup> When it comes to police work, Morse hates routine although he can be capable of “a ferocious work rate” if he is in the mood. He does, like Sherlock Holmes, everything in his power to find clues and solve the case. Bird mentions “He will do anything in his power...to crack the first and bring about the second...breaking and entering...forging letters...searching without warrant...or posing improbably as an expert on the breeding...of cattle.”<sup>38</sup> If it can be described as being the purpose, Morse is, as well as Sherlock Holmes, using methods in the legal grey zone in order to solve the cases.

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<sup>37</sup> Bird, 116.

<sup>38</sup> Bird, 116.

## Conclusion

This essay has discussed the differences and similarities that are found between two of the most well known fictional detectives in classical crime literature. In the essay the opposing characteristics of the two crime solvers are considered, and it has been proven that differences as well as similarities are found in both of the characters. The largest difference between the detectives is found in their method of solving crime. Their different ways of solving cases are quite interesting, as Sherlock Holmes is mostly searching for clues that present him with a large amount of research and records to work on. This massive source of evidence leads him right to the solving of the crime, while Morse and his “coincidental” way of working often leads him to the wrong conclusions. Morse is not always right in his conclusions, and he does not simply “bust” the suspect, instead “ironic circumstances have the case end and the crime brought to him.”<sup>39</sup>

The largest similarity between the two investigators is that both consider cerebration as the being the main means of solving crimes. Morse cannot think straight without a crossword puzzle from ‘The Times’ or a pint of beer, and in addition, he “refuses to drive - or think - in a car that is not ‘pre-electrics’<sup>40</sup>”, referring to his Jaguar. Sherlock Holmes on the other hand thinks best in silence at Baker Street, No 221 B smoking his pipe, and we are told that “he is often able to solve a case without leaving home”<sup>41</sup>. Subsequently, Holmes is most famous for the use of “his prowess at using logic and astute observation to solve cases.”<sup>42</sup> As a backup to his deductive skills, Holmes has a massive research library and an accurate

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<sup>39</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Inspector\\_Morse](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Inspector_Morse), 2/4, 2005-09-12.

<sup>40</sup> Bird, 100.

<sup>41</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sherlock\\_Holmes](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sherlock_Holmes), 1/19, 2005-10-07.

<sup>42</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sherlock\\_Holmes](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sherlock_Holmes), 1/19, 2005-10-07.

collection of case records. This is in contrast to Morse, as “his method of “using random connections to see where they lead...would be anathema for Holmes.”<sup>43</sup>

Another important aspect worth mentioning is the environment in which the two master detectives work. Sherlock Holmes lives and works in London, and most of the adventures are also set in the town or its surroundings, as well as Inspector Morse’s Oxford, which with its surrounding areas is the place where the Morse mysteries are set. This gives the impression that both detectives in general have great local knowledge about the area in which most of the crime scenes are found. However, it is important that the fictional environments have to be consistent. Equally, the geographical locations, as well as the characters are important aspects that contribute to moving the story forward. Morse’s Oxford for example, is an imaginary construct, and however realistic it may seem, it is only a creation just as all imaginary worlds contained in novels. The fictional territory of Morse’s Oxford is “just as rounded and satisfying as Holmes’s gaslit London...or the steamy Los Angeles of Philip Marlowe.”<sup>44</sup>

In conclusion, the two master detectives have a lot in common despite the fact that they also have many differences. As the essay has explored the background of the characters, as well as of their creators, one thing can be stated. The human being is a complex creation, whether it is described as a character in literature or in real life. In the novels, the descriptions of the character’s habits, person, life and history are remarkably similar to a real person. Also, the pictures of the environments, characters, places and crimes that come to mind while reading, must be considered as having a strong resemblance to reality. Therefore, in my own opinion, I find it difficult to separate one of the two contenders to the title as being the master

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<sup>43</sup> Bird, 77.

<sup>44</sup> Bird, 12.

detective. Though the fact that their methods to find and arrest the culprit differ in many ways, they are very successful in their ability to solve the cases with, of course, quite a large amount of help from their faithful assistants. The final decision must be to have the two detectives share the title side by side and ascend the throne as equals.

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