

Book Sources for *Baker Street* **Lee Beaudrot - Class of 2023- Creative Writing**

While much of the plot is original, *Baker Street* draws on the stories *A Scandal in Bohemia* (1891), *The Adventure of the Empty House* (1903), and *The Final Problem* (1893). The musical seems to exist generally within the Sherlock Holmes mythos rather than at a specific point on the series' timeline because significant events happen out of sequence. Watson's wife did not die until the period where Holmes was pretending to be dead, and the two met Irene Adler several years prior.

There are distinct differences between the source material and the musical, most of which are common in other adaptations as they represent Sherlock Holmes as he occupies the public consciousness instead of the character he is in the short stories and novels. Professor Moriarty is presented as an ongoing nemesis to Holmes. He only appears in *The Final Problem*, and is only further mentioned in *The Valley of Fear* and *The Adventure of the Empty House*. The musical casts him as a constant antagonist that Holmes must repeatedly foil, and bases its opening scene on a story where Moriarty was already dead when it took place. The character is employed as a super villain to Holmes's superhero, inflating his importance so that the musical has a properly menacing antagonist. In reality, Moriarty primarily served as a means for Sir Arthur Conan Doyle to kill off his near superhuman character in a way that did not feel forced (debatably), but once Holmes was revived due to public outcry he had already definitively killed off his nemesis so the only further importance Moriarty had was his remaining criminal network. His presence in the stories proved momentary, but he stuck in the minds of the readers because he was capable of "killing" Sherlock Holmes. Thus, overtime he took on the persona presented in *Baker Street*: The sort of person who would steal jewels and plant a time bomb during Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee.

Holmes, himself, is written in a more stereotypical than interpretive fashion in *Baker Street*. He's rude, unfeeling, and infallible. In one scene, he goes so far as to throw Watson's memoirs into the fireplace because he is in a bad mood, saying "You really must spare me your sanctimonious sermons". The books make it clear that Holmes is prone to bouts of depression and general ill humor, but he is also always courteous with the people he cares about, Watson in particular. The books often remark upon the affection he shows Mrs. Hudson and Dr. Watson, who both in turn do their best to take care of him when he gets in a bad way (i.e. goes without food or sleep or starts using drugs to stimulate his brain). Many adaptations, and even the books themselves, refer to him as incapable of typical human emotion despite the fact that they present him as a highly emotional human being. A more accurate statement would be that he reacts differently to emotional triggers than most, and thus has convinced himself that feeling is a weakness. Holmes as a character does prize logic over all other virtues, and the musical even succeeds in showing his internal conflict over the person he wants to be and the person he is. However, it misses the mark in depicting what specific emotions he struggles with. Attraction to another person never afflicted him, as such. His difficulty interacting with others stems from a fundamental disconnect in priorities and a lack of knowledge of society's unwritten rules. Sherlock Holmes bears more of a resemblance to people on the autism spectrum than to a robot. To the point that he is infallible, one must only look to the changes that the musical made to Irene Adler.

Adler was initially a one-off character in *A Scandal in Bohemia*, but quickly took on cultural significance as “the only woman Sherlock Holmes ever loved”. This is not an accurate summation of her role in the one short story in which she appeared. Her significance has been misinterpreted since she first appeared, resulting in her depiction in most adaptations as a sort of temptress. It is true that in the short stories Holmes had a great deal of respect for her, but it was never romantic in nature. Irene Adler mattered to him because she outsmarted him and caused him to examine his own biases. In *A Scandal in Bohemia*, Holmes hatches a plot to retrieve some compromising letters that Irene possesses which relies on the assumption that in the event of a fire, a married woman immediately goes for her baby while an unmarried woman goes for the most valuable thing she owns. When he eventually comes back to take the letters from where he had seen her put them, he finds only a letter from Adler that explains that she has left the country with her new husband and had been aware of Holmes's machinations from the beginning. *Baker Street* all but erases her intellectual capability and Holmes's resulting epiphany and reduces her to a romantic interest. Its depiction of the main incident from *A Scandal in Bohemia* depicts Adler handing over the letters to Holmes because he “earned them” by nearly tricking her. Irene Adler's importance to the Sherlock Holmes canon is that of a worthy opponent to the famed detective, not so different from Professor Moriarty, in a way. Reducing her to a love interest for Holmes when a) she is happily married in the source material, b) Holmes is written as close to asexual as was possible when the term had not yet entered the common lexicon, and c) she is primarily defined by her strength of character and intellect, goes directly against the spirit of the original author's work.

Baker Street traffics in what the public assumes the Sherlock Holmes series is about: a smart but emotionless man who solves mysteries with his bewildered sidekick and refuses to submit to such base emotions as love. It casts the heart and soul of the stories, Dr. Watson, as a bumbling tertiary character with one song about how he misses his departed wife. The creators of *Baker Street* missed the central point of the stories to which they pay homage. Sherlock Holmes makes mistakes. He misjudges situations. He depends on his relationships with the people around him. He is always growing and learning, and he is a better man for it.