

Character Analysis

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In the 1965 Broadway musical *Baker Street*, based on a series of Sherlock Holmes stories by Arthur Conan Doyle, the world's most famous British detective faces and solves numerous puzzles in the mysterious case of a sinister mathematician. One puzzle that proves difficult for even his unmatched mind, however, is that of love. Yet, while the audience does not get to see or hear much visual or musical softening of Holmes' character on stage, his decision to pursue woman-of-interest Irene Adler at the end of the musical alludes to romance yet to come. Granted, this pursuit is presented as more of a detour on his steadfast career path rather than a worthy aim in and of itself, and most hints of love in the musical serve mainly to trouble and distract Holmes' otherwise perfectly logical demeanor. Indeed, the principal "couple" in this death-of-a-bachelor musical breaks several Broadway conventions, creating instead a predominantly masculine aesthetic reflecting a national emphasis on technological and scientific innovation during the 60s Cold War era. The bachelor suffers a bit, but never comes close to dying.



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From Act I, Scene I, Holmes is conveyed as brilliant and witty, but also unpredictable and condescending—less-desirable traits that are nonetheless still charming in their own way, at least the way Sherlock Holmes wears them. Contrary to most book musicals, which begin with a number sung, at least in part, by a chorus introducing the audience to the setting and community in which the show takes place, *Baker Street* opens with Holmes' character-debut song "It's so simple." This 'I want'/'I am' song is sung mainly by a fast-talking and cleverly-rhyming Holmes, with occasional additions from Watson and a couple side male characters. As the number conveys, *Baker Street* is oh-so-simply Holmes' show. There is no need to spend time characterizing the community when Holmes' charisma and deductive genius fill up the otherwise empty space. While there are multiple chorus numbers later in the show, these do little to advance the plot.

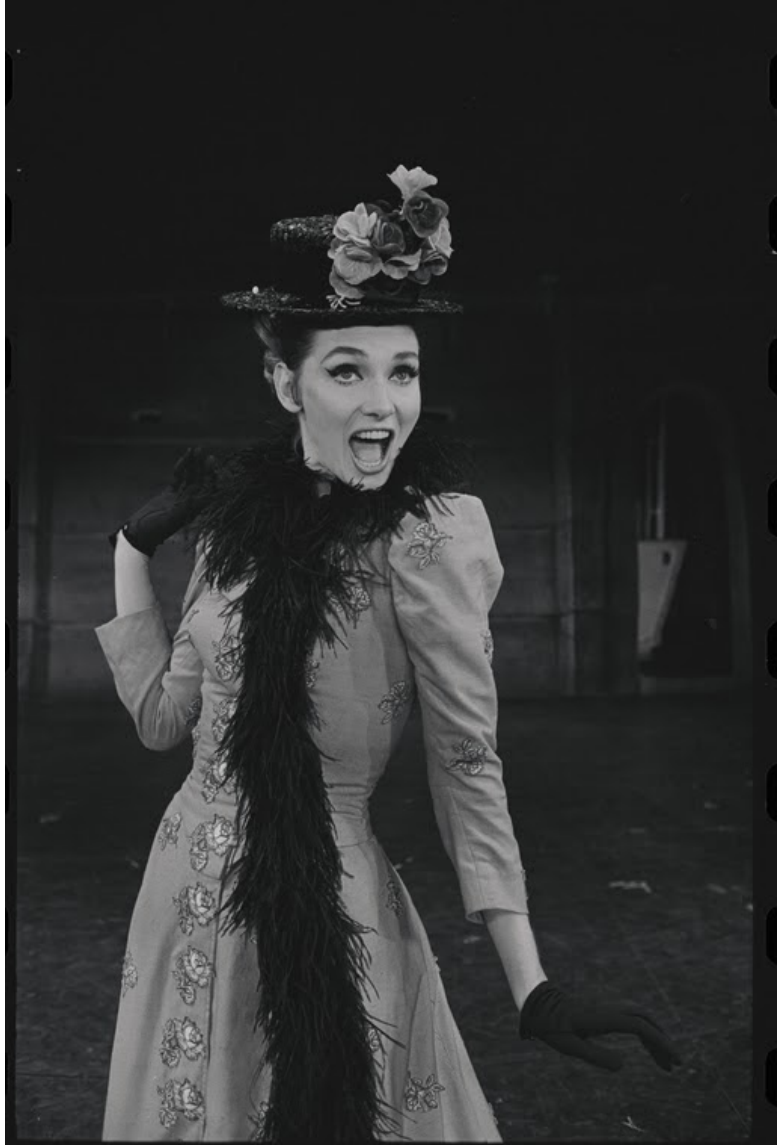
Holmes lives and breathes sleuthing. In "Cold Clear World," he laments with a sorrowful violin when he is stuck on a case—the sole source of his fulfillment. The source of his troubles? His incorrect assumptions about American performer Irene Adler, Holmes' primary suspect at the beginning of the show. Adler's 'I am' song, "I'm in London Again," comes after Holmes' and demonstrates her admired place in the city. Not only is Adler a successful career woman, but she is also musically multi-faceted. In "Love Letters," she humorously teases Sherlock for his failure to trick her with the disguise he created to investigate case-related evidence in her possession, all the while transitioning between salsa, country western, and opera styles. Moreover, when Adler later aids him in escaping from the mathematician Moriarity's traps, Holmes comments on her "astuteness and courage not commonly found in a woman."

In stride with genre conventions, Holmes and Adler have a conditional love song, "Finding Words for Spring," but the characteristic sense of resistance that usually emotes from both principal characters in such songs comes instead mainly from Holmes, who declares that "love doesn't exist." Adler is much more approaching, telling Holmes that he cannot know love until he feels it. Indeed, she reveals herself to be a hopeless romantic in "I'd Do it Again," her soliloquy in Act II. The conditional love song ends with the two physically close, but their would-be kiss is interrupted. Nevertheless, Holmes recruits Adler's performative skills in a scheme to outwit Moriarty and the two excitedly get ready for the night ahead. When Holmes finally comes face-to-face with his villain, however, he does so alone. The villainizing of Moriarity, a fanatic professor and engineer who shares Holmes' gift for logical analysis—a fact Moriarity himself points out in his speech to Holmes—seems to convey the pitfalls of a great man's otherwise perfectly instrumental life without feminine affection. Before he plummets over a cliff, Moriarty accuses Holmes of letting love corrupt his mind. Holmes then decides to fake his death, an act Watson criticizes as an effort to evade his feelings for Adler. "What are you so afraid of?" he asks before singing about the wonders of married life in "A Married Man." This song is easily interpreted as a tribute to the fundamentality of marriage to American society, providing stability during times of crisis.



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In a climactic scene wherein Holmes reacts to the discovery that Moriarity is not really dead either, he is also unable to resist love's appeal. As he mixes chemicals, his usually unfaltering thoughts are repeatedly interrupted by the echoing chords and voice of Adler's emotional "I'd Do it Again," representing the place that love is beginning to occupy in his character's heart. These sounds weave in conflictingly between bouts of piano and violins—the tense, mysterious musical style first introduced in the overture that dominates most of the show up to this point. In the final song, Holmes announces to Watson that he will go after Moriarity until he is caught, but not before stopping in America, where Adler has returned, thinking Holmes has rebuffed her affections completely. For Holmes, whose intellectual prowess reflects American self-idealizations in the Cold War, life is still incomplete without a loving wife, symbolizing the steadfastness of heteronormative American conventions.



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