

Sherlock Uses Argumentative Inquiry

Abstract

This paper uses an extract from the Sherlock Holmes' detective story, "The Study in Scarlet" in order to reflect on Sherlock's scientific deductive research methods. The conjecture is that there is discrepancy between how Sherlock says scientific research should be done and how it is actually done. Should the scientist jump to conjectures and test them, or rather should he or she collect all the evidence impartially before formulating a theory? Even a quick reflection on Sherlock's actual detective practices suggest his impartial, 'let the evidence speak for itself', espoused theory, does not match his actions. Sherlock seems to know what he is looking for upfront; he draws on experience and analogy to know where to look.

The Problem

This paper is about inquiry, that is, research methods. The author is concerned to interpret how an inquiry considered acceptable to all those involved actually occurs. The approach chosen is to use the criteria of interpretive research to reflect on the activities of someone solving a complex social problem, such as the solution of a crime. This involves an intent to 'get at the truth', and provided the criminal when exposed then confesses, many would agree that indeed the truth was discovered. As it will be important to reflect on the process of inquiry, and as the thinking behind the methodology of the inquiry needs to be available, this paper will reflect on one of the stories of Sherlock Holmes solving a crime applying what he called the 'deductive methods of exclusion'. Over 100 years of research methodology debate has passed since Sherlock's method was written up, so hopefully we have learnt something about methodologies. The intent of this paper is to interpret his inquiry method from the perspective of interpretive methodology.

Sherlock Holmes, created in the 1880s, was the epitome of the scientific detective. Arthur Conan Doyle made Edgar Allan Poe's Detective Dupin into a Mr Chips science teacher. Douglas Adams did not miss the opportunity to satire this by creating the harmless, friendly, yet self absorbed cynical post-structural detective, Dirk Gently, where even time is manipulated. The author Arthur Conan Doyle was a medical doctor at a time when medicine was beginning to emerge as a credible science and stun the general public with its rigorous and acceptable research methods, which led to an extensive library of knowledge claims. Doyle's books try and apply this scientific methodology to a particular complex social situation, namely murder.

The relationship between the use of fiction and research is reasonably well established in the organisational literature (Boje, 1995). This paper will NOT make any attempt to write in a detective genre (eg. Goodman 2000), nor even hint at the approach of Briet and Elizinga (2002) who invented the detective Henry Spearman. He uses economic theory to solve crimes; here, murder has to be understood as rational behaviour in order to increase utility for one of the suspects. Czarniawska (1999) provides a useful analogous approach to organisational studies and detective stories, but is not focused on research methods. She does however reference the Italian literature which tries to expose Sherlock Holmes' methodology, summarising it as abduction (argument to the best evidence) rather than Sherlock's own claim of deduction. This paper will simply

provide a similar critique but one more interested in the role of prior experiences on how an investigation is designed.

It will explore the argument that we can learn about research methodology from critiquing Sherlock Holmes' methods as recorded in an extract of 'A Study in Scarlet'. I am hoping you will read the extract below as a researcher interested in Sherlock's research method(ology) rather than 'who done it'. It is a bit long but easy reading.

The critique could have used Churchman's (1972) hierarchy of inquiry systems or the list of 7 'principles' for conducting and evaluating interpretive field studies by Klein and Myers [1999]. However, the two main questions I would like this paper to consider include, first whether he is unbiased and impartial in his collection of evidence. He, and others, say scientists should first collect all the evidence and then formulate a theory. Does Sherlock, or rather does he not form tentative conjectures, which he then evaluates? Second, what does he mean by theory, is it 'who done it' or the more modern meaning of theory as an explanation why the murder took place? The opportunity may also be taken to ask some context question like, why do we identify Sherlock as a positivist, a scientist? How important is context to his data? Is he ever interpretive, intensive, or qualitative? What role does emotion play in his thinking? Is he a capital letter or small letter (g)rounded (t)heorist? Is there a critical social theory bone in his body as he strives to improve the world by exposing criminals?

These questions will be used to think about Sherlock Holmes' research into 'who did it'. But first:

EXTRACTS FROM: 'A STUDY IN SCARLET'

Arthur Conan Doyle, 1887

...

Chapter 3

The Lauriston Garden Mystery

... — look at this!" He threw me over the note which the commissionaire had brought.

"Why," I cried, as I cast my eye over it, "this is terrible!"

"It does seem to be a little out of the common," he remarked, calmly.

"Would you mind reading it to me aloud?" This is the letter which I read to him,

"MY DEAR MR. SHERLOCK HOLMES:

"There has been a bad business during the night at 3, Lauriston Gardens, off the Brixton Road. Our man on the beat saw a light there about two in the morning, and as the house was an empty one, suspected that something was amiss. He found the door open, and in the front room, which is bare of furniture, discovered the body of a gentle man, well dressed, and having cards in his pocket bearing the name of 'Enoch J. Drebbler, Cleveland, Ohio, U. S. A.' There had been no robbery, nor is there any evidence as to how the man met his death. There are marks of blood in the room, but there is no wound upon his person. We are at a loss as to how he came into the empty house; indeed, the whole affair is a puzzler. If you can come round to the

house any time before twelve, you will find me there. I have left everything in statu quo until I hear from you. If you are unable to come, I shall give you fuller details, and would esteem it a great kindness if you would favour me with your opinions.

Yours faithfully, TOBIAS GREGSON.

“Gregson is the smartest of the Scotland Yarders,” my friend remarked; “he and Lestrade are the pick of a bad lot. They are both quick and energetic, but conventional—shockingly so. They have their knives into one another, too. They are as jealous as a pair of professional beauties. There will be some fun over this case if they are both put upon the scent.”

I was amazed at the calm way in which he rippled on. “Surely there is not a moment to be lost,” I cried, “shall I go and order you a cab?”

“I’m not sure about whether I shall go. I am the most incurably lazy devil that ever stood in shoe leather—that is, when the fit is on me, for I can be spry enough at times.”

“Why, it is just such a chance as you have been longing for.”

“My dear fellow, what does it matter to me? Supposing I unravel the whole matter, you may be sure that Gregson, Lestrade, and Co. will pocket all the credit. That comes of being an unofficial personage.”

“But he begs you to help him.”

“Yes. He knows that I am his superior, and acknowledges it to me; but he would cut his tongue out before he would own it to any third person. However, we may as well go and have a look. I shall work it out on my own hook. I may have a laugh at them if I have nothing else. Come on!” He hustled on his overcoat, and bustled about in a way that showed that an energetic fit had superseded the apathetic one.

“Get your hat,” he said.

“You wish me to come?”

“Yes, if you have nothing better to do.” A minute later we were both in a hansom, driving furiously for the Brixton Road...

“You don’t seem to give much thought to the matter in hand,” I said at last, interrupting Holmes...

“No data yet,” he answered. “It is a capital mistake to theorize before you have all the evidence. It biases the judgment.”

“You will have your data soon,” I remarked, pointing with my finger; “this is the Brixton Road, and that is the house, if I am not very much mistaken.”

“So it is. Stop, driver, stop!” We were still a hundred yards or so from it, but he insisted upon our alighting, and we finished our journey upon foot.

Number 3, Lauriston Gardens wore an ill-omened and minatory look. It was one of four which stood back some little way from the street, two being occupied and two empty. The latter looked out with three tiers of vacant melancholy windows, which were blank and dreary, save that here and there a “To Let” card had developed like a cataract upon the bleared panes. A small garden sprinkled over with a scattered eruption of sickly plants separated each of these houses from the street, and was traversed by a narrow pathway, yellowish in colour, and consisting apparently of a mixture of clay and of gravel. The whole place was very sloppy from the rain which had fallen through the night. The garden was bounded by a three-foot brick wall with a fringe of wood rails upon the top, and against this wall was leaning a stalwart police constable, surrounded by a small knot of loafers, who craned their necks and strained their eyes in the vain hope of catching some glimpse of the proceedings within.

I had imagined that Sherlock Holmes would at once have hurried into the house and plunged into a study of the mystery. Nothing appeared to be further from his intention. With an air of nonchalance which, under the circumstances, seemed to me to border upon affectation, he lounged up and down the pavement, and gazed vacantly at the ground, the sky, the opposite houses and the line of railings. Having finished his scrutiny, he proceeded slowly down the path, or rather down the fringe of grass which flanked the path, keeping his eyes riveted upon the ground. Twice he stopped, and once I saw him smile, and heard him utter an exclamation of satisfaction. There were many marks of footsteps upon the wet clayey soil; but since the police had been coming and going over it, I was unable to see how my companion could hope to learn anything from it. Still I had had such extraordinary evidence of the quickness of his perceptive faculties, that I had no doubt that he could see a great deal which was hidden from me.

At the door of the house we were met by a tall, white-faced, flaxen-haired man, with a notebook in his hand, who rushed forward and wrung my companion's hand with effusion. "It is indeed kind of you to come," he said, "I have had everything left untouched."

"Except that!" my friend answered, pointing at the pathway. "If a herd of buffaloes had passed along, there could not be a greater mess. No doubt, however, you had drawn your own conclusions, Gregson, before you permitted this."

"I have had so much to do inside the house," the detective said evasively. "My colleague, Mr. Lestrade, is here. I had relied upon him to look after this."

Holmes glanced at me and raised his eyebrows sardonically.

"With two such men as yourself and Lestrade upon the ground there will not be much for a third party to find out," he said.

Gregson rubbed his hands in a self-satisfied way. "I think we have done all that can be done," he answered; "it's a queer case, though, and I knew your taste for such things."

"You did not come here in a cab?" asked Sherlock Holmes.

"No, sir."

"Nor Lestrade?"

"No, sir."

"Then let us go and look at the room." With which inconsequent remark he strode on into the house followed by Gregson, whose features expressed his astonishment. A short passage, bare-planked and dusty, led to the kitchen and offices. Two doors opened out of it to the left and to the right. One of these had obviously been closed for many weeks. The other belonged to the dining-room, which was the apartment in which the mysterious affair had occurred. Holmes walked in, and I followed him with that subdued feeling at my heart which the presence of death inspires. It was a large square room, looking all the larger from the absence of all furniture. A vulgar flaring paper adorned the walls, but it was blotched in places with mildew, and here and there great strips had become detached and hung down, exposing the yellow plaster beneath. Opposite the door was a showy fireplace, surmounted by a mantelpiece of imitation white marble. On one corner of this was stuck the stump of a red wax candle. The solitary window was so dirty that the light was hazy and uncertain, giving a dull gray tinge to everything, which was intensified by the thick layer of dust which coated the whole apartment.

All these details I observed afterwards. At present my attention was centred upon the single, grim, motionless figure which lay stretched upon the boards, with vacant, sightless eyes staring up at the discoloured ceiling. It was that of a man about forty-three or forty-four years of age, middle-sized, broad-shouldered, with crisp curling black hair, and a short, stubbly beard. He was dressed in a heavy broadcloth frock coat and waistcoat, with light-coloured trousers, and immaculate collar and cuffs. A top hat, well brushed and trim, was placed upon the floor beside him. His hands were clenched and his arms thrown abroad, while his lower limbs were interlocked, as

though his death struggle had been a grievous one. On his rigid face there stood an expression of horror, and, as it seemed to me, of hatred, such as I have never seen upon human features. This malignant and terrible contortion, combined with the low forehead, blunt nose, and prognathous jaw, gave the dead man a singularly simious and ape-like appearance, which was increased by his writhing, unnatural posture. I have seen death in many forms, but never has it appeared to me in a more fearsome aspect than in that dark, grimy apartment, which looked out upon one of the main arteries of suburban London.

Lestrade, lean and ferret-like as ever, was standing by the doorway, and greeted my companion and myself.

"This case will make a stir, sir," he remarked. "It beats anything I have seen, and I am no chicken."

"There is no clue?" said Gregson.

"None at all," chimed in Lestrade.

Sherlock Holmes approached the body, and, kneeling down, examined it intently. "You are sure that there is no wound?" he asked, pointing to numerous gouts and splashes of blood which lay all round.

"Positive!" cried both detectives.

"Then, of course, this blood belongs to a second individual—presumably the murderer, if murder has been committed. It reminds me of the circumstances attendant on the death of Van Jansen, in Utrecht, in the year '34. Do you remember the case, Gregson?"

"No, sir."

"Read it up—you really should. There is nothing new under the sun. It has all been done before." As he spoke, his nimble fingers were flying here, there, and everywhere, feeling, pressing, unbuttoning, examining, while his eyes wore the same far-away expression which I have already remarked upon. So swiftly was the examination made, that one would hardly have guessed the minuteness with which it was conducted. Finally, he sniffed the dead man's lips, and then glanced at the soles of his patent leather boots.

"He has not been moved at all?" he asked.

"No more than was necessary for the purpose of our examination."

"You can take him to the mortuary now," he said. "There is nothing more to be learned."

Gregson had a stretcher and four men at hand. At his call they entered the room, and the stranger was lifted and carried out. As they raised him, a ring tinkled down and rolled across the floor. Lestrade grabbed it up and stared at it with mystified eyes.

"There's been a woman here," he cried. "It's a woman's wedding ring."

He held it out, as he spoke, upon the palm of his hand. We all gathered round him and gazed at it. There could be no doubt that that circlet of plain gold had once adorned the finger of a bride.

"This complicates matters," said Gregson. "Heaven knows, they were complicated enough before."

"You're sure it doesn't simplify them?" observed Holmes. "There's nothing to be learned by staring at it. What did you find in his pockets?"

"We have it all here," said Gregson, pointing to a litter of objects upon one of the bottom steps of the stairs. "A gold watch, No. 97163, by Barraud, of London. Gold Albert chain, very heavy and solid. Gold ring, with masonic device. Gold pin — bull-dog's head, with rubies as eyes. Russian leather cardcase, with cards of Enoch J. Drebber of Cleveland, corresponding with the E. J. D. upon the linen. No purse, but loose money to the extent of seven pounds thirteen. Pocket edition of Boccaccio's 'Decameron,' with name of Joseph Stangerson upon the flyleaf. Two letters—one addressed to E. J. Drebber and one to Joseph Stangerson."

"At what address?"

"American Exchange, Strand—to be left till called for. They are both from the Guion Steamship Company, and refer to the sailing of their boats from Liverpool. It is clear that this unfortunate man was about to return to New York."

"Have you made any inquiries as to this man Stangerson?"

"I did it at once, sir," said Gregson. "I have had advertisements sent to all the newspapers, and one of my men has gone to the American Exchange, but he has not returned yet."

"Have you sent to Cleveland?"

"We telegraphed this morning."

"How did you word your inquiries?"

"We simply detailed the circumstances, and said that we should be glad of any information which could help us."

"You did not ask for particulars on any point which appeared to you to be crucial?"

"I asked about Stangerson."

"Nothing else?"

"Is there no circumstance on which this whole case appears to hinge? Will you not telegraph again?"

"I have said all I have to say," said Gregson, in an offended voice.

Sherlock Holmes chuckled to himself, and appeared to be about to make some remark, when Lestrade, who had been in the front room while we were holding this conversation in the hall, reappeared upon the scene, rubbing his hands in a pompous and self-satisfied manner.

"Mr. Gregson," he said, "I have just made a discovery of the highest importance, and one which would have been overlooked had I not made a careful examination of the walls."

The little man's eyes sparkled as he spoke, and he was evidently in a state of suppressed exultation at having scored a point against his colleague.

"Come here," he said, bustling back into the room, the atmosphere of which felt clearer since the removal of its ghastly inmate. "Now, stand there!"

He struck a match on his boot and held it up against the wall.

"Look at that!" he said, triumphantly.

I have remarked that the paper had fallen away in parts. In this particular corner of the room a large piece had peeled off, leaving a yellow square of coarse plastering. Across this bare space there was scrawled in blood-red letters a single word – RACHE

"What do you think of that?" cried the detective, with the air of a showman exhibiting his show.

"This was overlooked because it was in the darkest corner of the room, and no one thought of looking there. The murderer has written it with his or her own blood. See this smear where it has trickled down the wall! That disposes of the idea of suicide anyhow. Why was that corner chosen to write it on? I will tell you. See that candle on the mantelpiece. It was lit at the time, and if it was lit this corner would be the brightest instead of the darkest portion of the wall."

"And what does it mean now that you have found it?" asked Gregson in a depreciatory voice.

"Mean? Why, it means that the writer was going to put the female name Rachel, but was disturbed before he or she had time to finish. You mark my words, when this case comes to be cleared up, you will find that a woman named Rachel has something to do with it. It's all very well for you to laugh, Mr. Sherlock Holmes. You may be very smart and clever, but the old hound is the best, when all is said and done."

"I really beg your pardon!" said my companion, who had ruffled the little man's temper by bursting into an explosion of laughter. "You certainly have the credit of being the first of us to find this out

and, as you say, it bears every mark of having been written by the other participant in last night's mystery. I have not had time to examine this room yet, but with your permission I shall do so now."

As he spoke, he whipped a tape measure and a large round magnifying glass from his pocket. With these two implements he trotted noiselessly about the room, sometimes stopping, occasionally kneeling, and once lying flat upon his face. So engrossed was he with his occupation that he appeared to have forgotten our presence, for he chattered away to himself under his breath the whole time, keeping up a running fire of exclamations, groans, whistles, and little cries suggestive of encouragement and of hope. As I watched him I was irresistibly reminded of a pure-blooded, well-trained foxhound, as it dashes backward and forward through the culvert whining in its eagerness, until it comes across the lost scent. For twenty minutes or more he continued his researches, measuring with the most exact care the distance between marks which were entirely invisible to me, and occasionally applying his tape to the walls in an equally incomprehensible manner. In one place he gathered up very carefully a little pile of gray dust from the floor, and packed it away in an envelope. Finally he examined with his glass the word upon the wall, going over every letter of it with the most minute exactness. This done, he appeared to be satisfied, for he replaced his tape and his glass in his pocket.

"They say that genius is an infinite capacity for taking pains," he remarked with a smile. "It's a very bad definition, but it does apply to detective work."

Gregson and Lestrade had watched the manoeuvres of their amateur companion with considerable curiosity and some contempt. They evidently failed to appreciate the fact, which I had begun to realize, that Sherlock Holmes's smallest actions were all directed towards some definite and practical end.

"What do you think of it, sir?" they both asked.

"It would be robbing you of the credit of the case if I were to presume to help you," remarked my friend. "You are doing so well now that it would be a pity for anyone to interfere." There was a world of sarcasm in his voice as he spoke. "If you will let me know how your investigations go," he continued, "I shall be happy to give you any help I can. In the meantime I should like to speak to the constable who found the body. Can you give me his name and address?"

Lestrade glanced at his notebook. "John Rance," he said.

"He is off duty now. You will find him at 46, Audley Court, Kennington Park Gate."

Holmes took a note of the address.

"Come along, Doctor," he said: "we shall go and look him up. I'll tell you one thing which may help you in the case," he continued, turning to the two detectives. "There has been murder done, and the murderer was a man. He was more than six feet high, was in the prime of life, had small feet for his height, wore coarse, square-toed boots and smoked a Trichinopoly cigar. He came here with his victim in a four-wheeled cab, which was drawn by a horse with three old shoes and one new one on his off fore-leg. In all probability the murderer had a florid face, and the finger-nails of his right hand were remarkably long. These are only a few indications, but they may assist you." Lestrade and Gregson glanced at each other with an incredulous smile.

"If this man was murdered, how was it done?" asked the former.

"Poison," said Sherlock Holmes curtly, and strode off. "One other thing, Lestrade," he added, turning round at the door:

"'Rache,' is the German for 'revenge'; so don't lose your time looking for Miss Rachel."

With which Parthian shot he walked away, leaving the two rivals open mouthed behind him.

Chapter 4

What John Rance Had to Tell

It was one o'clock when we left No. 3, Lauriston Gardens. Sherlock Holmes led me to the nearest telegraph office, whence he dispatched a long telegram. He then hailed a cab, and ordered the driver to take us to the address given us by Lestrade.

"There is nothing like first-hand evidence," he remarked; "as a matter of fact, my mind is entirely made up upon the case, but still we may as well learn all that is to be learned."

"You amaze me, Holmes," said I. "Surely you are not as sure as you pretend to be of all those particulars which you gave."

"There's no room for a mistake," he answered. "The very first thing which I observed on arriving there was that a cab had made two ruts with its wheels close to the curb. Now, up to last night, we have had no rain for a week, so that those wheels which left such a deep impression must have been there during the night. There were the marks of the horse's hoofs, too, the outline of one of which was far more clearly cut than that of the other three, showing that that was a new shoe. Since the cab was there after the rain began, and was not there at any time during the morning—I have Gregson's word for that—it follows that it must have been there during the night, and therefore, that it brought those two individuals to the house."

"That seems simple enough," said I; "but how about the other man's height?"

"Why, the height of a man, in nine cases out of ten, can be told from the length of his stride. It is a simple calculation enough, though there is no use my boring you with figures. I had this fellow's stride both on the clay outside and on the dust within. Then I had a way of checking my calculation. When a man writes on a wall, his instinct leads him to write above the level of his own eyes. Now that writing was just over six feet from the ground. It was child's play."

"And his age?" I asked.

"Well, if a man can stride four and a half feet without the smallest effort, he can't be quite in the sere and yellow. That was the breadth of a puddle on the garden walk which he had evidently walked across. Patent-leather boots had gone round, and Square-toes had hopped over. There is no mystery about it at all. I am simply applying to ordinary life a few of those precepts of observation and deduction which I advocated in that article. Is there anything else that puzzles you?"

"The finger-nails and the Trichinopoly," I suggested.

"The writing on the wall was done with a man's forefinger dipped in blood. My glass allowed me to observe that the plaster was slightly scratched in doing it, which would not have been the case if the man's nail had been trimmed. I gathered up some scattered ash from the floor. It was dark in colour and flaky—such an ash is only made by a Trichinopoly. I have made a special study of cigar ashes—in fact, I have written a monograph upon the subject. I flatter myself that I can distinguish at a glance the ash of any known brand either of cigar or of tobacco. It is just in such details that the skilled detective differs from the Gregson and Lestrade type."

"And the florid face?" I asked.

"Ah, that was a more daring shot, though I have no doubt that I was right. You must not ask me that at the present state of the affair."

I passed my hand over my brow. "My head is in a whirl," I remarked; "the more one thinks of it the more mysterious it grows. How came these two men—if there were two men—into an empty house? What has become of the cabman who drove them? How could one man compel another to take poison? Where did the blood come from? What was the object of the murderer, since robbery had no part in it? How came the woman's ring there? Above all, why should the second

man write up the German word RACHE before decamping? I confess that I cannot see any possible way of reconciling all these facts.”

My companion smiled approvingly.

“You sum up the difficulties of the situation succinctly and well,” he said. “There is much that is still obscure, though I have quite made up my mind on the main facts. As to poor Lestrade’s discovery, it was simply a blind intended to put the police upon a wrong track, by suggesting Socialism and secret societies. It was not done by a German. The A, if you noticed, was printed somewhat after the German fashion. Now, a real German invariably prints in the Latin character, so that we may safely say that this was not written by one, but by a clumsy imitator who overdid his part. It was simply a ruse to divert inquiry into a wrong channel. I’m not going to tell you much more of the case, Doctor. You know a conjurer gets no credit when once he has explained his trick and if I show you too much of my method of working, you will come to the conclusion that I am a very ordinary individual after all.”

“I shall never do that,” I answered; “you have brought detection as near an exact science as it ever will be brought in this world.”

My companion flushed up with pleasure at my words, and the earnest way in which I uttered them. I had already observed that he was as sensitive to flattery on the score of his art as any girl could be of her beauty.

“I’ll tell you one other thing,” he said. “Patent-leathers and Square-toes came in the same cab, and they walked down the pathway together as friendly as possible—arm-in-arm, in all probability. When they got inside, they walked up and down the room—or rather, Patent-leathers stood still while Square-toes walked up and down. I could read all that in the dust; and I could read that as he walked he grew more and more excited. That is shown by the increased length of his strides. He was talking all the while, and working himself up, no doubt, into a fury. Then the tragedy occurred. I’ve told you all I know myself now, for the rest is mere surmise and conjecture. We have a good working basis, however, on which to start. We must hurry up, for I want to go to Halle’s concert to hear Norman Neruda this afternoon.” ...

The Critique

In next stage in this paper is to offer a critique of this passage using the questions listed in the introduction.

The starting point may be the conjecture that Drebber’s death was suspicious. The police are paid to be suspicious, and they invite Sherlock to be suspicious. Already they can all be called bias. Their initial efforts are to confirming their conjecture that Drebber was murdered. Sherlock is introduced to the problem in a bias way, the letter claimed, ‘*that* a man has died mysteriously’ The confirming evidence given in the letter to support this is that he was found in an empty house late at night, with blood splattering around his body. There is no one present to explain what happened. This is enough to convince Sherlock it is an interesting mystery. Note there is no attempt to seek any disconfirming evidence. Given their agreed concerns about murder this persuades all three interlocutors to establish as common ground that there should be an investigation. The implication of accepting the initial conjecture that Drebber died in mysterious circumstances, is that a new conjecture of who performed the murder is sought.

The argument, from Sherlock's point of view, shifts as he approaches the house in Lauriston Gardens. His experience (either personal or from a third person) of examining murder scenes has led him to conclude (i.e. argue, knowledge claim) *that* the approach may reveal evidence of the comings and goings from the house. As he collects evidence in the form of horses hooves, wheel ruts and footprints the argument shifts to *that* two men came by cab after the rain and walked in to the house holding each other. They talked. The argument then shifts again to *that* he took poison, *that* a woman's ring was relevant, *that* the words 'Rache' in blood on the wall was irrelevant, *that* the second person was over six feet tall, *that* he smoked a certain cigar and *that* he has 'florid' faced. Sherlock's problem becomes one of combining these sub arguments under one overall argument about the identity and motive of the missing man.

The Evidence

Under argumentative inquiry the criteria for quality of evidence is simply whatever will convince a knowledgeable audience. This does not resolve many epistemological issues. The excerpt shows a means to tease out these issues, in particular that of the recursive relationship between what Sherlock would call theory and evidence. The creator of Sherlock, Conan Doyle, was a medical doctor in real life, and was writing at a time when there was a massive interest in science as providing solutions to disease and poverty. Sherlock, represents the scientific method of inquiry in human form applied to complex social problems. He out-performed everyone, but Conan Doyle acknowledged that Sherlock had to have a reductionist view of the world. He had no knowledge of the arts or literature or of non-forensic sciences. Sherlock believed in analysis not a systems view, i.e., he zoomed in on detail.

“...genius is an infinite capacity for taking pains”

Further, like a true Kantian scientist, Sherlock constantly reminds Watson that the 'proper' way to conduct these ever more minute analyses is to start with an empty head, no preconceived ideas, no a priori, an indifferent impartiality. In this spiritually unbiased way, the assumed empirical evidence is first to be collected (which is assumed to be empirical) and only then can a hypothesis be considered to explain the empirics. Sherlock calls this deduction, when perhaps it is abduction (best conclusion from the available evidence). The theory, according to Sherlock emerges through reasoning from the empirics.

“It is a capital mistake to theorise before you have all the evidence. It biases the judgement”

Sherlock concluded that the death was mysterious, immediately before asking the cab to stop short of the murder scene. This conclusion seems to be directing him to want to collect evidence from the approach to the scene. There seems to be some doubt about whether Sherlock is actually looking for evidence to fit his theory or, as he claims, theory to fit his evidence. At the risk of being 'sophistic' he has a theory that empirical evidence will solve the crime, and a theory that the approach will provide useful evidence. This pre-Popperian detective is not inclined to look for disconfirming evidence. He is also willing to accept the absence of evidence as evidence. The classic case from another case of Sherlock's is when he says it is significant that the guard dogs

did not bark [in *The Hound of the Baskervilles*]. Somehow he is able to distinguish what is evidence from what is not, even when it does not exist. In this case he does not examine the other rooms of the house, because somehow he knows they do not contain evidence. This suggests he has a theory driving his decisions of what to collect and what not to.

Another interesting point about his evidence collection is how quickly he weaves it with reasoning. The imprints of the horses' hooves are an example. What he sees is an incomplete set of horseshoe imprints in the mud of the road. First, by combining this with reasoning about when it rained he interprets them to be made by a cab, and second he interprets that the suspects were in the cab. He would appear to have a theory (argument) in his mind *that* some people came to the house during the previous night. So, he was looking for evidence to support, or not, his prior theory. The same is true of Sherlock's interpretation of the word, 'Rache' on the wall, and of the stride giving the height of the suspect, and of the cigar ash revealing his preferred brand. There is a lot of interpretation going on of so called impartial, objective empirics. At best we are in the inductive-deductive loop that Popper broke with his suggestion that human inquiry be communicated as beginning from a conjecture which is then subject to a search for falsifying evidence.

This discussion of the recursion between evidence and theory may also be approached from the thinking about one of the cornerstone concepts in objective thinking, that of repeatability. The convincingness of objective empirics and reasoning is that anyone can see for themselves. For example, the evidence of the horses hooves is objective and convincing because all those present can go and see them for yourselves that there are four with one 'newer' than the others. The same is true of the foot prints. The reasoning or calculations that a certain stride length can be directly related to someone's height can also be 'seen for oneself' and repeated as often as required. The demand for convincing evidence becomes more difficult in a situation where one cannot 'see for oneself' because repeatability of observation or the calculations is not possible. This is the classic problem with human behaviour research. If you heat up molecules three times (that is, repeat the experiment) they behave exactly the same each time, but if you repeat experiments with humans they will not only react differently each time but may even contrive to deceive the researcher. Sherlock only deals in repeatable evidence. However, he enters the world of interpretation when he theorises. Put another way, the evidence addresses the 'what happened', while the theory addresses the 'why it happened' (motive). However, he needs the why (theory, explanation) to decide what evidence is relevant.

Take the example of the words 'Rache' in blood on the wall. One interpretation, drawing on a theory of a lover's quarrel, stems from finding of a woman's ring. This theory drove the policeman to suggest it was an incomplete 'Rachael'. Sherlock's interpretation draws on the theory that the two men were involved in some conspiracy. This had previously been concluded from the suspect seeming to have entered the house arm in arm, one had taken poison and the other had imitated a German 'a'.

Sherlock's use of analogy is also interesting.

It reminds me of the circumstances attendant on the death of van Jensen, in Utrecht, in the year '34. ... There is nothing new under the sun. It has all been done before.”

It would appear that the a priori of the van Jensen case is giving Sherlock a way of seeing the physical evidence of this case. His experience is making him see certain things as relevant and others as not. He mentions the case almost immediately after seeing the body. This must again raise the question of whether his actions suggest that his method is more accurately described as being that he has a conjecture that something happened and is seeing confirming or falsifying evidence. Or rather, is it more accurately described as he claims, of remaining ‘unbiased’ until the physical evidence has been collected, then theorising?

As a final remark, the discourse involved in the excerpt is interesting. Watson’s role in a literary sense is to get Sherlock to talk out his thinking. However, the act of talking (and writing) in a cognitive sense is connected to thinking. It could be seen that by talking to Watson, Sherlock is aiding his own thinking even if all he is getting is platitudes from Watson. Argumentative inquiry takes this a step further. The act of arguing even symbolically with the police is thought to create a synthesis, and the competition to be the one who solves the crime improves the quality of Sherlock’s reasoning even to himself.

An Argumentative Sherlock

At the beginning of this paper reference was made to Biet and Elzinga’s (2002) detective who used economic theory to solve crimes. This raises the question of how ‘The Study in Scarlet’ would have been written [up] if argumentative inquiry rather than objectivist science was to be the methodology. Argumentative inquiry was designed to help us appreciate complex social situations, while objective science was designed to understand the physical world. The attributes of complex social situations includes incomplete, quantitative and qualitative evidence, multiple perspectives and purposeful, self conscious activity. The real reason for a murder may not be known by even the murderer, who may act to deceive even themself.

I will spare you from the creation of Anna Savage, the argumentative detective, but perhaps there is space to reflect on how she would have dealt with the arrival of the original letter from Glasson.

The first step is to identify the problem. From the letter the problem appears to be whether there is a murder. The object under study is not so much the body as the circumstances of his death. Concerns over this come from the public at large for reasons of their security, the police who are paid to provide explanations, and Anna who is concerned to solve mysteries. Anna’s first conjecture is therefore that she needs to investigate the mystery over the circumstances of the death.

She can then start thinking about what evidence there is to *falsify* this conjecture. The letter may be a hoax. The man may have died of natural causes and the blood not even be blood, or it may be from a witness, a passer-by or one of the police officers who first

came upon the scene. If she solves the crime then the police may not learn from the experience. Her crime solving in the past has not reduced the number of murders. The crime may have been justified; the dead man may have been more of a threat to society than his killer. Will solving this crime pay the rent? Will the police take the credit or disregard her advice? Sherlock obviously thought about some of these things as initially he was reluctant to take the case.

In order to tease out these falsifications, argumentative Anna would need someone or something to set up dialectic dialogue. These days she could have a group of dinner party friends, have a chat room on the Internet, or perhaps develop some sort of Eliza interactive software on her Palm which uses systems thinking concepts to randomly draw upon responsive questions.

In Summation

The above critique of Sherlock's inquiry methods from the perspective of argumentative inquiry suggests that he used an upfront intellectual framework, which he then used to jump to conclusions and later to seek confirming evidence. The inquiry process was competitive, and argumentative. The evidence used included a dialectic mix of empirics and reasoning. Analogy was used as the basis of an intellectual framework to recognise evidence and participants' experiences through interviews as the equivalent of empirics.

The main danger with Doyle's writing of the inquiry may be that of portraying the image of a 'lone scholar', or that is inquiry as a solo effort by an elite few well trained, fastidious people. Rigor is emphasised over insight; there is one correct interpretation of why the murder took place. The criminal is the research subject, who is silenced, and who is unable to speak for himself, like an inanimate object being scientifically investigated. There is no need for him to speak as the researcher's interpretation is clearly more intellectual, more insightful. This is a mono-perspectival world where Sherlock's interpretation is dominant. Perspectives such as the criminal's being a victim of social forces are excluded, as is whether or not the world would be better off with the criminal apprehended –.

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