

## **The Search for A Man of Feeling within Sherlock Holmes in Praveen Radhakrishnan's *The Adventure of Black Drop***

**Dr. Sharmi Rachel C. M.,**

Assistant Professor,

Department of English and Foreign Languages

College of Engineering & Technology

SRM Institute of Science and Technology

(Deemed to be University Under Section 3 of UGC Act 1956)

SRM Nagar, Potheri, Kattankulathur (PO) - 603 203

Chengalpattu (Dt), Tamil Nadu, India.

[sharmirc1@srmist.edu.in](mailto:sharmirc1@srmist.edu.in)

### **Abstract:**

In answering the why is and why not of a pre-existing story, a new story is born. Such stories are independent because of the author's penmanship, but they do live under the shadow of either original or popular existing versions. *The Adventure of Black Drop* (2011) by Praveen Radhakrishnan is an extension of Arthur Conan Doyle's detective collection featuring the iconic detective Sherlock Holmes. The story records the complex life of the detective with crimes and chaos by showing him as a man of feeling against his clichéd representation as a man of brain games. Even though this novel is exclusive, it is not the first literary piece that tries to animate Holmes as a man of feeling. In addressing the problem of anxiety of influence in literature, the answer that the researcher arrives at by tracing the inventiveness of stories in the timeline of English literature is thought-provoking, as this transition is evident in almost all genres, including non-fiction. Even when this novel is seen as a tale that owes its credit to Doyle, its story stuff does define the authorcraft of Praveen and claims him a place in the literary world.

**Keywords:** Detective fiction, flat and round characters, extension, anxiety of influence, craftsmanship.

"Stories do not tell themselves; whoever is telling the story has to be somewhere in relation to the story, in order to tell it." (29) explicates Marjorie Boulton in her book, *The Anatomy of the Novel*. The art of narration differs based on the teller, his intention, and the audience. From time immemorial, the purpose of stories has been to teach and delight at the same time. Despite this, stories, being told again and again for centuries, have not lost their lustre, and they have been altered to suit the taste and needs of the audience. Evolving from oral tradition, stories got their written transcripts as early as the sixth century, and thereafter, the monasteries recorded stories for inculcating moral and Biblical teachings to the masses, in the case of English literature.

Every grandmaster in English literature has retold stories and has tasted great success. Geoffrey Chaucer's magnum opus, *The Canterbury Tales*, is inspired by Boccaccio's *Decameron*. William Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* is taken from

**The Search for A Man of Feeling within Sherlock Holmes in Praveen Radhakrishnan's  
The Adventure of Black Drop - April - June 2025**

Holinshed's *Chronicles*. John Milton's Christian epic, *Paradise Lost*, is based on Bible stories. These examples hint that stories are retold, accepted, and invited because of their universal recognition and the ability to play multiple enlightening roles in society.

Narratives are revised not only within genres but also across genres. A few classical plays like *Prometheus Bound* are reproduced as lyrical drama by romantics like P. B. Shelley with an antonymous title, *Prometheus Unbound*. Astonishingly, narratives that appear in long poems are rewritten with some other meter to deliver a different message. Homer's *Odyssey* is reanimated as *Ulysses* by Alfred Lord Tennyson and as a modern prose adaptation in the form of the novel by James Joyce. Not only that, most of the epics are redesigned into prose pieces in the form of novels. For instance, Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* are retold from a female's perspective in Margaret Atwood's *Penelopiad*; the *Mahabharatha* is retold by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni as *The Palace of Illusions*, again from a female point of view. All these illustrations lead the argument to one point that says that stories descend centuries across genres to impress the readers.

Such kinds of narrations that transform narratives across genres have been in practice for so long that the twenty-first century categorizes them based on the motive of restructuring a well-established tale. They are retelling, fan fiction, extension, and adaptation. They became prominent in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries as the taste of the audience was undergoing a massive shift. Due to the advancements in printing and increased accessibility of books, many started reading and, in turn, tried their experiments by writing stories. Speaking from literary criticism's perspective, readers replaced authors with the advent of reader response criticism and reception theory. Thus begins a new era in literature where pen and paper became affordable to pin down anyone's dreams.

A retelling is modelled on myth, epic, and fairytale by identifying a problem that needs to be analyzed and addressed. Such an attempt helps broaden the worldview of the audience by exploring the issues beyond the juxtaposing definitions of good and evil. The novel *Penelopiad* retells the epic *Odyssey* to give a glimpse of the domestic conflict that a warrior's family, especially his wife, faces amidst war. Fan fiction is the platform where readers become the co-creators of a story and produce sequels or alternative endings to the story of their choice. This was found as unofficial and so left unattended until J. K. Rowling fueled fan fiction with fan websites like Mugglenet, The Leaky Cauldron, and the Harry Potter Fan Club Tiers, welcoming every creative output of the audience as worth the try. Extension is the "process by which a new narrative imitates an original, but does not constitute a sequel to it." (Phelan 545). The select novel, *The Adventure of Black Drop*, passes off as an extension of the adventure of Sherlock Holmes. Adaptations are products of cinema and technology that add audio-visual detail to a script or oral tale. *Beauty and the Beast*, featuring Emma Watson and Dan Stevens, is a modern adaptation of a fairytale. The *Life of Pi* of 2012 is a close reproduction of the novel

**The Search for A Man of Feeling within Sherlock Holmes in Praveen Radhakrishnan's  
*The Adventure of Black Drop* - April - June 2025**

of the same name by the Canadian author Yann Martel. Thus, adaptations offer a broad scope for stories to be retold with alterations for a big screen and global audience.

Even though these four types of sub-genres are well received, the baseline motive of these metanarratives is the expressions of parody and pastiche. A parody "imitates the serious manner and characteristics features of a particular literary work, or the distinctive style of a particular author, or the typical stylistic and other features of a serious literary genre, and deflates the original by applying the imitation to a lowly or comically inappropriate subject." (Abrams 38), whereas a pastiche is a narrative technique that imitates another work or artist in order to appreciate or pay due tribute to the idiosyncratic matter and manner of depiction.

Since literature embraces both grand narratives and metanarratives alike, *The Adventure of Black Drop* has secured a place of interest in the contemporary reading world. *The Adventure of Black Drop* (2011) is Praveen Radhakrishnan's debut novel. The narrative belongs to the extension category, where the copyright brought from the "**Joanathan Clowes Limited., on behalf of Andrea Plunket, Administrator of the Conan Doyle Copyrights.**" has used Arthur Conan Doyle's characters in his new storyline in his pursuit to ascertain Holmes as a sensitive man.

Arthur Doyle, the creator of the fictional detective Sherlock Holmes, has inspired many writers after him to create an extension of detective novels featuring the same heroic Holmes as the protagonist. *The Adventure of Black Drop* is one such contemporary novel that resurrects Holmes almost after two centuries. Praveen, in this novel, extends Holmes's adventures, featuring him strolling in Baker Street, hiring cabs, sliding through places in disguise, and using the trains of Victorian England with his usual ease.

The story begins with the smuggling of opium, revealing police officers as and among smugglers. The unexpected arrest of the opium den killer and the Windsor Castle murder of Mrs Mary Strider welcome Sherlock Holmes to unveil the truth behind these murders. Holmes shows up at the entrance of Newgate Prison to break loose of Shinwell Johnson, the accused of Mrs. Mary's murder. Mr. Hiten, a suspicious Indian, joins hands with him in this rescue mission and reveals his identity and motive to become Holmes' apprentice.

In the course of unwinding the mystery behind these murders, the beadle's death and the traces of black drop hint at the man behind these murders. The last murder shows no evidence of the murderer, but seldom does that help him (the murderer) to hide his identity from Holmes. Holmes finds opium as the string that connects these murders to reveal the culprit in the end. He explains the mysteries of the murders to the Queen and politely denies Knighthood.

The strained relationship between the detective friends, Holmes and Watson, creates a tense situation throughout the novel, only to reunite and renew their relationship. Meanwhile, newspapers announce the theft of new inventions, which

**The Search for A Man of Feeling within Sherlock Holmes in Praveen Radhakrishnan's  
*The Adventure of Black Drop* - April - June 2025**

attracts the villain, Moriarty, who wishes to trap the future generation through technology, which he sees as a futuristic addictive device that would replace opium. The climax shows Holmes and Moriarty fighting till the building collapses. The aftermath unites Watson and Holmes to pursue Hiten to Calcutta. Hiten's last words emphasize Moriarty's existence and Watson's disappearance. The last chapter leaves Sherlock Holmes on his heels to find Watson.

Doyle's characterization of Sherlock Holmes was not an imaginative fictive piece. Instead, it was inspired by a real-life physician, Dr Joseph Bell, who was an expert in his diagnosis. Featuring Holmes as an armchair critic with a mind that is keen to notice every last detail in the account of narrating a problem is mesmerizing. Even when Doyle breaks the magic by logically exposing Holmes' methods of deduction, the iconic detective is lauded for his wit and scorned for being less sentimental. It is this reason that made many writers who came after Doyle pick up Doyle's fiction and design a new storyline in order to show Holmes as a man of emotion as well. The cinematic adaptations featuring Robert Downey Jr., Benedict Cumberbatch, and Henry Cavill are all attempts to emotionalize the detective, Sherlock Holmes. The 2009 and 2011 movies *Sherlock Holmes* and *Sherlock Holmes: A Game of Shadows* featuring Robert Downey Jr. unravels his love for Irene Adler. The BBC web series featuring Benedict Cumberbatch, *The Sherlock Holmes*, takes every turn to show him as an emotional detective. The 2020 film *Enola Holmes*, featuring Henry Cavill as Holmes does not fail to insist on his emotional side over the intellectual one in playing the role of a responsible elder brother to Enola, the central character of the story.

In the same line, *The Adventure of Black Drop* gives a shot but at a greater level where he is made to handle multiple murders in a single plot. The increasing rift in the friendship between Holmes and Watson is again used for this purpose. The last scene also explains this vividly when Watson goes missing, as Hiten professes Moriarty's plans, leaving Holmes in a hurry to find Watson. Holmes' infatuation towards Irene Adler from the original is also borrowed and worked out to prove the point that even Holmes had to have such emotional moments while solving criminal cases. His concern over Watson's marriage also seeps through the narration, "Holmes paused as he stole a glance at Mary's hand that she used to smooth her hair back....Mary involuntarily looked at her finger. The wedding ring was about a fourth of its size. Flustered, she hid her ring-hand behind her..." (Radhakrishnan 87). Sooner than ever, Holmes knows the reason for their marital problem as Watson's gambling.

While Doyle prefers to explore one or two murders per story, Praveen has knitted a row of murders to lead Holmes to Moriarty, his arch-rival in this novel. Even Holmes admits this with an exhausted state of mind, "If not that, I have learnt one thing. I will never again abuse my mind by taking up more than one case at a time."..." As long as I think that the multiple cases are separate, they will never be one," replied Holmes." (Radhakrishnan 319). In saying so, Holmes is forced to break loose of a Newgate prisoner

**The Search for A Man of Feeling within Sherlock Holmes in Praveen Radhakrishnan's  
*The Adventure of Black Drop* - April - June 2025**

due to his moral conscience, to bring Watson back into the game of murders by hurting his ego and pride, to show his cordial concern towards Mary Watson, to involve Mrs. Hudson in due course of action, and to lose Irene Adler in the end. Besides solving crimes and enjoying the status of being the mastermind, this story is built with blocks that deliberately take shape to reveal exploiting situations that expose the emotional side of Holmes. More so, this is done with Doyle's dramatic techniques, such as disguise. Both Holmes and Adler disguise themselves as per their purpose, and one such disguise that enhances Holmes to meet Adler is the characterization of a ginger policeman. "This man had a sharp, small nose, large ears, squinting eyes and ginger hair and a ginger beard and moustache and sideburns." (Radhakrishnan 27).

As an author, Praveen shares his convictions with the researcher during an interview that heroes in literature are ordinary people who are disturbed from their routine by some social injustice. In simpler terms, heroes are neither saints nor saviours who strive for peace and societal welfare. Instead, they are just reactionaries against evil and injustice. In addition, he explains the role of a hero that cinema has portrayed for a long. Except for detective thrillers that feature James Bond, Sherlock Holmes and Hercule Poirot, all other heroes, even romantic ones, react to some form of obstacle to develop the story. At the same time, Praveen's characterization of Holmes is brilliant, and it alludes to J. K. Rowling's characterization of Lord Voldemort. Both the characters are identified by the mere mention of the pronoun "him" (Radhakrishnan 25) instead of their names in order to instil fear and anticipation in the readers.

With undivided clarity, Praveen talks about the significance of villains in a tale as well, without whom the story would lose pace and action. In his words, "The stronger the villain, the bigger hero has to be personified." (Rachel). As a craftsman, Praveen introduces Moriarty first with his haunting personality and later with his grand presence. Making him feel felt in the pages is what he aims to achieve, and he does so with a master stroke.

The Indian gave in to his curiosity. "Who is this Moriarty?"

"Unfortunately, describing our history and dynamics in the short time given us would only serve to make you jump to conclusions, and do injustice to the gravity of my relationship with him. But to not keep you in the dark, I will tell you this much. I have, over the past few years, tried to gather information that would aid in the downfall of the criminal organization of which he is the head. And I think I've finally stepped on his toes." (Radhakrishnan 66-67)

"'Tragedy' says Aristotle, 'is an imitation of an action that is serious, complete, and of a certain magnitude; in language embellished with each kind of artistic ornament, the several kinds being found in separate parts of the play; in the form of action, not of narrative; through pity and fear effecting the proper purgation of these emotions.'" (Prasad 15). Pity and fear are the emotions that have to surface in a literary piece to turn the audience to purge their vile emotions. Today's reading world finds



**The Search for A Man of Feeling within Sherlock Holmes in Praveen Radhakrishnan's  
The Adventure of Black Drop - April - June 2025**

Doyle's Sherlock Holmes as a psychopath who is void of emotions and so engages in a never-ending pursuit to make him experience human feelings. Robert Downey's version gives an equally skilful counterpart as Irene Adler, whose loss scars Sherlock, and the marriage of Watson and Mary leaves him as a solitary recluse. Benedict Cumberbatch's version takes a step ahead to show him emotionally weak before his brother, Mycroft, hurt by the memory of Redbeard, insensitive towards his sister, Eurus, in his childhood, and Molly, a chemist, in his adult life. The last Episode of the last Season is all about undoing him psychologically to make him sensitive. The movie *Enola Holmes* also insists on showing the soft side of Sherlock Holmes towards his sister, Enola Holmes, the eponymous character.

Zac O' Yeah, a detective fiction writer, in an article in *THE HINDU* titled "The adventure of the drowned detective", observes that, "Holmes to me isn't about running around like James Bond getting brain-bashed, but about sitting in a chair and doing the most remarkable things with one's brain." (18). This extended piece, *The Adventure of Black Drop*, is itself a standing proof that only a least per cent of a larger reading community would agree with Zac and so engage themselves in creating an action-based Holmes of their choice. Furthermore, modern literature generously approves of such pastiche works with great regard for them.

Owing to this emphasis on creating an emotional type of detective, even cross-gendered detective duos are made available. This overflow is cross-checked by Harold Bloom's concept of "anxiety of influence", as it has taken place in all genres, and detective fiction is no exception in the twenty-first century. As readers have become active participators in the reading world, they render their appreciation to the authors in the form of fan fiction, retellings, extensions and digital adaptations. This novel, *The Adventure of Black Drop*, is an extraordinary exception that reanimates Sherlock Holmes in his habitat and time frame without blemish with a brand new story that celebrates him as a round character despite Doyle depicting him as a flat one. This extension thus challenges M. H. Abrams' comment on the flat characterization of this detective. In his words, "in many types of narrative, such as the *detective story* or adventure novel or *farce* comedy, even the protagonist is usually two-dimensional. Sherlock Holmes and Long John Silver do not require, for their excellent literary notes, the roundness of a Hamlet, a Becky Sharp, or a Jay Gatsby." (Abrams 46). This roundedness is made elemental by making him handle serial murders and show off his deduction skill cunningly, by the way. As highlighted throughout, this is another novel that longs to reveal him as a man who feels like any other normal and natural human being.

Will the audience be satisfied after witnessing Sherlock as a man of feeling and doing away with sequels? This is out of the question, as literature is an encouraging platform that welcomes any number of experiments in writing. The history of literature is the history of such bold experiments conducted by people who wanted something new despite having a collection of classics to decorate their shelves. With that note,

**The Search for A Man of Feeling within Sherlock Holmes in Praveen Radhakrishnan's  
*The Adventure of Black Drop* - April - June 2025**

Praveen's contribution to fiction with cautious exactitude decorates the art of redesigning stories with artistic sense and desired action.

### **Works Cited**

- Abrams. M. H., and Geoffrey Galt Harpham. *A Glossary of Literary Terms*. Fifth Indian reprint, Cengage Learning India Private Limited, 2013.
- Boulton, Marjorie. *The Anatomy of the Novel*. Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1975.
- Doyle, Arthur Conan. *The Complete Collection of Sherlock Holmes*. BeThink Books, 2020.
- Enola Holmes*. Directed by Harry Bradbeer, performance by Millie Bobby Brown and Henry Cavill, 2020.
- Radhakrishnan, Praveen. *The Adventure of Black Drop*. Prosody Press, 2011.
- . Interview. Conducted by Sharmi Rachel C M, 06 June 2018.
- Rowling. J. K. *The Harry Potter Series*. Bloomsbury Publishing, 1997-2007.
- Prasad. B. *An Introduction to English Criticism*. 1965, Trinity Press, 2014.
- Phelan, James, and Peter J. Rabinowitz, editors. *A Companion to Narrative Theory*, Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2005.
- Sherlock Holmes*. Directed by Guy Ritchie, performance by Robert Downey Jr. and Jude Law, 2009.
- Sherlock Holmes: A Game of Shadows*. Directed by Guy Ritchie, performance by Robert Downey Jr. and Jude Law, 2011.
- The Sherlock Holmes*. Directed by Steven Moffat and Mark Gatiss, performance by Benedict Cumberbatch and Martin Freeman, 2010.
- "Was Sherlock Holmes based on a real person?" *History*, 29 July 2014, updated 22 Aug. 2018, [www.history.com/.amp/news/was-sherlock-holmes-based-on-a-real-person](http://www.history.com/.amp/news/was-sherlock-holmes-based-on-a-real-person). Accessed on 03 Nov. 2020.
- Yeah, Zac O'. "The adventure of the drowned detective". Magazine (The Sunday Issue.), *THE HINDU*, 2 June 2019. Accessed on 14 Aug. 2020.

\*\*\*\*\*