

## **Performing Sherlock: A Study in Studio and Location Realism**

Given his status as one of literature's most popular creations, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes – usually accompanied by his faithful chronicler, Doctor Watson - has been less ubiquitous on British television screens than might be imagined. Having debuted in 1951, played by Andrew Osborn in *The Adventure of the Mazarin Stone* (BBC), the Baker Street sleuth returned a few months later in the guise of Alan Wheatley for a series of six live plays. Viewers then had to wait until 1965 for a home-grown run of episodes,<sup>1</sup> this time featuring Douglas Wilmer; when this production returned in 1968, it was Peter Cushing who donned the deerstalker. In 1984 Granada's series saw Jeremy Brett injecting a seven per cent solution in the long-running and popular production, but following Brett's death in 1995 there were few attempts to revive Holmes in the UK, and audiences had to wait until 2010 for the character's enormously successful 21<sup>st</sup> century reimagining in the form of *Sherlock* (BBC, 2010- ), starring Benedict Cumberbatch.

I have written elsewhere (Hewett 2013; 2017) of the prominent role that production process plays in the shaping of television performances, and Holmes' UK television career conveniently spans the eras I have termed 'studio realism' and 'location realism'; from the multi-camera set-up of the 1960s episodes, through the single camera filming of the Granada programmes, and up to the HD techno-wizardry of the modern series. As will be seen, these three versions illustrate in various ways the chief characteristics of the models I developed in order to unpack the evolution of British television acting, which are briefly outlined below:

### **Studio Realism**

1. Actors are working primarily in a constructed space, i.e. the studio

### **Location Realism**

1. Actors are working primarily in a 'real' location, whether exterior

set, providing a link with the traditional practices of theatre performance.

2. Performances are prepared in advance, in a separate space such as the rehearsal room, before being transferred to the recording site.
3. Scenes are performed in their entirety, with limited opportunity for re-takes.
4. Representation of reality is mediated by both space (typically an artificial, three-walled set) and technology.
5. Use of voice and body are 'scaled down' from the level of projection required for the stage, but still feature a greater degree of projection than would be

or interior, as opposed to a performance space created for that purpose.

2. Performances are evolved 'on site', with little or no prior preparation, allowing actors to respond to the environment in which they are working.
3. Master shots aside, scenes are performed repeatedly, in segments, to accommodate different shot framings.
4. Representation of reality, though mediated by technology, is less shaped by the use of an artificial or constructed performance space.
5. Body and voice are used on a scale similar to that employed in real life.

employed in real life.

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| 6. Physical movement is often designed to provide visual interest within the set, rather than deriving from character objectives. | 6. Physical movement derives from the situation and character objectives; visual interest is produced by framings and editing. |
| 7. Gesture is employed selectively to signify meaning and intent, though on a smaller scale than that used in the theatre.        | 7. Gesture to signify meaning and intent is minimal.   |
| 8. Clarity of diction is paramount.   | 8. Clarity of diction is not always required.  |

These will now be applied to three televised versions of Doyle's novella *The Hound of the Baskervilles* (1902) – one of the most adapted stories in the Holmes canon. The iterations chosen for analysis and comparison are the two-part 1968 BBC version, featuring Cushing, the 1988 Granada television film, with Brett, and the 2012 *Sherlock* episode 'The Hounds of Baskerville', starring Cumberbatch. While the latter is, in strict terms, a pastiche rather than an adaptation, it features a scenario common to all three: the initial consultation between Holmes, Watson and their client. In the 1968 and 1988 versions this is Doctor Mortimer, representing Sir Henry Baskerville, while in *Sherlock* the client is Henry Knight – a Baskerville *manqué*. While, as television versions of a much-adapted text, there is the risk that these examples will include some 'cross-contamination' in terms of the performance of Holmes and Watson, each actor in fact brings a distinct approach, while still remaining very

much of their respective periods – and the characters of Mortimer and Knight, who arguably carry less ‘baggage’ in terms of performance preconceptions, act as a useful barometer of the extent to which production context helps shape acting style.

## 1968

*The Hound of the Baskervilles* centres round the fears of Doctor James Mortimer for his new neighbour Sir Henry Baskerville, recently arrived from America to take up inheritance of the Baskerville estate in Dartmoor following the death of his uncle, Sir Charles. The latter had, according to Mortimer, recently become obsessed with the legend of a spectral hound that is believed to have killed his notorious ancestor Sir Hugo, and the discovery of a dog’s footprints next to Sir Charles’ corpse has once more fuelled local superstitions. The book opens with Watson, surreptitiously observed by Holmes in the reflection of his silver coffee pot, examining a walking stick left by the absent-minded Mortimer, who called while the duo were out.

The 1968 version begins with a colourful depiction of the legend of Sir Hugo being hounded to his doom, followed by the regular opening series titles and music, and then features two brief scenes culminating in the death of Sir Charles (Ballard Berkeley) – an event only related by Mortimer in the book - before moving to the Baker Street sequence which provides our case study.

The scene opens with a foreground close-up of the coffee pot, through the handle of which Holmes (Cushing) can be seen observing the off-camera Watson’s (Nigel Stock) examination. The camera then pulls out and pans left (somewhat jerkily) to reveal Watson, before cutting to a close-up of the stick in his hands. When Holmes asks Watson to apply his own methods and ‘reconstruct the man’ by examining his stick, the line is clearly enunciated

by Cushing, and projected at a volume slightly louder than that which would be needed for normal conversation in a similarly sized space. However, both here and throughout the episode Cushing does not over-project, and his Holmes is notably softer spoken than either Brett's or Cumberbatch's. An experienced television actor who had by this point spent several years working in film, Cushing had learned to 'scale down' his performance from that which would be necessary, for example, in the theatre. Others to have recognised Cushing's facility for television include Lez Cooke, who praises his skill in 'close-up' acting for the camera in Rudolph Cartier's *Saturday Night Theatre* production of 'Nineteen Eighty-Four' (2003: 26). In this sense, while Cushing's acting might still be regarded as somewhat stage-derived, he represents the emerging period of studio realism, in which actors were coming to understand the degree of vocal projection and scale of physical gesticulation required for the multi-camera studio set-up. Indeed, Cushing is in several respects less 'theatrical' – if we employ the term in the same sense as James Naremore, who defines it as involving 'a degree of ostensiveness which marks it off from quotidian behaviour' (1988: 17) – than the later Brett and Cumberbatch, though as will be seen this is as much due to personal style and actor choice as production process.

In contrast, Nigel Stock as Watson is far more projected, over-stressing key words to convey meaning, his delivery of the line 'Me, Holmes?' for example emphasising Watson's surprise that Holmes should solicit his opinion. Much has been made of the long history of 'buffoonish' portrayals of Watson, and while some claim that Stock's performance was a departure from this stereotype, his performance choices serve as clear signalling devices that the character is, alas, setting himself up for a fall in his attempts to apply Holmes' deductive methods. Signifiers include Watson's self-satisfied chuckle at his cleverness in deducing that the owner of the well-worn stick walks frequently (scarcely a difficult conclusion), as does

his dramatic turn towards Holmes when he exclaims, 'He's a doctor!' Finally, Stock's adoption of the stance of a performer, arms slightly bent at his sides, as Watson delivers his *coup de grace* ('I should say that the owner is an elderly practitioner...') proves a comic prelude to Holmes' gentle – yet devastating – debunking and correction of the majority of his deductions.

The scene also features much of the unnecessary physical movement that typifies studio realism, designed to provide visual interest in what would otherwise be a static conversation, rather than deriving from the objectives of the characters themselves. To facilitate Stock's movement into a position from which both he and the walking stick will be in medium close-up, it is necessary for he and Cushing to swap positions. The latter therefore moves out of shot towards the rear of the set in order to light his cigarette (an action not specified in the book), leaving Stock free to move forward to where Cushing had previously been sitting. Stock then moves to the left of the frame, the camera tracking with him, as Cushing returns 'downstage' to seat himself in a different chair, now facing Stock but with the back of his head to the camera as he smokes. He then rises, takes the stick from Stock, and crosses back to where the latter had begun the scene, for the purpose of obtaining his magnifying glass, with which he then commences his own investigation, leaving Stock downstage and on the right of the frame; a reversal of their initial positioning. Such manoeuvres illustrate both the perceived need for some form of action on screen and the lack of mobility of the pedestal-mounted studio cameras, but at least demonstrate an attempt on the part of director Graham Evans to avoid an entirely frontal performance, and escape the sense of a three-walled set which typified so much studio realist drama.

However, there are several moments where the exigencies of multi-camera are all too obvious. While Cushing examines the stick in the background, Stock remains at the front of

the frame in medium close-up, in order that his increasingly affronted facial expressions (as Holmes corrects his various deductive errors) can be read by the camera. At this point Stock is standing partially side-on to the camera, his back to Cushing as the latter continues to speak; hardly a natural position for two people conducting a conversation, but necessary if the faces of each are to remain visible to the audience. After Holmes observes the arrival of both Mortimer and his curly haired spaniel through the window, Cushing is clearly aware of the camera tracking backwards as he moves forwards, controlling his own pace in order to avoid collision, and pulling a 'thoughtful' face, his eyes moving sideways to indicate cogitation. Later in the scene, a slight shadow is cast over the now seated Cushing when Stock (off-screen) inadvertently stands in his light.

As Doctor Mortimer, David Leland takes a similarly gestural path to Nigel Stock, pointing at his stick in recognition when he enters the set, and exclaiming loudly. The actor then strolls round the apartment in long shot as Mortimer outlines the mysterious circumstances surrounding Sir Charles' death. While it is possible that a client would so dominate the space of a famous detective on his first visit – Mortimer's pacing arguably typifying the nervous energy with which Leland imbues the character – this movement again demonstrates the perceived need to provide some form of visual stimulus. Leland's gestural performance is completed by him raising his hand (in a manner that can only be described as dramatic) on the line: 'By the time that I reached him, he was dead.'

Of the three performers, Cushing would, by today's standards, be regarded as the least projected. Moments such as the sudden exhalation of smoke through his nostrils when Mortimer confesses to coveting Holmes' skull, and the brushing of cigarette ash from his dressing gown near the close of the sequence, seemingly occur spontaneously, though they were doubtless carefully pre-rehearsed 'bits of business.' However, even in Cushing's

performance there are also examples of stage-derived, gestural acting. The actor uses both Holmes' cigarette and magnifying glass to point and gesture (though not as broadly as Stock and Leland), and also employs several non-verbal signifiers, such as an intrigued 'Ah!' when Mortimer hands Holmes the scroll detailing the legend of the hound.

The 1968 scene is indicative that studio realism was gradually reducing the scale of performance employed for stage work – which is what most British actors of the time were trained for, and where they received their grounding. Some performers, whether through instinct or experience, were adapting more quickly than others, Peter Cushing being a case in point. By the time of the Granada television film in 1988, studio realism had become far more established, but the increased use of single camera film for television drama meant that significant changes were afoot.

## **1988**

In the late 1980s single camera film production was beginning to overtake multi-camera as the preferred production model for British television drama, and by the time Granada's production of Sherlock Holmes stories ceased in the mid-1990s, the latter model only continued to be employed for situation comedies and soaps. However, this shift – which had arguably begun in the 1970s with Euston Films' series productions, and prestigious serials such as *Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Spy* (BBC, 1979) – was a slow one, and the still projected, gesture-inflected style of studio realism did not disappear overnight.

The 1988 version of *The Hound of the Baskervilles* opens with Sir Charles' death as part of the opening title sequence. The action then cuts to shots of Granada's exterior Baker Street set, ending with a slow close-up on the door to 221B. This then cuts to a medium interior shot of Holmes (Brett) with the coffee pot, the lid of which Brett lifts to observe



Watson, signalling Holmes' enjoyment with a slight smile. Watson (Edward Hardwicke) is also seated, in the background, with his back to the camera, but turns, startled, on Brett's line 'What do you make of it, Watson?'

From the outset, Brett is more vocally projected than Hardwicke; a reverse of the 1968 situation due largely to Brett's more overtly 'theatrical' performance. While both Cushing – a long-time devotee of Doyle's work - and Brett immersed themselves in the character of Holmes, the latter arguably drew upon his own personality to a far greater extent, producer Michael Cox not being alone in his speculation regarding the extent to which the actor's bipolar disorder (then known as manic depression) informed his performance (2011: 207). Brett's version of the detective is far more of a performer than Cushing's, for example applauding and shouting 'Bravo!' when Watson concludes his largely inaccurate analysis of Mortimer's walking stick.

For his part, Edward Hardwicke presents a far quieter Watson than Nigel Stock's, the small pauses in his speech being indicative of Watson actually thinking through his examination of the stick. Hardwicke employs far fewer physical and non-verbal signifiers, other than Watson's small nod to himself, a narrowing of his eyes as he reads the inscription on the stick, and a quiet 'Oh' when Holmes berates him for habitually underestimating his abilities. He does adopt a slightly defensive posture, left hand placed on his hip, when Holmes begins to challenge his deductions, but overall these moments are balanced by naturalistic touches such as Hardwicke speaking with a cigarette in his mouth as he goes to light it. It is also notable that, once he has risen, Hardwicke's Watson is fairly static. Although he strolls to the fireplace to light his cigarette after examining the stick, he does not feel the need to stroll around the apartment as Stock did. There is no need here for multi-camera style blocking to engage the viewer's eye, as movement within the space is provided

instead by director Brian Mills cutting between single camera set-ups: a low angle medium close-up of Hardwicke as Watson examines the stick, and a close-up of Brett for Holmes' reactions, alternating with the initial medium shot.

By contrast, even when not projecting vocally, Brett's delivery is somewhat mannered, signalling the coming admonishment of Watson with a wry facial expression indicative of Holmes attempting to conceal a smirk. As Holmes makes his own pronouncements regarding Mortimer's stick, Brett's voice veers between extremes of volume, becoming quite loud when Holmes deduces that their client is the possessor of a dog. The line 'Larger than a terrier' is similarly voluble, seemingly pitched towards Watson, yet the next, 'Smaller than a mastiff,' is almost whispered, with Brett now in extreme close-up. It is unclear why Holmes would wish Watson to hear the first half of the deduction but not the second, and this variation in volume is almost certainly due to the performance choices of Brett, rather than being a response to the narrative logic of the scene or the details of the text. This is followed by a triumphantly noisy ejaculation of 'Hm!' after Holmes moves to the window and observes Mortimer and his spaniel alighting outside.

Played here by Neil Duncan, Doctor Mortimer is initially no less projected than David Leland's 1968 incarnation, his eyes widening in fascination as he admires Holmes' cranium. Brett's reaction to Mortimer's request for a cast of Holmes' skull 'until the original becomes available' is a full-throated chortle, followed by a pert 'Behave and sit down!' However, the fact that Duncan remains seated for the remainder of the scene provides a marked contrast with David Leland's unnecessary roaming around 221B in 1968. As Mortimer describes Sir Charles' death, his voice now softer, he is kept in medium-sized framings, cutting between reaction shots of Holmes and Watson. Duncan then removes his glasses and looks away, in partial reverie, as Mortimer recalls the dead man's facial distortion. This could indicate either

that Mortimer still finds the memory disturbing, or that – as a medical man – he is mulling over the possible cause. A moment such as this would have been difficult to manage using the 1968 multi-camera set-up, in which Mortimer never dominated the frame, and was usually on the move (as were the cameras). The main physical movement in the 1988 version is provided by Brett, who moves across to Duncan to take the scroll containing the legend of the hound, and then stands next to Hardwicke as Holmes reads it aloud.

In contrast to the 1968 version, in which an ellipse was employed to cover Holmes' reading of the legend, here Brett casts his eye over the document only briefly before Mortimer's discovery of Sir Charles is shown in flashback, with Duncan narrating in a voiceover. When the footprints of the hound are revealed, the action cuts back sharply to Baker Street with a close-up of Brett jerking his head round to face Duncan on the line 'Why did you not consult me immediately?' This moment of heightened delivery is clearly designed entirely to drive the narrative, and emphasise the significance to Holmes of Mortimer's discovery.

Duncan now indicates that Mortimer is unnerved and discomfited by not making eye contact with the other characters, instead tapping his left hand nervously on the arm of the chair. Brett, in a low angle medium shot, rubs his hands together suddenly on the line 'Well, if you believe this to be supernatural you will find more help from a priest.' The noise of hands rubbing continues as we cut to a medium shot of Duncan, then back to Brett. The hand rubbing now slows, and Brett quickly glances sideways at Duncan before suddenly dropping his hands and gently but rapidly muttering 'No, no, no, no, no, no, no.' Now signalling Holmes' resignation to the inevitable, Brett emits a lavish sigh and his eyelids droop. He proffers his left hand in another theatrical gesture as Holmes offers Mortimer his assistance, then flares his nostrils and smiles; the game is once more clearly afoot.

By this period television actors were better accustomed to the multi-camera studio set-up than in 1968, but studio realism was a style of acting which, when transferred to the single camera film set-up, could appear overly projected – much as theatre acting had previously seemed for multi-camera. Leaving aside the performance of Jeremy Brett, who was by this point bringing much of his extravagant personal style (and several of his personal demons) to his portrayal, Edward Hardwicke and Neil Duncan are, in general, noticeably scaled down in terms of vocal projection and physical gesture when compared with their 1968 counterparts, though it is Hardwicke whose performance is arguably best adapted to single camera. This production in fact contains the seeds of location realism, which by the time of *Sherlock* – nearly a quarter of a century later – had become the dominant form of British television acting.

## **2012**

As already noted, the *Sherlock* episode ‘The Hounds of Baskerville’ is in no way a direct adaptation of Doyle’s novel, but shares such commonalities as certain character names, the Dartmoor setting (now repurposed as the site of the Baskerville MoD base) and a monstrous hound which may or may not be the product of a client’s over-active imagination. The consulting room scene no longer features the business with Mortimer’s walking stick; instead we find Holmes – or Sherlock (Cumberbatch), as he is referred to in the series - in need of something to engage his faculties after solving his latest case, his aggressive craving for nicotine steadfastly refused by John Watson (Martin Freeman) until the arrival of the troubled Henry Knight (Russell Tovey) provides a much-needed distraction.

The episode opens with an attack by the hound upon Henry’s father, shown from his point of view as an infant. The closing shot is a close-up of the adult Henry’s face, which

then pulls out to a wide aerial long shot, depicting him alone in the misty hollow where his father died, before cutting to the opening titles.

As with the 1988 version, the episode proper begins with a shot of the door to 221B, this time being forcibly slammed by Sherlock. One element of this version that was arguably lacking (or at least underplayed) in earlier iterations is the black humour which forms a major component of script, mise-en-scene and performance, as indicated by the cut to a point of view shot of Sherlock's feet, panning upwards to reveal him bloodied and carrying a harpoon, before cutting to John for Freeman's line, 'You went on the Tube like that?'

Following an ellipse, Sherlock is shown striding restlessly around the flat, still carrying his harpoon but now bathed and wearing a dressing gown. Unlike the cumbersome multi-camera of the 1968 version and the largely static single camera set-ups employed in 1988, 'The Hounds of Baskerville' uses handheld camera throughout to follow Cumberbatch round the frame, while Freeman remains seated – signifying his role as the calm voice of reason. Although Cumberbatch is here occupying the space of 221B in much the same way as Stock and Leland did in 1968, his actions are motivated by Sherlock's inability to settle until some fresh stimulus presents itself, rather than being devised purely for the sake of providing visual interest. In terms of vocal performance, Cumberbatch is not projected in a stage-derived sense, but does employ loud, explosive declamations – in a manner not dissimilar to Brett's – to signify Sherlock's sense of frustration, bellowing 'God!' before commanding John to 'Get me some [cigarettes]!' When John refuses, Cumberbatch begins frantically riffling through piles of newspapers, and calling for his landlady-cum-housekeeper Mrs Hudson (Una Stubbs), a character who featured irregularly in Doyle's stories, but a mainstay of the BBC version. The continuing calm of Freeman's performance – seated, static, passive – again contrasts with Cumberbatch's manic physical performance.

The arrival of Mrs Hudson provides an interesting contrast in terms of generational acting styles. Una Stubbs' television acting career began in the 1950s, later including the long-running sitcom *Till Death Us Do Part* (BBC, 1965-75). In *Sherlock*, the character of Mrs Hudson – much enlarged from the sketchy descriptions provided by Doyle – functions primarily (though not exclusively) as comic relief, and as an experienced sitcom performer Stubbs' acting style at times features slightly studio realist traits, for example gesturing to Sherlock's piles of bric-a-brac on the line 'You know you never let me touch your things; chance would be a fine thing.'

When Sherlock seizes upon Mrs Hudson's appearance as an opportunity to exert his analytical powers, Cumberbatch's performance – while still manic – becomes more focused, speaking rapidly as he rattles out deductions. Comedy is provided by Cumberbatch pointing at Mrs Hudson with the harpoon, as though it has not occurred to him that this is a dangerous weapon. As Sherlock reveals that Mrs Hudson's current beau has a secret wife in Doncaster that nobody knows about – 'Nobody except me!' – Cumberbatch employs 'jazz hands', indicative of Sherlock's awareness that he is showing off his powers as part of a performance. After Mrs Hudson's distraught exit, Cumberbatch sits in Holmes' armchair with knees drawn up, rocking backwards and forwards to signify the character's distraction.

Two contrasts between this episode and earlier versions are the much faster rate of cutting, several shots lasting less than a second (particularly in the initial exchanges between Sherlock, John and Mrs Hudson), and the use of a 16:9 widescreen aspect ratio, as opposed to the 4:3 that was common until the 1990s. As Sarah Cardwell (2014) has observed, the latter has a significant impact on framings, as for example where, at the conclusion of their argument, Sherlock and John are shown, seated, at opposite extremes of the frame, in long shot, emphasising the physical (and emotional) distance between them.

The use of rapid editing means that a far greater number of takes would be required here than for the 1968 and 1988 iterations. In 1968, the scene as broadcast would have been recorded in two takes – before and after the ellipse – with each segment played all the way through continuously unless mistakes were made, as was the norm for ‘as live’ multi-camera production. In 1988 a greater degree of repetition would have been required, with the first take representing a ‘master shot’, possibly played in its entirety (with the exception of the flashback). Dialogue would then have been repeated several times in order to facilitate the various medium shots and close-ups of Brett, Hardwicke and Duncan, which would then be pieced together in post-production. By 2012 the number of repeat takes has increased significantly to accommodate a variety of framings, including medium shots in the main living space, long shots through the door of the kitchen, medium shots, close-ups and extreme close-ups of Cumberbatch, Freeman and Stubbs, all of which are handheld. These diverse *modi operandi* represent very different demands upon the casts involved, and result in widely divergent performances.

The frantic pace of editing and performance in ‘The Hounds of Baskerville’ slows significantly with the arrival of Henry Knight, and the camera set-ups at this point come to more closely resemble those of 1988, with a mix of medium shots and close-ups of the three protagonists as Henry outlines his case. There are several over the shoulder shot/reverse shot sets ups between Sherlock and Henry, and it is notable that the pace of cutting has slowed significantly, giving Russell Tovey time to exhibit Henry’s nervousness.

While Tovey’s vocal performance is in no sense projected, barely moving above a breathy whisper, there is a sense throughout of him clearly signalling Henry’s troubled mental state. There is a break in his voice when Henry talks about Dewer’s Hollow being a name for the devil, and Tovey looks away as Henry recalls his father’s death, his voice

broken, and his eyes heavy lidded. When Sherlock seems not to be taking his story seriously, Tovey's eyes begin watering, and the last two words of the line, 'I'm not sure you can help me, Mr Holmes, since you find it all so funny' become venomous. Tovey then quickly rises to leave, but when Sherlock reveals that he knows something happened to Henry the previous night, he sits again, incredulously. When the moment comes for Tovey to deliver what was previously Mortimer's big line: 'Mr Holmes, they were the footprints of a gigantic hound', there is an extreme close-up on Tovey. However, the moment is played for laughs, Holmes twice talking over him before Henry at last manages to make his point. Tovey's hesitant delivery on Henry's first two attempts – allowing Cumberbatch plenty of time to butt in – is not naturalistic, and when he does finally get it out (the first time the actor raises his voice), the line is very clear and overly enunciated. When Holmes asks Henry to repeat what he just said, there is a sense of Tovey milking the moment via an extremely slow, clear delivery, his voice again catching.

By contrast, Cumberbatch signals Holmes' distraction via the nervous twitching of his fingers as he rests his face upon his hand. He gestures with his hands on the line, 'Hmm, not interested. Moving on,' which is delivered in a fast, flat monotone. Cumberbatch then employs a *sotto voce* stage whisper when Holmes mocks Henry by speculating that the appearance of the hound was part of a genetic experiment, and delivers Sherlock's deductions regarding Henry's journey to London in another rapid monotone. When Holmes leans in to sniff Henry's cigarette smoke, the moment is played broadly, the detective's flared nostrils and blithe intrusion into his client's physical space emphasising the humorous aspect of the usually controlled Sherlock's insatiable craving for nicotine. Cumberbatch's voice here remains low and fast, but the change in tone as Sherlock asks what Henry saw the previous night indicates that he is now taking it seriously. Overall, Cumberbatch's performance



comprises a blend of the projected or gestural – waving Henry away on the line, ‘Off to Devon with you; have a cream tea on me’, or pulling a mock sad face when Sherlock pretends he is too busy to come to Dartmoor – and the still and focused, providing more than an echo of Brett’s ‘manic depressive’ performance.

As with the 1988 version, the most restrained performance comes from Martin Freeman as John. Though required to display a greater range of emotions – disbelief at Sherlock’s behaviour, restraint as he attempts to keep his temper with his friend, frustration at the latter’s flamboyant display of his deductive powers for a client’s benefit – Freeman does this with a great sense of economy. There is virtually no gestural acting, other than John holding up his finger when the doorbell rings just once, announcing Henry’s arrival. While, like Una Stubbs, Martin Freeman is an experienced comedy performer, the sitcom via which he became known to the public, *The Office* (BBC, 2001-03), has been hailed by Brett Mills as comedy vérité (2005); the diametric opposite of projected, multi-camera sitcom. An example of this is Freeman’s underplayed reaction shot on Sherlock’s insensitive line to Henry: ‘Yes, good, skipping to the night that your dad was violently killed; where did that happen?’ Freeman also employs ‘in character’ touches such as former soldier John almost standing to attention, ready for action, when Sherlock charges him with travelling to Dartmoor to investigate Henry’s case.

Overall, ‘The Hounds of Baskerville’ offers several marked contrasts with earlier versions, proving a far livelier sequence in terms of framing, camera movement and editing, combined with the restless physicality of Cumberbatch’s Sherlock. Despite the fact that the scene is similarly dialogue-heavy, there is none of the movement for movement’s sake that was present in 1968, or the static camera set-ups of twenty years later. The performance of

Martin Freeman in particular demonstrates just how far television acting has scaled down in the modern day, but to what extent is this the result of changing production processes?

### **Studio versus location realism**

Given that all three versions of *The Hound of the Baskerville* featured herein were produced in the studio, it might seem problematic to define the changes in performance style in terms of studio and location realism; surely the fact that each of these scenes, at least, was a product of the studio militates against the use of location realism for the purposes of categorisation? However, studio and location realism refer to more than just site, instead encompassing broader changes in production approach, such as the amount of rehearsal time typically allocated to television drama.

Each of the BBC's 1968 50-minute episodes had nine days' 'outside' rehearsal (i.e. in a room separate from the studio in which recording would take place), before moving into Television Centre for two days' videotape recording apiece, location filming having taken place a month earlier ('Sherlock Holmes Schedule', 1970). This period would typically encompass a read-through of the script on the first morning, followed by several days' blocking of scenes, the focus being upon the learning of lines and movements. The resulting preponderance of theatre-style blocking, Peter Cushing, Nigel Stock and David Leland conducting a delicate ballet with the cumbersome studio cameras, can therefore readily be understood. The studio in this sense was the home to a number of three-walled sets, offering limited room for manoeuvre.

By contrast, the Baker Street interiors used by Granada in 1988 and the BBC in 2012 were 'standing sets'; i.e. semi-permanent edifices. In the case of the former, Holmes' apartments were part of the Victorian Bonded Warehouse in Manchester (Haining 1991:

119), while Sherlock's 221B interior is erected on a soundstage. Each provides the production with a 'base' which becomes a location in its own right, as *Sherlock* co-creator and 'The Hounds of Baskerville' author Mark Gatiss explains: 'It's something that is incredibly useful; we had to relocate a couple of scenes to Baker Street, just because we ran out of time. You think: "With a little bit of jiggery-pokery we can move that there"' (2011).

*Sherlock* had far more limited rehearsal time than the earlier productions,<sup>2</sup> only two days being allocated to the episode, including a table read of the script and some time blocking movements in a church hall (Gatiss 2011). It is therefore possible that, with less time available to pre-plan movement and gesture, performance becomes a more instinctive response to environment on the day of recording, rather than a pre-planned orchestration from which performers cannot deviate, as would have been the case in 1968.

## **Conclusion**

A number of variables can affect the performances given by television actors, including their own personalities and performance style (as characterised in these case studies by Jeremy Brett), which in turn can be informed by background, e.g. drama training, or lack thereof, and the amount of experience acquired in a particular medium. However, the significant changes in the production processes employed on British television drama are clearly evidenced in the performances which, in some part, resulted from them in the 1968, 1988 and 2012 iterations of *The Hound of the Baskervilles*. These offer a snapshot of historical developments in television acting, from the still largely theatre-derived, gestural performances that typified studio realism, to the scaled down, less projected style of location realism we have come to expect today. Even when compared through a character such as Sherlock Holmes – whose special place in the hearts and minds of the public makes him a potentially problematic

subject – these differences are highlighted via the performances seen in the case studies examined herein.

## References

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<sup>1</sup> The 1954 US series starring Ronald Howard was transmitted in some ITV regions.

<sup>2</sup> The Granada series initially allocated five days per 50-minute episode, though this was increased to eight at Brett's insistence (Cox 2011: 20), meaning that *The Hound of the Baskervilles* would have had at least a fortnight's rehearsal.