

RESEMBLANCES IN CHARACTER PORTRAYAL IN POPULAR TELEVISION DRAMA: SHERLOCK HOLMES VERSUS DR. GREGORY HOUSE

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Abstract

Popular American television medical drama, *House M.D.* has a famous medical genius named Dr. Gregory House. He is dependent on pain medications much like the celebrated detective; Sherlock Holmes is a cocaine addict. While House solves paradoxical medical cases, Holmes deciphers seemingly unfathomable criminal cases.

Sherlock Holmes is a fictional character penned by British author and physician Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. Holmes captured hearts and popularized his genre since his first appearance in print in 1887. He featured in four novels and 56 short stories by Conan Doyle and also manifested in works of other writers as well.

Dr. Gregory House is the protagonist of the American medical drama series, *House* created by David Shore, a Canadian writer and producer of television series. His character appeared in all the episodes of the series and the actor, Hugh Laurie also received multitude of awards for his portrayal of the character, including the Golden Globe Award for the best actor.

The following paper brings out the similarities between the two creations. Sherlock Holmes, being an epitome has been eulogized by many artists of every field in every culture. Now we have replicas of the great detective with the dichotomy of the presentness with a veritable mix of the past era.

Keywords: Sherlock Holmes, Dr. Gregory House, Drama, detective

In the world of television, amalgamation of drama and melodrama is a common scenario. But a drama where a character is based on a fictional counterpart is rather rare. Drama protagonists are products of screenplay writers' need for an immediate stir. The plot has to be sensational with sufficient twists and turns at quick successions to grab the fleeting attention of their audience. In such an era of commercialized arts, reviving literary characters, which are from a bygone millennium and that character becoming popular, are rather farfetched thoughts. Rendering all these believes false, the protagonist of an acclaimed medical drama in America,

House M.D, has successfully based and molded their protagonist's personality according to the famed sleuth, Sherlock Holmes.

Sherlock Holmes is known in every continent of the world as an established British detective. He was a detective par excellence not only in the stories or novels he featured in, but also in his field of crime fiction. His technique and practices created such a stir in the literary world that departments of forensic science all over the world stood up and took notice. His appearance in print in 1887 was a benediction to the literary enthusiasts and bureau of investigations alike. His appearance in the first series of *The Strand Magazine* became popular with a short story titled *A Scandal in Bohemia* in 1891. He was not the first detective in this genre as Edgar Allan Poe has created a blueprint to follow, but he was arguably the most popular and the most portrayed movie character according to the Guinness World Records. He has such a universal appeal that even after his age has crossed a century and a half, he still has a major fan following and fan societies. [<http://www.sherlock-holmes.co.uk/>]

Dr. Gregory House, the protagonist of the American medical drama series, *House*, which ran from 16th November, 2004 to 21st May, 2012. He leads a team of diagnosticians as the Head of Diagnostic Medicine at the fictional Princeton- Plainsboro Teaching Hospital in New Jersey, U.S based on Yale-New Haven Hospital in all its 177 episodes, through 8 seasons. He is described as a cynic, disparager, narcissist, ill temper doctor full of obstinate opinions. His temperament is similar to that of a curmudgeon, an annoyed, supposedly old stubborn individual. Despite his disposition, the actor portraying the character in question won two Golden Globe Awards for Best Actor in a drama series and two Satellite Awards for Best Actor in a televisionized drama series excluding several nominations for the same category. The show was amongst the top 10 shows in the United States from its second through fourth seasons and was the most watched in 66 countries of the world in 2008. [<http://www.housemd-guide.com/characters/house.php>]

The writer of this character is a Canadian nationalist who is best known for his writing and production for television series. Born on July 3, 1959, David Shore wrote for television series *Due South* where a Canadian is transplanted in America. He wrote numerous crime fictions for the screen such as *Homicide: Life on the Street*, *Gideon's Coming*, *Law and Order* etc which were immensely successful. His writings are of the procedural nature where his characters are a part of a television series involving a sequence of technical detail. A problem is introduced, investigated and solved within the same episode or in a series of the same episode. This genre is generally found on channels showcasing dramatized criminal cases in hour - long episodes. The chapter starts with the discovery of the crime at the very beginning and the entire hour is then dedicated to the investigation. The solving of the mystery culminates with the pronouncement of the convict who is either arrested at the very end or is shown to be absconding. [<http://www.housemd-guide.com/showinfo/davidshore.php>]

These types of dramas are generally popular with the audience as the plot thickens and concludes in an hour. They however lack character development and the characters are recognized solely by their stereotypical roles of police, victim, convict, suspect, and kith and kin. They have no background stories as there is time for none. They enact their roles in that hour and then exit the silver screen hence; they do not impact audiences with their personality. This genre has best found takers in the police investigation enactment, however, in literature, mystery fiction or science fiction has a few glorious examples. *Timescape*, a novel by scientist and author Gregory Benford is an example of Science procedural. David Shore took this very police

procedural genre and applied it upon a show on medicine and House, M.D was born. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Police_procedural]

Shore claims that he realized that a medical procedural could place the mystery secondary to the hero. He therefore conceived of a hero similar to the iconic detective Sherlock Holmes. The name House has also been modified from Holmes. Holmes' sole friend and accomplice Dr. James Watson can also be found in the series, by the name of Dr. James Wilson, another similar modification. Shore ruled that Ho(l)mes and House are homophones for the word "home". Similarly, the building that House lives in is numbered as 221 and the apartment is categorized as 'B', leaving no trace in the audience's mind that the maverick diagnostician, specializing in infectious disease and nephrology is an attempted mirror reflection of the famous sleuth.

Both Holmes and House specialize in dealing with seemingly impossible cases which none other than they can analyze. Both depict a keen sense of observation and can deduce a large amount of information on the basis of these minute observations. While Holmes indulged in cocaine, House was addicted to Vicodin, a pain medication. House had suffered an infraction in his right thigh causing substantial loss of muscle and limping. As a result he had to support his walk with a cane and undergoes a lot of physical pain. This explains his Vicodin addiction. On the other hand, Holmes famously resorted to cocaine in absence of any stimulating cases which was legal in that era. However, House is shown to use extreme quantity of Vicodin. In an episode, *No Reason*, House gets traumatic when he is remotely without pain in his legs. He needed the stimulation of a tough diagnosis or Vicodin to function. This was a yet another bridge between the two characters.

In House and Holmes, their natures mirrored each other as being unconventional, misanthropic and in having a sole trusted friend who connected them to human concerns. That trusted friend, Watson/Wilson married and moved away but Holmes /House never did. The detectives had similar tastes in music and musical instruments as well. While we see Holmes playing violin, House plays the piano and the guitar. The actor Hugh Laurie also remarked that House's obsession with television, video games and popular music is meant to echo Holmes' habit of listening to classical music or reading dull monographs for hours on end in order to relax his mind while pondering a case.

The movie on Sherlock Holmes, *A Game of Shadows* and also the British series based the same with a modern backdrop depicted the negative influence that Holmes had on the ladies, Watson was conjugally or romantically involved with. During the series, Wilson's wife, Bonnie Wilson alleged that Wilson had little time for her as he dropped everything to assist House. At some point in their lives, both Watson and Wilson had been Holmes'/ House's roommate and moved out to live in conjugal harmony which does not work out very well.

In Indian Cinema and literature, there are other characters who have massively impersonated Sherlock Holmes. He is notably the most portrayed movie character in the world according to Guinness Book of World Records. Many regional books and movies in myriads of languages can be found that have either drawn reference or inspiration from the famous private detective. Many have not been found. Sherlock Holmes being the first of his kind to use deductive reasoning to solve his cases has captured the imagination of many artists. The 1980 Indian detective Karamchand with a half-wit female assistant was a comedy, Byomkesh Bakshi, Pradosh Chandra Mitra in the same time were ruling the Indian silver and golden screen. In the comic book series Chacha Chaudhary won the hearts of children in India. Many other works have been based on the evergreen detective that has wooed millions of spectators worldwide.

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