

MR HOLMES – Film at CONCA VERDE on 08.02.16 – Talk by Elliott Brett

The film

Sherlock Holmes returns to the big screen, but not in the way one might expect. In 1947, Mr. Holmes (Ian McKellen) finds himself retired and unsatisfied with the publication of his final case, written by his former partner John Watson. Holmes lives in a small farmhouse in the county of Sussex, England with his housekeeper, Mrs. Munro and her young son, Roger. At the age of 93, though, Holmes' memory is gradually deteriorating as he struggles to write his own account of his final case. Through a series of flashbacks, the story of Mr. Holmes' final case begins to unravel, as we witness just a small portion of the man behind the great legend. "Mr. Holmes" is a film that takes its viewers on a slow, but even paced journey as Sherlock yearns to improve his memory and piece together all that he remembers from his final case.

"Mr. Holmes" is a unique piece of cinema and a rare treat for filmgoers. Ian McKellen's portrayal of Sherlock Holmes is superb as he is supported in fine fashion by both Laura Linney and Milo Parker. The film has its slow moments and may be a bit hard to follow at times, due to the number of flashbacks, but, for patient filmgoers, this is a film that engages and opens up its audience to the inner being of Sherlock Holmes.

Bill Condon does a solid job of directing Jeffrey Hatcher's script which is based in part on the novel *A Slight Trick of the Mind* by Mitch Cullin. Sir Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes is brought back to life as we are taken on a steady journey through beautiful British scenery and a slightly mysterious story. Do not expect great thrills and suspense, but a study of the "inner-self" of one of the greatest characters ever created.

The English countryside is beautifully filmed, from lush fields to the startlingly white chalk cliffs by the sea. Although Mitch Cullen's novel provides the plot from which the script was developed and offers intriguing insights into Holmes' mind that a film cannot include, this film adaptation enriches the story. Everything—the set dressing and props within Holmes' study, intimate close-ups within the cozy cottage, long shots capturing the country's natural beauty, original score with ponderous strings offset by an uplifting clarinet solo—creates an inviting world audiences will want to (re)visit.

There is a lot to like about "Mr. Holmes". Themes of friendship, love, family, and dealing with internal struggles all come into play in this mysterious drama. As mentioned above, Holmes develops a close relationship with Roger throughout the course of the film, as they take care of bee hives, read stories, and discover "forgotten" clues. Mrs. Munro has mixed feelings about Mr. Holmes in the beginning, but she slowly develops a deeper appreciation of his notable character. Holmes also gradually realizes his great need for both Mrs. Munro and Roger in his life and becomes more aware of the struggles others face—not just his own. He starts to see that it is not just about him, but others.

Reception

Mr. Holmes has received positive reviews from critics. On Rotten Tomatoes, the film has a rating of 87%, based on 142 reviews, with an average rating of 7.1/10. The site's critical consensus reads, "*Mr. Holmes* focuses on the man behind the mysteries, and while it may lack Baker Street thrills, it more than compensates with tenderly wrought, well-acted drama". On Metacritic the film has a score of 67 out of 100, based on 35 critics, indicating "generally favorable reviews". IGN awarded it a score of 7.7 out of 10, saying "Gentle, moving, diverting drama that's perfect Sunday afternoon fare".

The character

Sherlock Holmes (/ˈʃɒrlɒk ˈhɒlms/) is a fictional character created by British author and physician Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. A London-based "consulting detective" whose abilities border on the fantastic, Holmes is known for his astute logical reasoning, his ability to adopt almost any disguise, and his use of forensic science to solve difficult cases. The character first appeared in print in 1887, and was featured in four novels and 56 short stories by Conan Doyle, as well as later works by other authors. The first novel, *A Study in Scarlet*, appeared in *Beeton's Christmas Annual* in 1887 and the second, *The Sign of the Four*, in *Lippincott's Monthly Magazine* in 1890. The character's popularity grew with the first series of short stories in *The Strand Magazine*, beginning with "A Scandal in Bohemia" in 1891; additional short-story series and two novels (published in serial form) appeared from then to 1927. The events in the stories take place from about 1880 to 1914.

All but four stories are narrated by Holmes's friend and biographer, Dr. John H. Watson. Two are narrated by Holmes himself ("The Adventure of the Blanched Soldier" and "The Adventure of the Lion's Mane"), and two others are written in the third person ("The Adventure of the Mazarin Stone" and "His Last Bow"). In two stories ("The Adventure of the Musgrave Ritual" and "The Adventure of the *Gloria Scott*"), Holmes tells Watson the story from memory, with Watson narrating the frame story. The first and fourth novels, *A Study in Scarlet* and *The Valley of Fear*, include long passages of omniscient narrative of events unknown to either Holmes or Watson.

The Great Hiatus /haˈeɪtəs/ (La Grande Interruzione)

Conan Doyle wrote the first set of stories over the course of a decade. Wishing to devote more time to his historical novels, he killed off Holmes in "The Final Problem" (which appeared in print in 1893, and is set in 1891). After resisting public pressure for eight years, the author wrote *The Hound of the Baskervilles* (which appeared in 1901, with an implicit setting before Holmes's death; some theorise that it occurs after "The Return", with Watson planting clues to an earlier date). In 1903 Conan Doyle wrote "The Adventure of the Empty House", set in 1894; Holmes reappears, explaining to a stunned Watson that he had faked his death in "The Final Problem" to fool his enemies. "The Adventure of the Empty House" marks the beginning of the second set of stories, which Conan Doyle wrote until 1927.

Holmes aficionados refer to the period from 1891 to 1894—between his disappearance and presumed death in "The Final Problem" and his reappearance in "The Adventure of the Empty House"—as the Great Hiatus: the earliest known use of this expression is in the article "Sherlock Holmes and the Great Hiatus" by Edgar W. Smith, published in the July 1946 issue of *Baker Street Journal*. The 1908 short story "The Adventure of Wisteria Lodge" is however described as taking place in 1892 due to an error on Conan Doyle's part.

Retirement

In "His Last Bow", Holmes has retired to a small farm on the Sussex Downs. The move is not dated precisely, but can be presumed to predate 1904 (since it is referred to retrospectively in "The Second Stain", first published that year). He has taken up beekeeping as his primary occupation, producing a *Practical Handbook of Bee Culture, with some Observations upon the Segregation of the Queen*. The story features Holmes and Watson coming out of retirement to aid the war effort. Only one other adventure, "The Adventure of the Lion's Mane" (narrated by Holmes), takes place during the detective's retirement. The details of his death are unknown.

This 5th Film Show is sponsored by AEGEE Bergamo – the association of Erasmus students, Anderson House – the Cambridge Centre for Bergamo and CRTDrills Lingue Bergamo – the Resource Centre for Language Teachers in the province of Bergamo coordinated by Noemi Ciceroni which operates within the Ufficio Scolastico Territoriale – the local education authority.

This is the second film in English this year. There will be a total of 12 films – 9 in English, 1 in French, 1 in German and 1 in Spanish.

Enjoy the film!