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Is It Any Longer Always 1895? Why the Latest Russian *Sherlock Holmes* Failed and the Implications for Twenty First Century Perceptions of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's Detective.

In November of 2013 fans of the BBC *Sherlock* eagerly awaited the Christmas special, *Many Happy Returns*, a prequel to a third series after yet another prolonged hiatus. *Elementary* was ticking through a full second season with the metronomic regularity of all CBS police procedurals. Now and again devotees of Robert Downey Jr pondered, as they still do, on the prospect of a *Sherlock Holmes 3* from Guy Ritchie. Meanwhile, during the fortnight from November eighteenth, a new Sherlock Holmes TV series whose conception in 2008 predates all the above was broadcast on Russia 1 in its entirety. Andrey Kavun's *Sherlock Holmes*, (*Шерлок Холмс*), extends to 704 minutes running time, almost the equivalent of three whole BBC *Sherlock* seasons. Though, as I shall show, the project was much delayed and modified before filming began in September, 2011, from the outset, it was determined (with all the implied production values and expense) that events be set in the Victorian period. Similarly, once Andrey Kavun took charge, as I shall expand upon, the vision was to create a cinematic novel whose episodes or chapters, experienced in order, told of familiar characters and adventures from a refreshingly new perspective.

It is universally acknowledged that the late Andrey Panin's Doctor Watson is an outstanding creation. Some, myself included, consider it the best in any media. But this is not the only virtue of a major cinematic work that has attracted far less attention than it deserves. Apart from a ravishingly beautiful evocation of Victorian England (and beyond), Panin's triumph is

matched by an outstanding Lestrade, and film's most original, engaging Mrs Hudson. Finally, while it will be clear from my detailed discussion that Kavun's over-arching plot and characters are influenced by Ritchie and Moffat/Gatiss (certainly in the handling of the Moriarty/Adler/Holmes triangle), there soars beyond an entirely original and arresting arc that may be expressed as the parallel births of a successful writer (Watson/Doyle) and a fictional legend: a wholly credible narrative that enacts the transmutation of a protean rough diamond into the cut and polished hero we find in the Canon.

In the light of these introductory remarks, this paper will examine the range of reasons an adaptation of such quality came to fail and address the key implication that, contrary to the traditional perception, Sherlock Holmes may have come to be redefined in twenty first century eyes; that the Cumberbatch Holmes may signify it can be no longer be *Always 1895*.

Andrey Kavun is a Russian film director and screenwriter, who was born in the Ukraine. Similar to the creators of the BBC *Sherlock* series, Steven Moffat and Mark Gatiss, Andrey Kavun discovered his love of the Sherlock Holmes stories of Arthur Conan Doyle at a young age. In an interview Kavun stated:

"I'm terribly lucky that as a child I first read it, and loved it. And from what I read, I had an image of Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson, just not one that was grandly embodied by Igor Maslennikov (director of the legendary Vasily Livanov and Vitaly Solomin, *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* series 1979 - 1986). My image is not a very smooth and glamorous character, not a gentleman, let's say, in the anecdotal sense of the word, but a guy who is not very pleasant. Holmes and Watson were not London dandies, wealthy gentlemen. On the contrary, they take a cheap apartment at Mrs. Hudson's and live not on

a grand scale, but depend on private investigations for their earnings.”

The fact that the new Russian Sherlock Holmes series was originally conceived in 2008, prior to the Guy Ritchie *Sherlock Holmes* (2009) film, the Moffat and Gatiss BBC *Sherlock* (2010) series, and the Robert Doherty CBS *Elementary* (2011) series, confirms this series was created solely through Russia's love of the literary work and not just a cynical creation to ride a new wave of Sherlock Holmes's popularity on screen. Since the series was going to be the most expensive in Russia's recent history, involving the recreation of Victorian London sets, financial delays occurred due to the country's economic and political crisis at the time. Some preview scenes had already been filmed with Sergey Bezrukov as Sherlock Holmes and Vladimir Epifanstev as Dr. Watson. Having watched these clips I can honestly say they were awful, and if the filming had continued the finished film would have most likely ended up the same. So luckily for us, by the time the project moved forward, Oleg Pogodin, initially selected to direct the project, had started his film, *Home*. Ruben Dishdishyan, the head of Russia's largest film company, Central Partnership, knowing of Kavun's love of the literary character, handpicked him as replacement. Ironically, on the way to meeting Dishdishyan that first time, Kavun had passed a billboard featuring Guy Ritchie's *Sherlock Holmes*, and he could only think: 'Why?' It's just been done! Hence, he rejected the offer, though took home the script written by Oleg Pogodin and a collective of authors. He noted that the Sherlock Holmes of that script was indeed much the same as that of the Guy Ritchie movie, so set the script aside, certain it would not work and moved on to other scripts submitted for his attention. But the thought of Sherlock Holmes had settled in his mind, and constantly nagged the imagination. He went out and bought a collected

Canon to re-read, and had a revelation: of an altogether different Holmes that now made it eminent sense to take on the project. He viewed the few hundred existing adaptations, however interesting, as simply detective stories, lacking the palpable underlying story. He knew that only by forging new Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson interpretations, by exploring the conflict and relationship of two iconic literary characters who were interesting in themselves could something truly original be essayed. He called Dishdishyan and agreed to take on the series. In the words of Andrey Kavun:

“I watched all the film adaptations of Arthur Conan Doyle, in order not to interfere, not to be repeated. If the director wants to do something different, then he needs to know what was before him. It's no secret that all the detective genre cinema moves have already been used. Note that most adaptations shot in 20 and 30 years of the last century, they have sunk into oblivion, and lost the meaning...”

And again:

“This is not a direct reading of Conan Doyle. For me, in act, Watson was Conan Doyle himself, because Watson was the narrator, a writer, a former army doctor, who came to a poor London to open a private practice. In general, it is a biography of Arthur Conan Doyle. And I think that Conan Doyle largely himself wrote about himself. The starring actors are of different generations, Igor Petrenko as Sherlock and Andrey Panin as Watson. If you get a grasp of the text of Conan Doyle, it is clear that Watson is much older than Holmes. In the first story, the main character of Sherlock was just twenty-seven.”

Kavun envisaged a format that would be an apt artistic vehicle for his approach. Sixteen 44

minute episodes were to be transmitted in titled couplets in quick succession over a fortnight. Thus may the viewer experience the filmic equivalent of a novel, whose eight chapters and kaleidoscope of Canon and original stories interwove to tell a Bayeux of a narrative. Only by watching the whole, in order, from part one to eight, does one appreciate that characters, plot and themes indeed blend into one magnificent work, just as Kavun had envisioned. The first major Russian Sherlock Holmes since 1986 came to the small screen from the pens of Andrey and his father, Oleg.

#### Production.

704 mins total: 16 x 44 mins shown on Russia 1.

1 & 2 *221B Baker Street* Nov. 18, 2013 (*Бейкер-стрит, 221Б*)

3 & 4 *Rock, Scissors, Paper* Nov. 19, 2013 (*Камень, ножницы, бумага*)

5 & 6 *Clowns* Nov. 20, 2013 (*Паяцы*)

7 & 8 *The Mistress of Lord Maulbrey* Nov. 21, 2013 (*Любовницы лорда Маулбрея*)

9 & 10 *The Adventure of the Musgrave Ritual* Nov. 25, 2013 (*Обряд замка Месгрейвов*)

11 & 12 *Halifax* Nov. 26, 2013 (*Галифакс*)

13 & 14 *Holmes's Last Case* Nov. 27 (*Последнее дело Холмса*)

15 & 16 *The Hound Named Baskerville* Nov. 28 (*Собака Баскервиль*)

These episode titles and the brief summaries below are not presented as a replacement for watching the series, which may readily be viewed on Youtube, with English subtitles, thanks to fans of the series. There's no substitute to watching the series to understand its overarching, developing plot. The function of the summaries is to remind the reader of their salient content, in chronological order and clarify the broader sweep that drives all of them forward. In addition, the

summaries will help in tracking the introduction of Canon characters and allusions, while highlighting significant new readings of them. They will reveal where the completely new material is introduced with no Canon origin. This will allow us to come to some significant major conclusions concerning character and acting unique to this series. Most significantly, the Watson figure is stronger than that of Holmes. Moreover, a younger, stronger version of Mrs. Hudson is presented, which diminishes Irene's claim to the title of 'the woman' (in this adaptation) and virtually makes of a forty year old Mrs. Hudson 'the woman'.

Part One - *Baker Street, 221B*, (Бейкер-стрит, 221Б), is loosely based on Doyle's *The Adventure of Black Peter*, and contains elements of *A Study in Scarlet*, *The Adventure of Charles Augustus Milverton*, *The Adventure of the Three Gables*, *The Hound of the Baskervilles* and *A Scandal in Bohemia*. It establishes Dr. Watson as a major character, a military man who has just returned from the war in Afghanistan. Watson has arrived in London to establish a medical practice and to try his hand at writing. Every episode begins and ends with Watson's inkwell pen writing in his journal, with sketches, and with his narration of his writings. As witness to a stabbing, Watson comes across a young man, Sherlock Holmes, attempting to solve the murder, and a grizzly Inspector Lestrade, who we see is not too happy to have the young man in the way of his investigation. The viewer's introduction to Lestrade is riveting. Here is a policeman so ready to rough up Sherlock Holmes, that he even has special gloves for the occasion. He's the most chilling Lestrade ever encountered on screen, even though he appears to soften to Holmes and consult him more as the series progresses. He never fully loses that edge of potentially acting with the callous, arbitrary, unpredictable power we associate with a police state. The milieu of Victorian England through costuming, settings, and lighting is well

established. Near the end of the episode Mrs. Hudson is introduced, relieving a Mrs. Turner who was house sitting 221 for her. New to Holmes film history, we are presented with a Watson fifteen years older than Holmes, and a significantly younger Mrs. Hudson. Four of the six major characters and an authentic sense of period have been established. We learn of Watson's prowess as a boxer, a recurring talent he demonstrates on Holmes whenever the quirky but brilliant detective gets out of line. We see a prime example of Kavun's humorous touch as a screenwriter when Holmes must give an alias to enter an illegal boxing match with the murderer:

"Hey Charlie, the new guy wants to fight with Shark!" ...

Charlie: "Name!, Name!"

Holmes: "Barbarin!"

Charlie: "I'm not asking your nickname, but your name! C'mon!"

Holmes: "Basil Rathbone!"

Part one establishes how Kavun will present his characters: as they actually were and not how Watson's embellished, romanticized writings transformed them. For the first time in Holmes film history we are going to see the 'true' protean characters of Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson, as imagined by the scriptwriters.

Part Two - *Rock, Scissors, Paper*, (*Камень, ножницы, бумага*) is loosely based on Doyle's *The Sign of The Four*, and contains elements of *The Disappearance of Lady Frances Carfax*, *A Study in Scarlet*, and *The Adventure of the Speckled Band*. The title refers to the well known rock, papers, scissors game, a meme brilliantly tied into the opening and closing scenes of the episode. In flashback, we witness Watson as he and fellow soldier, Peter Small, are captured by the Ghazi. Since the Ghazi have only one set of shackles, Watson and Small attempt to buy

time by playing the child's game to a tie each time. Forced by their captors to finish, Small loses, and Watson must witness him getting a leg chopped off. Doctor Watson is able to save Small's life. The episode ends with Watson visiting Peter Small's very young daughter, Mary, in an orphanage and playing at her behest, rock, paper scissors. Such a touching scene my eyes water up just thinking about it. Between these opening and closing scenes, the notional female lead of the series, Irene Adler, is introduced, and we see her as Holmes's sole love interest. Mrs. Hudson's character is expanded as we see her choosing her troublesome neighbors, Holmes and Watson, to remain at 221B, in preference to two elderly female tenants who had urged the landlady to eject the disruptive pair. Mrs. Hudson clearly favors the good Doctor. Subtly effective is Kavun's use of her astrological woman's instinct as a clever foil for Sherlock's logic.

Meanwhile, Sherlock Holmes senses that there is someone unseen involved in the various crimes which occur but is stymied as to whom. At the very end we glimpse an ominous hand, with a gold ring, at a coach window. One of the most impactful scenes of this episode involves Dr. Watson and the antagonist, his friend, Major Thaddeus Sholto, whom Holmes suspects is involved in the crime from their first meeting.

Thaddeus Sholto: "You know Holmes, that Englishmen tear off weaver's fingers in India so Indian silk won't be a competitor to our manufactures? Here is your civilization."

The murder of an Indian boy by Major Sholto, enrages Watson, who goes to the private Officer's Club and challenges him to a duel. Sholto spouts off the diatribe above and expatiates upon uncivilized savages and England's migratory problems:

"John, we are bringing civilization to the east, we don't allow our culture to get destroyed, our beliefs, our traditions. We are Anglo-Saxons! It is our duty,

and our burden! The white man's burden.”

None of the other soldiers will second Watson until he adds the murder of Lieutenant Small to the challenge. A majority of the soldiers now volunteer to second him.

John Watson: “Hatred is your culture. Murder of women and children are your traditions. Your patriotism, Captain, is the last refuge of a scoundrel.”

This is a risky commentary on the part of director Kavun, since England's late 19th century migratory problems mirrored the current Russian situation. Kavun has lead us into a critique of humanity. Seeing England through Russian eyes proves enlightening.

The last character we must mention from this episode is Watson's publisher. Poor Watson wants to publish his poem on war, only to be turned down. The publisher (played by no less than Alexander Adabashyan, actor, film director and Mikhalkov's long-time screenwriter) suggests writing detective stories would yield him a handsome sum. Kavun is solidifying that Watson is to be read as Conan Doyle..These hilarious verbal battles between Watson and his publisher become a recurring feature of subsequent episodes, crucial in enacting the development of Watson/Doyle as successful writer.

Part Three - *Clowns*, (*Паяцы*), is loosely based on Doyle's *The Adventure of the Bruce Partington Plans*, and contains elements of *A Scandal in Bohemia*, *A Study in Scarlet*, and *The Adventure of the Second Stain*. After seeing just a hand in a departing carriage in Part One, and hearing a dying man say 'Mor' with his last gasp in Part Two, and being teased by an unknown professor in a missing photo throughout, *Clowns* reveals the name of the criminal mastermind, Moriarty, and a truly bone chilling name it is.

Lestrade is a tad more cordial to Holmes in this episode, bringing him in to help on a case, but the Scotland yarder later reveals to Holmes that it is only at his brother, Mycroft's

request. We have not yet seen Mycroft's face revealed, but now our traditional roster of major players is complete.

These actors are distinctly non-western in their emotional reactions and stagey, artistic movement. Panin is magnetic. His Watson is a tour de force. The Russian Eastern European precision of detail in costume and scenery, is so refreshing for a Holmes film. This episode is highly creative and entertaining in the way it presents Holmes, with the assistance of the French Ambassador, pulling off a sting operation of Henry Gondorff proportions to save Irene Adler's life.

Part Four - *The Mistresses of Lord Maulbrey*, (*Любовницы лорда Маулбрея*), is not based on a specific Canon story, but contains canonical references from *A Study in Scarlet*, *The Sign of the Four*, *The Adventure of the Red-Headed League*, *The Adventure of the Retired Colourman*, *The Valley of Fear*, and, *The Adventure of Charles Augustus Milverton*. In the new Andrey Kavun Sherlock Holmes, one postulates everything is new. Holmes and Watson are hard pressed against the clock to save an innocent man from the gallows. Four women have been murdered, plus there is a missing will to be found. We see Watson's skills with the pistol once more (remember the duel scene when Major Sholto took one right between the eyes from Watson in *Rock, Scissors, Paper*). Lestrade misses the shot from the second floor window and it appears the murderer may escape their trap:

Holmes: "Leave it to the doctor. Doctor, shoot. Shoot!"

Watson: "Actually I heal people."

The episode ends (again) with a hand dangled from a carriage window... a gold ring...a capitalized 'M' incised thereon. Kavun is a master at building character and creating suspense,

leaving you craving for the next chapter.

Part Five - *The Ritual of the Castle Musgrave*, (*Обряд замка Месгрейвов*) is loosely based on, you guessed it, *The Adventure of The Musgrave Ritual*, and contains elements of *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, and *The Adventures of The Empty House* . One can not view the opening scene without commenting on the brilliant cinematography. A snow clad Vyborg Castle (or Musgrave Castle) is simply breath taking. There is no need to go much further into plot here, as many of you are familiar with the Musgrave ritual I'm thinking, but Kavun has added many twists and more action. Northern Scottish traditions such as eating without forks and wearing kilts are alluded to, and you should see Holmes and Watson in kilts!

The episode finishes in the now familiar Watson's editor's office with this gripping conversation.

Editor: "An intrigue, a love story and then this bloody inscription on the wall - just splendid. The readers like it, very good, and the Americans were mocked as well. Just bravo. It looks like the full cycle. One bit of advice, lift your character up in terms of social status, understand? So it would be a story about noble people. The poor is for Dickens, nobody is interested in that. Let your Holmes be a true gentleman. And then, if you're making him such a super detective, do it properly. Do you understand me?"

Watson: "Not really."

Editor: "You know, an intelligent, ordinary detective is boring. Let him have some supernatural abilities, I don't know, he has something. I don't know, never misses a shot.

Watson: But he can't do anything in real life, he can't."

Editor: “John, who’s interested in what he can do in real life? Let me tell you a story from my past. I was very young at that time, a reporter, and I was sent to take an interview from a Colonel Moran, remember?”

Watson: “Ah, yes.”

Editor: “A man who crawled miles in a dried river to hunt a Bengal tiger. A hero! I couldn’t sleep the whole night, was worrying, and then I saw a tiny man, this small, like this. Small, puny, trembling, looking at me with beady eyes like I’m his superior. Do you understand me?”

Watson: “To be honest, not really.”

Editor: “We are the ones who make then heroes, or not. Who are the heroes then, them or us?”

Part Six - *Halifax, (Галифакс)*, is loosely based on Doyle’s *The Adventure of the Red-Headed League*, and contains elements of *A Study in Scarlet*. This episode begins hinting of counterfeit money being exchanged for gold at the National Bank and the police murdering a man. It ends with Holmes undermining of a plan to destroy the British economy. It may best be remembered, however, for its in jokes and development of the character of Inspector Lestrade. One can’t help but to laugh out loud when Holmes and Mrs. Hudson confront Dr. Watson, whose sensationalized stories have come out in the press and created an uproar of fandom in Baker Street.

Holmes: “How dare you!”

Watson: “What happened?”

Mrs. Hudson: “The fame has gotten to you, doctor, look out the window.”

Holmes: “Just look, look - what do you need?”

Crowd shouting: “Look it’s Sherlock Holmes!”

Holmes: “Go away, these are all fantasies, lies! Go away immediately or I’ll call the police. Watson, you can fantasize as much as you want! You can write about how you dissect frogs! But do not suck me and Mrs. Hudson into this abomination!”

Watson: “What frogs?”

Holmes: “Do not, do not, write the exact address!”

Watson: “What address, Sherlock, wait, stop!”

Holmes: “Filthy hedge writer!”

Watson: “What is this nonsense? My God! I didn’t want to insult anybody.”

Mrs. Hudson: “Yes? Is that why you described me as an ancient granny!”

The humor aside, we do learn how serious and dedicated Lestrade is to his profession. You will never forget the scene where Lestrade realizes there are corrupt cops on his force, a reality he has considerable difficulty in accepting:

Lestrade: “I, Fitzpatrick Lestrade do solemnly and sincerely declare and affirm that I will well and truly serve the Queen with fairness, integrity, diligence, and impartiality, upholding fundamental human rights and according equal respect to all people. And I will to the best of my power cause the peace to be kept and preserved, and prevent all offenses against people and property; and that while I continue to hold the said office I will to the best of my skill and knowledge discharge all the duties thereof faithfully according to law!”

In perhaps what some might say is more of a Soviet than British way of dealing with the

problem, Lestrade is furious and summary with his justice. Since the crooked cops could be identified by the dirt stains on their trouser knees, he simply lines everyone up and shoots them accordingly. This may sound crude, even horrific, but it's totally in keeping with the hard-nosed but honest policeman we now appreciate. The episode confirms this Lestrade performance as perhaps the best ever in any medium.

A cute final touch to an outstanding segment sees Lestrade thanking Holmes and Watson, but with the addendum that if anything comes out in writing about this no one will ever find their bodies. Deliciously, Holmes points to a man in a deerstalker and inverness cape and suggests:

“Anything else you write, Watson, describe me like that man”.

In that moment, the legend is born and Watson/Doyle is established as a writer.

Part Seven - *The Last Case of Holmes*, (*Последнее дело Холмса*) is loosely based on Doyle's *The Adventure of the Final Problem*, and contains elements of *The Adventure of the Devil's Foot*, and *A Study in Scarlet*. For the first time on screen we encounter a fresh motive for the demise of Sherlock Holmes. It is a far better story than that of an accidental meeting where an attack takes place as was presented in Doyle's short story. Romance for Holmes is traditionally only hinted; Holmes is here presented with the dilemma of having to rescue the love of his life, Irene Adler, at the probable expense of his own life.

This episode explodes with romantic, Parisian hues more ravishing than Vincent Minnelli's *An American in Paris*. A partially constructed Eiffel Tower symbolizes the similarly stalled Grand Amour. The art directors of this series deserve the highest possible praise. In its final scene, as Watson begins to pen *Holmes' Last Case*, one poignant teardrop stains the parchment.

Part Eight - *The Hound Named Baskerville*, (*Собака Баскервиль*), despite its title, is loosely based on Doyle's *The Adventure of the Bruce Partington Plans* and contains elements of *The Adventure of the Empty House*. The title is a bit of a red herring of Kavun's making, in that there is nothing of *The Hound of the Baskervilles* in the episode except a dog named Baskerville in a late late scene.

What is an amazing finale to the series takes place three years after the events chronicled in the previous episodes. We discover a domesticated Dr. Watson married to Mrs. Hudson and the proud caretaker of The Sherlock Holmes Museum, established in Holmes's former rooms. We have never before seen on screen such an effective use of the whole of 221 Baker Street. Normally the action is limited to its B flat.. Dr. Watson has become a famous author from his stories about the dead detective. In a humorous scene, Watson unwittingly gives a tour of the museum to a girl who is actually seeking out Sherlock Holmes for help. Watson steps in himself to try to solve a murder and the disappearance of some secret documents. Realizing he needs a partner, he finds an unusual, but gifted ally in Mycroft Holmes, whose face we actually see for the first time. He is the spitting image of brother Sherlock beneath some rather unconvincing facial hair.

The arc of the story takes on a whole new dimension involving a plot to kill the Queen. We will reveal no more now, except to note the denouement ingeniously ties together the storylines of all previous episodes. There are even some references to a certain Professor Challenger: a premonition of Dr. Watson/Doyle's next literary expedition?

Watson (making notes): "On Friday, Professor Challenger will be presenting, don't forget to book the seats, he might be an interesting character."

Later:

Newspaper boy shouting in background: “Crazy theories of British scientists! Professor Challenger claims that human came from a monkey!”

Through this well conceived finale, Kavun has delivered the full length novel he promised, and perhaps the best Sherlock Holmes series adaptation ever. Kavun transmuted the original stories into one vast new narrative of great worth, very much in the way Steven Moffat and Mark Gatiss have with *Sherlock*, except Kavun remains faithful to period, creating in the process the most memorable Dr. Watson, Inspector Lestrade, and Mrs. Hudson in screen history.

#### Reception.

How to explain the conundrum? How does a master work escape all notice? Of rave reviews there are none, of worldwide distribution no sign. The Kavun Holmes was transmitted then quietly dropped beneath the radar. Why? Well...

#### Politics:

Kavun surely rocked the boat with his political statements, especially those from the lips of Thaddeus Sholto in Part Four. He did so on purpose as he revealed in this comment:

"It was a lot of controversy with the channel producers, which required me to cut the monologue. But then I decided to leave it, because this monologue is about England, and Russia, and what happened in England in the late 19th century is very similar to what is going on in Russia today. These phrases sound more and more, and I decided to throw a stone to make the pond splash."

Russian film history teaches us that Russian TV can and will put a show on permanent hiatus for political reasons. Take for example “*The Hound of The Baskervilles*” ( 1971), which starred Nikolay Volkov as Sherlock Holmes and Lev Krugly as Dr. Watson. This film was one of the better Hound adaptations I’ve seen, but how many Russian viewers remember it? Very few is the

answer, because of the defection of actor Lev Krugly to Israel, shortly after its first showing. The powers that be ordered it never be shown again. How much those political statements will impact future airings and distribution only time will tell. Kavun and Petrenko are not citizens of Ukraine, but ethnic Ukrainians (as their family names indicate; the Russian difference between citizenship and nationality). Kavun recently declared his pro-Ukrainian position, and his Moriarty, Alexey Gorbunov, who is Kavun's friend, has the same position. Some Muslims (or, at least, online persons with Muslim names) demanded that the film must be banned or, at least, the Sholto monologue must be deleted. While some nationalists put Sholto on a pedestal and made his monologue their credo.

#### Countering A Legend and Nostalgia

My essay *From Watson, With Love* begins with the statement, “(in Russia) Holmes is a favorite literary character for children and adults alike, largely thanks to the reruns of a television series that has become a cherished Christmas tradition.” That series, *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* (1979-1986) was directed by Igor Maslennikov, and the two main parts were played by Vasily Livanov (Holmes) and Vitaly Solomin (Dr Watson). It was the most popular series in the whole history of Soviet television. In American sports it is a well known fact that the person who follows a legend will automatically fail. No one wanted to follow the legendary football coach, Vince Lombardi, of the Green Bay Packers. Who did? No one remembers. Who followed the legendary college basketball coaches John Wooden of UCLA, Dean Smith of North Carolina, and Adolph Rupp of Kentucky? No one remembers. The point being that whoever attempted to follow that legendary duo of Livanov and Solomin was going to have a tough road to hoe.

Negative comments started even as the show was announced and persisted stirred by

articles in Russian newspapers. Typical were:

“After Livanov no one should play Holmes, it should not happen. Too bad that Igor Maslennikov took only 11 episodes, it was necessary to shoot 111, while Solomin was alive and Livanov was young.”

“If a film is going to be done, it should be transferred to the 21st century, like the Guy Ritchie film and the BBC Cumberbatch shows. You shame us, there is already a good Holmes.”

“Why this crap after a great series with Maslennikov, Livanov and Solomin? I will not watch it.”

“Among contemporary adaptations I like only by the BBC Cumberbatch. They were based on Holmes having a laptop and a smartphone, and instead of the pipe, nicotine patches, but it's very organically fits into the 21st century, and were brilliantly filmed. With our old Holmes things do not compare, because it is fundamentally different things. And this ... this is a disgrace, a mockery of a classic and a pathetic parody of the Livanov movies.”

Even more devastating than fan comments were those from Vasily Livanov himself who sharply criticized the show. Here was a Holmes performer, immortalized in a statue & honorary MBE adding fuel to the burning fire of criticism. Not only Livanov, but Maslennikov also dismissed the very idea of remakes. Simply stated, those raised on Soviet cinema are positive that Vasily Livanov is the best Holmes of all time and that Dr. Watson can only be Vitaly Solomin. The films Igor Maslennikov directed are like Granada's Jeremy Brett Sherlock Holmes series, almost standard adaptations of the Doyle work. Holmes (they teach us) should be smoking

a pipe, playing the violin, easily solving crimes, and leaving Lestrade to make wrong conclusions and Dr Watson to stumble around amazed and write about it. The main problem of this series is that most viewers will not delve into the essence of the stories of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, but will compare the adaptation to their favorite classic film version of Igor Maslennikov instead. The shorthand 'Soviet' Sherlock Holmes for the Livanov Holmes is quite revealing. There seems a significant theme of nostalgia for lost greatness, when 1991 saw the end of the USSR, and an understandable conflation of good old Livanov Holmes with better days even if they weren't, nostalgia is like that. National pride, Russia's pride in having stood at the centre of a galaxy of empire satellites dashed. One hears the wistful recalling of former glories and Livanov's recognition by England's Queen becomes a symbol in the collective mind. One can appreciate Vladimir Putin's political nous in feeding off this sense of shame, and also the constant comparisons with Hollywood, symbolic of Western ascendancy. They are passionate about Holmes partly because he has passed via Livanov into the national memory; reject him, eclipse him and you soil a golden past. Russia has its own Victorian period, the Soviet era. How fascinating this is, how intriguing the ways whole people's fasten on the most surprising ways to express a sense of identity they can feel good about.

#### Igor Petrenko an Alien Holmes.

Of course Vasily Livanov, or Jeremy Brett, or Basil Rathbone looks more like the Paget illustrations than Igor Petrenko does: they were meant to. Igor Petrenko discussed his Sherlock Holmes character portrayal in a recent interview:

Petrenko: "I know that many didn't accept that portrayal of the detective the first time, because it didn't fit any of the stereotypes. How can it be - Sherlock Holmes

can't fight, picks his nose, chews loudly while eating, is a drug addict, nervous and unstable...But it's important for me that I was in the character.

Interviewer: Were you afraid of inevitable comparison with the great Vasily Livanov's interpretation from the very start?

Petrenko: “Well, it's not a competition and there's no need to prove something to someone. I like the actual process of searching and creating the character. The director Andrey Kavun had already set the main goal - do not play a hero, our Sherlock Holmes shouldn't be one. Hero in this story is only Watson played by Andrey Panin: he's the gentleman, he smokes the pipe and so forth...The director took a long time searching for the right definition for Sherlock: he's crazy, nobody takes him seriously...So I had an opportunity to fool around. That's how I modeled him, as we say, from what we had.”

To this I can only add, that while this quirky Holmes is perhaps not the exact Holmes from the book, this Holmes is interesting for me, he persuades me.

#### Language and Dubbing.

Naturally the absence of an English version limited its potential. In terms of timing, there was a considerable lag until serviceable subtitles were forthcoming. The dubbed version which appears only on YouTube was done by fans. This put the actual viewing time and availability for potential fans even further behind weighty competition. Nor do most people particularly like subtitles so naturally the lack of an English version would limit potential.

#### You Don't Read a Book From The Middle.

Some series you can watch the episodes in any order: they are stand alone stories, but often with recurring characters. CBS's *Elementary*, may be sampled in any order without

missing a thing. Having discussed Kavun's series with many Sherlockians, I have found that they have only watched a random episode or two and were very critical of the series based on just that sampling. Well, folks, this series is actually a novel, and you don't read a novel from the middle do you? If you haven't watched this series from start to finish you have no valid critique to offer.

#### Death is final!

Unfortunately, this was the last film role for Andrey Panin, who died before he was able to complete the dubbing of his lines as Dr. Watson. However, they were able to finish the film almost entirely using the sound recorded on set, with only a small contribution by another voice actor. The untimely and mysterious death of the series' most irreplaceable star, while surely cementing there would be no future production of the series, was not the reason for the show's death in the eyes of the critics. That had been pronounced already. While Panin's Watson, Mikhail Sergeevich Boyarsky's Lestrade and the artistic directors went unscathed by the critics, the factors detailed above effectively buried the series along with the real and equally mysterious actor's demise.

#### Timing is Everything.

There is a great deal of truth to this aphorism, especially in the entertainment industry. Being released after the blockbuster *Holmes* from Guy Ritchie, and the BBC *Sherlock*, (both of which took Russia by storm), and the CBS series *Elementary* in America featuring a female Watson, Kavun was already starting the race ten lengths behind formidable competition. But, is this competition, which is clearly not as well written as Kavun's work, with the exception of the BBC *Sherlock* series, a valid reason by itself? Or, perhaps the real reason for failure has more to do with trends the competition established. In either case the timing of the release and the lack of international publicity conspired to miss the tide of fortune. It's one lesson we learn time and

again from the fate of the original Canon stories to the great succession of Gillette, Rathbone, Brett, Livanov, Cumberbatch, et. al., all seized special fortuitous moments and flourished. Would it been distributed and accepted if it had come out a few years sooner? We'll never know.

#### Conclusion.

Sorry, Vincent Starrett, but It is No Longer Always 1895! In Arthur Conan Doyle's literary world of Sherlock Holmes it's always the Victorian era. Vincent Starrett's famous *221B* poem ends with the famous line:

“Here, though the world explode, these two survive, And it is always eighteen ninety-five.”

In the BBC *Sherlock* the viewer is reminded of that iconic year, when Dr. Watson's blog viewer counter is stuck on 1895. Sorry Vincent Starrett, and Arthur Conan Doyle literary loyalists, in the world of Holmes on screen the game has changed. It is no longer acceptable to be in that Victorian era which 1895 represents. This is best summed up in a recent interview with Mark Gatiss:

“We have just filmed the Special, which as you may know, is set in 1885. I swear to God I couldn't answer this for laughing for fully five minutes, but Steven and I were asked: ‘How can Sherlock Holmes exist in an era without iPhones?’ He just said: ‘There is some history of that.’ We are answering all the same questions we were asked five years ago, but upside down. Our version has so fundamentally become Sherlock Holmes that people have trouble thinking it could be Victorian.”

Here I believe I detect the central reason for the failure of Kavun's Sherlock Holmes series. Traditional Russian viewers have their beloved Livanov/Solomin, but the next generation has embraced a modernized BBC Holmes. Whilst older Russian viewers are unwilling to accept

anyone but Vasily Livanov as Holmes, newer viewers yearn for Benedict Cumberbatch. Older Russians relate to Sir Arthur Conan Doyle as the author of their Canon but to many these days the de facto authors of their Canon are MOFTISS, Steven Moffat and Mark Gatiss. They can stretch to an exception for a steampunk super hero Holmes, given the star power of ‘iron man’, Robert Downey Jr. and ‘pretty boy’ Jude Law in the lead roles...and an ungodly budget for promotion But that film was released even before the BBC *Sherlock*. Poor Igor Petrenko had to trail Benedict Cumberbatch along Baker Street and has been undeservedly crucified for it. Steven Moffat and Mark Gatiss have created a new Sherlock Holmes and their writings are the new gold standard. The new generation of fans have their modernized Sherlock Holmes: on screen he is no longer Victorian. The well crafted Victorian series from the imagination of Andrey Kavun is left to wither on the bough, while a poorly written modern series like *Elementary* prospers, simply because it is no longer 1895.

#### One Final Irony. (Moftiss Final Problem?)

Fascinatingly, paradoxically, as I write, the Sherlockian world awaits (with customary bated breath) a second *Sherlock* Christmas Special for 2015. It is in the can. It is a full 90 minute film (as opposed to the excellent mini episode *Many Happy Returns*) and it is a very Victorian can. We are assured by the writers this is a one off one teasing time when we shall witness Benedict Cumberbatch and Martin Freeman play the famous pair in period, Brettstyle, Livanovstyle, Kavunstyle, Series 4 (in preparation) will resume normal 21st Century service. Intriguing. Let’s leave a delicious question hanging in the air if viewers go wild, petition, demand! more Victorian CumberSeries, whatever would the BBC, Moffat and Gatiss do? Who knows? Maybe the pendulum will swing back. Maybe, just maybe, there’s an audience coming that will be better primed to appreciate a Russian Holmes that’s just too darn good to disappear for ever over film’s own Reichenbach Falls.

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