

# Theory

## Authorship and authenticity in Sherlock Holmes pastiches

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[0.1] Abstract—Rewritings and adaptations of the Sherlock Holmes stories are traditionally called pastiches among fandom. This article juxtaposes that established use with the literary critical notion of pastiche as imitation of style, and shows how stylistic affinity to the originals produces complex effects in the imitations. The article identifies two main strands in the pastiches: one that aims to correct the mistakes and fill in the gaps in the original stories, and one that supplements the canon with stories Watson left untold. Balancing among homage, criticism, and usurpation, the pastiches comment on the original story world and its cultural context, and engage in fictions of authorship to account for the apparent inauthenticity of the retellings.

[0.2] Keywords—Canon; John Dickson Carr; Detective fiction; Michael Dibdin; Adrian Conan Doyle; Sir Arthur Conan Doyle; Fan fiction; Imitation; Nicholas Meyer; Pastiche

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### 1. Introduction

[1.1] The original 56 short stories and four novels about Sherlock Holmes, written by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle between 1887 and 1917, hold a special position in literary history as one of the inaugural and certainly one of the most influential text corpora of detective fiction. The memorable characters of Sherlock Holmes and his companion Dr. Watson have inspired a vast number of imitations, adaptations, spin-offs, and so forth. The earliest rewritings appeared in the 19th century, making Sherlock Holmes rewriters "the first fanwriting community" (Jamison 2013, loc. 906). By 1980, an international Sherlock Holmes bibliography listed over a thousand parodies and pastiches (De Waal 1980). Today, the number of printed Sherlock Holmes stories has multiplied: the success of Nicolas Meyer's novel *The Seven-Per-Cent Solution* (1974) and its subsequent film adaptation, together with the easing of the Conan Doyle estate's copyright vigilance, exploded the number of publication in late 20th and early 21st century (Boström 2012), and Internet sites devoted to fan fiction have added thousands of new Sherlock Holmes adventures to the corpus. Probably no other modern writer has attracted imitators in the same scale.

[1.2] In the Sherlock Holmes fandom, the literary rewritings of the original canon (the corpus of Conan Doyle's Holmes stories) have traditionally been called pastiches (e.g., De Waal 1980; Jamison 2013, loc. 286 passim; Gray 2014). The emergence, however, of Internet-based fan fiction has introduced new divisions: the term pastiche is now usually restricted to rewritings published in print form (e.g., Polasek 2012, loc. 812), while the fan fiction writers of the Internet prefer their own, highly specialized generic terminology in categorizing their texts. The distinction highlights the differences between these two modes of fan writing: published pastiches appear as solitary achievements and closed in form, while Web-based fan fiction is processual and communal. Moreover, pastiches tend to adhere to world of the originals, while contemporary fan fiction favors crossovers and is increasingly inspired by film and TV adaptations