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The Final Solution: Reimagining Sherlock Holmes through Michael Chabon's Fan Fiction[1]

Nihai Çözüm: Michael Chabon'un Hayran Kurgusu Üzerinden Sherlock Holmes'un Yeniden Yorumlanması

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Abstract

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's iconic detective has become a primary point for reinterpretation and innovation within fan communities, where both amateur and professional writers engage in reshaping established narratives. Michael Chabon's (1963-) portrayal of an aging Sherlock Holmes, struggling with the hardships of old age and a complex, unresolved mystery in his novel, *The Final Solution* (2004), diverges from the traditional image of a relentlessly sharp and flawless detective. This nuanced portrayal not only challenges the conventional narrative but also highlights the vibrant and adaptive nature of fan communities as they reimagine iconic characters. This trend reflects a broader phenomenon in the works of fans, known as fan fiction, where creators push the boundaries of canonical texts, explore the limits and possibilities of iconic characters and offer fresh, inventive narratives. Through their collective intelligence and collaborative efforts, fan-authors transform original works, creating a dynamic interplay between established texts and new interpretations. As fan fiction evolves, it exemplifies how this collaborative creativity can influence literary traditions, expand the boundaries of established narratives, and redefine the role of readers. The evolving portrayal of the detective illustrates how fan fiction can transform passive readers into active creators, enriching the literary landscape with diverse insights and voices. In that sense, by presenting Sherlock Holmes in a state of vulnerability and limitation, Chabon not only challenges the conventional detective narrative but also highlights the transformative nature of fan fiction. Therefore, this article aims to explore how Sherlock Holmes has evolved within the realm of fan fiction through the analysis of Chabon's *The Final Solution*, revealing the ongoing dialogue and creative interaction among writers and works within the participatory culture of Sherlock Holmes fandom.
Keywords: Michael Chabon, *The Final Solution*, Sherlock Holmes, fan fiction, participatory culture.

[1] This article is adapted from an unpublished master's thesis titled "The Evolution of the Character Sherlock Holmes within Fan Fiction Narratives in Discourse," which was submitted in 2019 at the British Cultural Studies Program of the Department of English Language and Literature, Hacettepe University Graduate School of Social Sciences, Ankara, Türkiye, under the supervision of Assoc. Prof. Dr. Alev Karaduman.

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Öz

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle'un ikonik dedektifi hem amatör hem de profesyonel yazarların kabul görmüş anlatıları yeniden şekillendirdiği hayran topluluklarında yeniden yorumlama ve yenilik için ana bir nokta haline gelmiştir. Michael Chabon'un (1963-) *Final Solution* (Nihai Çözüm) adlı romanında yaşlılığın getirdiği zorluklar ve karmaşık, çözülmesi zor bir gizemle mücadele eden yaşlı Sherlock Holmes tasviri, geleneksel keskin ve kusursuz dedektif imajından sapmaktadır. Bu nüanslı tasvir, sadece geleneksel anlatıyı sorgulamakla kalmaz, aynı zamanda hayran topluluklarının ikonik karakterleri yeniden hayal ederken gösterdikleri canlı ve uyumlu doğalarını da vurgular. Bu eğilim, yaratıcıların kanonik metinlerin sınırlarını zorladığı, ikonik karakterlerin sınırlarını araştırdığı ve taze, yaratıcı anlatılar sunduğu hayran kurguları adı verilen hayran eserlerindeki daha geniş bir olguyu yansıtmaktadır. Hayran-yazarları, kolektif zekaları ve işbirlikçi çabalarıyla orijinal eserleri dönüştürerek yerleşik metinler ile yeni yorumlar arasında dinamik bir etkileşim yaratırlar. Hayran kurguları geliştikçe, bu işbirlikçi yaratıcılığın edebi gelenekleri nasıl etkileyebileceğini, yerleşik anlatıların sınırlarını nasıl genişletebileceğini ve okuyucuların rolünü nasıl yeniden tanımlayabileceğini örnekler. Dedektifin gelişen tasviri, hayran kurgularının pasif okuyucuları nasıl aktif yaratıcılara dönüştürebileceğini ve edebi manzarayı çeşitli içgörüler ve seslerle nasıl zenginleştirebileceğini gösterir. Bu anlamda, Chabon, Sherlock Holmes'i savunmasız ve sınırlı durumda sunarak yalnızca geleneksel dedektif anlatısını sorgulamakla kalmaz, aynı zamanda hayran kurgusunun dönüştürücü doğasını da vurgular. Bu sebeple bu makale, Sherlock Holmes'un hayran kurgusu içinde nasıl evrildiğini, Chabon'un *Final Solution* (Nihai Çözüm) adlı eseri üzerinden analiz ederek, Sherlock Holmes hayran topluluğundaki yazarlar ve eserler arasındaki sürekli diyalog ve yaratıcı etkileşimi katılımcı kültür bağlamında ortaya koymayı amaçlamaktadır.
Anahtar Sözcükler: Michael Chabon, *Nihai Çözüm*, Sherlock Holmes, hayran kurgusu, katılımcı kültür.

Introduction

This article aims to explore how Sherlock Holmes has evolved within the realm of fan fiction, with a focus on Michael Chabon's *The Final Solution* (2004), which exemplifies the influence of the classic Sherlock Holmes fandom. By analysing Chabon's work, this article demonstrates how the ongoing dialogue between the writer and the text reflects the participatory culture of Sherlock Holmes fandom. According to John Fiske, fandom is an interactive community where readers engage collaboratively, sharing thoughts and contributing creatively. Fiske argues that fandom is often linked to cultural forms dismissed by the dominant value system, such as pop music, romance novels, comics, and Hollywood's mass-appeal celebrities. These cultural tastes are typically associated with marginalized groups, particularly those disempowered due to gender, age, class, or race (1992, p. 30). This idea highlights that fandoms often revolve around cultural forms marginalised by mainstream values, such as pop music and comics, reflecting the interests of groups that are frequently disempowered by social factors. This marginalisation creates a space where fans feel empowered to engage with these cultural forms in meaningful ways. Consequently, fans are encouraged to produce their fan fiction, a genre that allows them to creatively build upon existing characters, settings, and plots. By doing so, they not only explore new dimensions and narratives beyond the original works but also assert their voices and perspectives within a cultural landscape that often overlooks them.

This creative engagement empowers fans to reshape the cultural narrative, bridging the gap between their personal experiences and the broader scope of fan studies, also known as fandom studies, focusing on the active engagement and creative contributions of fans and their communities. This interdisciplinary field, rooted in cultural studies, began to gain recognition in the mid-1980s. Since then, it has expanded to explore how individuals or groups interact with various texts, whether it is literature, film, media, or even public figures and activities like sports or music. Henry Jenkins, a key figure in this field, provides a notable description of what is called fan and fan studies in one of his articles by claiming that fan studies is an academic field that examines media fans and the cultures they create. Fans are generally defined as individuals who form a deep, enthusiastic connection with popular media, express their identity through their involvement with its content, and find a sense of community through shared tastes and interests. Fan cultures refer to the social and cultural structures that nurture and sustain fan activities and interests. More specifically, fandom can describe a collective cultural space that originated with science fiction enthusiasts in the early 20th century, was significantly influenced by Star Trek fans in the 1960s, and has since evolved

to include cultural productions, largely by women, centred around genre entertainment (2012). Building on this understanding, fan studies can be seen as examining how fan communities engage with media to both identify and express their identities. This process often involves interactions with various cultural phenomena, including literature, sports, music, games, and politics, all within the framework of cultural studies. Fans within these communities form structured networks that facilitate connections with others who share similar attachments to the same texts. Through this engagement, fan studies not only analyse the reactions of fans but also explore how these interactions contribute to the broader cultural landscape. As a result of these explorations, fan studies view fan fiction as a significant aspect of popular culture that manifests the influence of fandom through audience-generated texts. This point is further emphasised by the fact that fan fiction involves any type of creative writing based on popular culture, such as television shows, and is created outside the realm of professional writing (Tushnet, 1997, p. 655), highlighting how it reflects the creative contributions of fans outside the realm of traditional professional media. By utilising elements like settings, plots, characters, and other materials from the original work, referred to as the source text, fans craft new stories that broaden and enrich the fictional universe of the original text, pushing beyond its established boundaries. This process of textual transformation provides fan-writers[2] with boundless opportunities to create alternative lives for characters and explore new versions of previous plots. Consequently, by producing diverse fan fiction stories with multiple voices and narratives, fans actively participate in the creation and evolution of cultural products.

This active involvement is further exemplified by the fact that fan-authors possess the agency to transform not only the canon but also the structure of it by initiating changes in the pre-existing fictional universes. They hold the ultimate power to create a fanon, an archive consisting of various texts created by fans that collectively offer a comprehensive perspective on the fictional universe of the original source material (Santilli, 2010, p. 42). In essence, through a democratic intervention, fans replace the term canon with fanon by generating their own stories. As fan fiction writer Kim Bannister describes:

> I find that fandom can be extremely creative because we have the ability to keep changing our characters and giving them new life over and over. We can kill and resurrect them as often as we like. We can change their personalities and how they react to situations. We can take a character and make him charming and sweet or coldblooded and cruel. We can give them an infinite, always-changing life rather than the single life of their original creation. We have given ourselves license to do whatever we want and it's very liberating... If a story moves or amuses us, we share it; if it bothers us, we write a sequel; if it disturbs us, we may even re-write it! We also continually recreate the characters to fit our images of them or to explore a new idea. We have the power and that's a very strong siren. If we want to explore an issue or see a particular scenario, all we have to do is sit down and write it (as cited in Jenkins, 2013, p. 140).

In line with this perspective, fan fiction writers exercise an independent agency, using their creative freedom to shape stories and characters according to their own vision. By doing so, they transform the one-dimensional published text into a rich, multi-dimensional textual archive filled with multi-voiced characters. This shift reflects the transition from viewing fans as mere consumers to recognising them as active producers. Thus, they shift the perception from viewing the audience as passive consumers to recognising them as active producers, as illustrated by Jenkins' claim that whereas old consumers were seen as passive, new consumers are active participants. Old consumers were predictable and stayed within designated boundaries, but new consumers are migratory, displaying less loyalty to networks or media. While old consumers were often isolated, new consumers are more socially connected. Previously, the actions of media consumers were silent and invisible, but now, new consumers are vocal and public (2008, pp. 45-46).

[2] In this article, the terms fan-writer(s) and fan-author(s) are chosen to underscore a hybrid identity that transcends traditional roles. By using fan-writer(s), the focus is on how these individuals blend fan engagement with authorship, creating a bridge between merely consuming texts and actively contributing to them.

By writing their stories, fan-authors move away from their previous role as passive consumers, embracing an active role as producers. While they respect the original status and uniqueness of the source text, they seek to deconstruct and challenge the rigid binary distinctions between producer and consumer, and author and reader. In doing so, they resist passive consumption by actively engaging in the creation and evolution of cultural products. Consequently, fan-authors redefine traditional notions of authorship and text, challenging the conventional dichotomies that separate readers from writers and highlighting the dynamic role of fans as contributors to the narrative.

Issues of agency and participation in fandom are not new; they have been present for decades, as Fiske observed, describing fandom as "a heightened form of popular culture in industrial societies" where fans are "excessive readers" who differ from ordinary readers in degree rather than kind (Fiske, 1992, p. 46). Fiske distinguishes between two types of readers: one who reads primarily for pleasure and another who engages in a more critical reading, delving into the details of the text. Fans, dissatisfied with the limitations and quality of the original texts, challenge the authority of producers and create fan fiction as a response. Since the nineteenth century, fans have not only engaged with traditional genres like science fiction but also responded creatively to works such as the Sherlock Holmes stories. In that sense, Henry Jenkins builds on Michel de Certeau's concepts of strategies and tactics to describe fans as "textual poachers.[3]" De Certeau's idea posits that strategies are the rules set by producers, while tactics are the ways consumers adapt and reinterpret these rules. As de Certeau (1984) explains that a strategy is the calculated manipulation of power dynamics, possible when a subject in authority, such as a business, army, city, or scientific institution, can be isolated. In contrast, a tactic is a calculated action shaped by the absence of its own space. Without an autonomous domain, a tactic operates within a space controlled by an external power. Essentially, a tactic is the art of the weak (pp. 35-37). Due to this perception, consumers often "poach" on cultural content by employing tactics that disregard the strategies set by producers. While strategies represent the intended or preferred interpretation of a source text, tactics involve a reinterpretation of the canonical material and the creation of fan fiction. According to de Certeau, "strategies pin their hopes on the resistance that the establishment of a place offers to the erosion of time; tactics on a clever utilization of time, of the opportunities it presents and also of the play that it introduces into the foundations of power" (1984, pp. 38-39). Jenkins defines this process of reinterpretation and creation as "textual poaching," asserting that fans who engage in fictionalisation are creative writers. He argues that fandom transforms consumption into production, leading to the development of new texts, cultures, and communities (1992, p. 46).

This transformation is evident in Sherlock Holmes fan communities, often called Holmesian or Sherlockian, where members actively discuss interpretations, theories, and insights rather than simply consuming the stories in isolation. Numerous authors have reinterpreted or rewritten the character of Sherlock Holmes and his stories, frequently offering their unique perspectives on the detective. As Paul Booth (2010) observes, fan communities bring their fandom to life by collaboratively rewriting stories, illustrating that fan fiction encompasses both crafting new narratives and reassessing existing ones (p. 75). For example, Nicholas Meyer (1945-) in *The Seven-Per-Cent Solution* (1974) explores the famous detective's battle with addiction and provides an alternative history that blends real historical figures like Sigmund Freud with Doyle's imaginative characters. Additionally, Laurie R. King (1952-) in her *Mary Russell* series (1994-) reinterprets the detective character by introducing Mary Russell, a young woman who becomes the detective's partner and eventually his wife, showing a more personal side of Sherlock Holmes. Another example is Mitch Cullin (1968-) in *A Slight Trick of the Mind* (2005), which portrays an elderly detective struggling with memory loss and grappling with his legacy and mortality. Similarly, Anthony

[3] For a more detailed exploration of these theoretical concepts, please refer to the introduction section of the following thesis: Soygül, T. (2019). *The Evolution of the Character Sherlock Holmes within the Fan Fiction Narrative and Discourse* (Unpublished master's thesis). English Language and Literature Department, Hacettepe University, Ankara, Türkiye.

Horowitz (1955-) in *The House of Silk* (2011) offers an authorised[4] continuation of the Holmesian canon that adheres to Doyle's style while introducing darker and more modern themes. Finally, Kareem Abdul-Jabbar (1947-) in *Mycroft Holmes* (2015) shifts the focus to Sherlock Holmes's elder brother, Mycroft, offering a fresh perspective on the Holmesian world through an exploration of Victorian politics.

Chabon's *The Final Solution* differs from other Sherlock Holmes rewritings in several notable ways. Unlike many reinterpretations that aim to recapture the detective's youthful energy or preserve his renowned brilliance, Chabon focuses on Sherlock Holmes in his later years, portraying him as an elderly man confronting the realities of aging. Moreover, the novel emphasises the detective's mental and physical decline since he fails to solve the central mystery at the end. In addition to this, Chabon does not use a typical Watsonian narrative style, leaving the detective isolated and introspective, forced to rely on his own fragmented thought processes. Through these unique approaches, Chabon diverges from the more traditional portrayals of Sherlock Holmes character, creating a more introspective and humanised version of the iconic detective. Chabon's innovative portrayal of an aging Sherlock Holmes not only offers a fresh perspective on the iconic detective but also gained significant attention in the literary world. Moreover, the novel was initially published in the *Paris Review*[5] in 2013 under the subtitle "A Story of Detection." This literary magazine granted the novel the 2003 Aga Khan Prize for Fiction, enhancing its recognition among Holmesian enthusiasts. Michael Chabon's novel *The Final Solution* can be viewed as a form of fan fiction, as Chabon himself noted in the "About the Book" section that Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes stories, along with associated fan fiction, served as an inspiration for his work (2006, p. 5). Chabon also discusses how his engagement with the canonical Sherlock Holmes tales motivated him to create his own novel, which illustrates not only his direct inspiration from the original stories but also the evolving nature of fan fiction (2011, p. 58)

This evolution is exemplified by the way fan-writers, captivated by compelling works, often seek to explore what happens next or address gaps left by the original narrative, prompting the creation of ongoing fan-generated content. As Lyndsay Faye (2014) asserts the fact that they desire more stories and will uncover them through various approaches, each reflecting their unique nature, time, preferences, and creativity (2). Many fans, driven by curiosity about what if scenarios, move away from merely imagining to creating through fan productions like fan fiction, fan art, or fan videos. These fans use their creativity to fill in narrative gaps and sometimes merge different universes. This activity fosters a collective intelligence among fans who generate content while also providing feedback, offering critiques, discussing, reading, and sometimes revising elements such as plot and character portrayal. This collaborative approach highlights the emergence of collective intelligence as a key concept in understanding how fan communities operate. The term 'collective intelligence' was introduced by Pierre Lévy, a cultural theorist and academic born in 1956. With technological advances turning consumption into a collective process, collective intelligence emerges as an alternative source of power. Lévy (1997) suggests that shared goals and collective effort enable individuals to achieve what they cannot accomplish alone, as no single person possesses all knowledge; instead, knowledge is distributed among everyone (p. 20). Consequently, collective intelligence enhances 'knowledge communities' by valuing everyone's contributions and their interactions with producers. As Lévy (1997) also notes, it is not the static possession of knowledge but the dynamic, participatory process of acquiring knowledge that holds collective intelligence together, continuously testing and reinforcing the group's social connections (p. 54). This idea is vividly illustrated by fan fiction, which is recognised as a significant manifestation of collective intelligence, as it emerges from communities of individuals who share similar intellectual interests and collaborate to create new stories. In this collaborative environment, fans pool their knowledge and creativity, collectively generating content that

[4] Approved by the Conan Doyle Estate, which manages the intellectual property rights of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's Works and regulates adaptations and commercial uses of his creations, including Sherlock Holmes.

[5] Established in Paris in 1953, this literary magazine known for its influential contributions to the literary world, has earned a reputation for its commitment to high-quality, innovative content and continues to be a respected platform for both emerging and established voices in literature.

reflects their shared passions and insights. This process exemplifies how knowledge, when utilised collectively, becomes a form of power within participatory culture.

In such a cultural context, the distinction between producers and consumers is increasingly blurred, allowing individuals to engage in both roles simultaneously. Participatory culture refers to a setting where traditional boundaries are dissolved, and consumers are no longer merely passive recipients of content. Instead, they become active contributors, engaging in the creation of new works. This involvement encompasses a range of activities, including interacting with one another, sharing ideas, and contributing creatively, thus transforming traditional consumption into a more dynamic and interactive process. As Henry Jenkins (2006) describes, "consumption becomes production; reading becomes writing; spectator culture becomes participatory culture" (p. 60). This shift reflects how the interconnected activities of consuming and producing content are central to the development of collective intelligence, illustrating the power of collaborative engagement within modern cultural environments.

In that regard, the participatory culture of Sherlock Holmes fandom revolves around community, collective intelligence, participation, and creative expression, which is particularly evident in the works of fan-authors like Chabon. As Lev Grossman (2017) describes, fan fiction represents what literature could become if it were completely reinvented by a group of creative pop-culture enthusiasts isolated in a post-apocalyptic setting. These fans are not passive consumers but actively engage with and respond to the culture in its own language (1). Within this dynamic, everyone contributes to both the production of the text and the ongoing dialogue among text, author, and reader. Chabon exemplifies this with *The Final Solution*, participating enthusiastically in the realm of fan fiction because "no one writes of Sherlock Holmes without love" (LeCarré, 2004, p. xv).

Michael Chabon's Revival of Sherlock Holmes

Questions like how a great mind evolves over time and whether understanding this change can shed light on the person's earlier life (Tucker, 2015, par. 22) are explored in *The Final Solution*, which portrays an eighty-nine-year-old retired Sherlock Holmes in poor health, residing in the English countryside during World War II. Michael Chabon brings back the retired detective for one final captivating mystery. According to psychologist Erik Erikson, "old age is a coming together of all that is good or bad from the life stages that went before, with the individual finishing up either facing disintegration and despair or else approaching personal peace and fulfillment" (1998, p. 48). The detective's retirement days can be depicted in two ways: as an old person who remains skilled in his detective abilities or as someone who has lost his vitality. Chabon offers a blend of both perspectives, depicting the elderly detective initially experiencing a revival of his deductive abilities, yet ultimately confronting an enemy he cannot overcome: the effects of old age. As Chabon (2006) writes, "he felt—with all his body, as one felt the force of gravity or inertia—the inevitability of his failure. The conquest of his mind by age was not a mere blunting or slowing down but an erasure, as of a desert capital by a drifting millennium of sand. Time had bleached away the ornate pattern of his intellect, leaving a blank white scrap" (p. 37). As an elderly man, Sherlock Holmes finds a reflection of his youthful energy and detective spirit represented by the symbolism of the bee. While this symbolism is intricate and diverse in literature, "the bee became associated with the human soul, suggesting that honey, the product of the bee, is the appropriate offering for the soul as represented by the bee" (Cook, 1895, p. 19). This connection reflects the detective's bond with life and his determination to stay active despite his age, paralleling bee's inherent association with life and vitality in nature. The representation of the elderly man's garden, teeming with hives, evokes a sense of liveliness, efficiency, and readiness to swiftly respond if circumstances call for the skills of a talented detective. By bringing Sherlock Holmes back to life in his novel, Chabon essentially resurrects the detective, emphasising that he remains ready for new adventures, even in his retirement.

This creative choice highlights the transformative influence of fans, demonstrating how they play a role in the continuous evolution of iconic characters. By reimagining Sherlock Holmes in his later years, Chabon showcases how fan creativity and engagement breathe new life into beloved figures, allowing them to develop and adapt within contemporary contexts. Set in 1944, Chabon's story presents an elderly

detective whose name is never directly stated, with the character consistently referred to as "the old man" throughout the tale (2006, p. 7). Despite this, his identity is unquestionable, as all the necessary clues point to him being Sherlock Holmes. The character's characteristic features, a hunting cap, Inverness cape, and the iconic magnifying glass, along with his behaviours, such as lighting a cigarette like a soldier and listening intently with a critical eye, clearly indicate his true identity as the author emphasizes these traits in the novel as follows: "Aside from giving his name and title . . . he lit his cigarette like a soldier, hastily, and listened with an air of one accustomed to seeking flaws in strategies" (Chabon, 2006, pp. 62-63). Additionally, the novel's title directly alludes to the detective's presumed death in "The Final Problem." Therefore, the identity of the elderly man in Chabon's novel clearly points to the iconic detective, Sherlock Holmes.

The key elements that characterise the appearance of the detective Sherlock Holmes have been altered by Chabon to better suit his depiction of an elderly and wise detective, creating a new perception within fan fiction narratives. For instance, Chabon reimagines the iconic deerstalker cap as an old hunting cap to better suit his advanced age and dignified wisdom. As can be seen in Chabon's following depiction, "[Sherlock Holmes] pulled on his hunting cap and, with a last nod in her direction, went out" (2006, p. 57). Furthermore, the author portrays the detective as a habitual smoker who continues to rely on his pipe for relaxation and contemplation, even in his old age. He writes:

> The old man had been stoking and sipping at his pipe for the last fifteen minutes as they awaited the prisoner. The smoke of his tobacco was the foulest that she, a girl raised in a house with seven brothers and a widowed father, had ever been obliged to inhale. It hung in the room as thick as sheepshearing and made arabesques in the harsh slanting light from the window. (2006, p. 48)

In addition to these character traits, Chabon maintains the Inverness cape, a symbol closely associated with the image of a successful detective. This item underscores the portrayal of Sherlock Holmes as elderly but sharp investigator, still perceptive and capable of making keen deductions. The aging of both the detective and his cloak creates a visual unity, reflecting the detective's enduring spirit and his wisdom. Chabon vividly describes this: "[Sherlock Holmes] [s]tooped in the manner of tall old men, but not bent, he had stood in the full April sunshine wrapped in a thick woolen Inverness, studying her, inspecting her, making no effort to conceal or dissemble his examination. The cloak, she remembered, had been heavily patched, with total disregard for pattern or stuff, and darned in hundred places in a motley spectrum of colored thread" (2006, p. 48). Additionally, the portrayal of the elderly man depicts Sherlock Holmes with his signature curved pipe and magnifying glass, along with the sentence, "here was a puzzle to kindle old appetites and energies" (11), written on the back of the couch and on the boxes scattered on the floor. This imagery signifies that Sherlock Holmes' familiar curved pipe represents his enduring passions, while his magnifying glass symbolises his persistent desire to be effective despite his age. Furthermore, the detective's armchair holds as much importance as these other items. In Doyle's stories, the young detective frequently sits in his armchair to hear his clients' concerns. Conversely, Chabon positions the elderly detective's armchair in front of a window, allowing him to observe the world around him. This armchair placement signifies that, even though the old man may not be able to actively perform his former duties, he remains eager and ready to take action against any potential danger or mystery.

In accordance with Chabon's depiction, the illustrator of the novel, Jay Ryan (1972-) portrays Sherlock Holmes as an elderly person seated in his armchair by the window, accompanied by his iconic curved pipe and magnifying glass, signifying that the detective remains faithful to his pipe-smoking habit. The detective's pipe is portrayed as an essential tool for thinking regardless of his age. For instance, while investigating a case, "[h]e patted down the pockets of his wrinkled suit: looking for his pipe" (Chabon, 2006, p. 28). Nevertheless, each illustrator brings their own distinctive style to the portrayal, and Ryan depicts the old man in slippers and casual clothing, instead of the classic deerstalker and Inverness cape. This choice aligns with Chabon's vision of an older, more reflective Sherlock Holmes instead of the young, dynamic detective. The canonical detective transforms into an elderly person seated in an armchair with his

familiar comforts, represented by his curved pipe and magnifying glass, and is further depicted as "the old man, the mad old beekeeper" indulging in his retirement pastime activity of beekeeping (Chabon, 2006, p. 88). In this regard, the illustration is a clever depiction, engaging the reader with various objects in the room. With the help of the illustrations, in Chabon's portrayal, Sherlock Holmes is reimagined as elderly, retired man who enjoys tending to his bees in a peaceful village in Sussex, where he is largely regarded as an eccentric beekeeper uninterested in the affairs of the locals. This depiction leads readers to envision "the old man, the mad old beekeeper" who is less energetic and seemingly less inclined to solve puzzles, indulging in his beekeeping pastime during retirement, yet still prepared to contribute using his extensive experience and remarkable detective skills (Chabon, 2006, p. 88).

Building on this portrayal of Sherlock Holmes as a retired, eccentric beekeeper, the narrative then shifts to a vivid illustration of the detective's quieter moments in retirement. The story opens with an image of a boy alongside the railway tracks, accompanied by an African grey parrot and the depiction of 'the old man' seated in his armchair, absorbed in reading *The British Bee Journal*. The depiction of the elderly detective offers readers a fresh perspective on the iconic detective, one that Conan Doyle never explored:

> [W]hen cold and damp did not trouble the hinges of his skeleton, it could be a lengthy undertaking, done properly, to rise from his chair, negotiate the shifting piles of ancient-bachelor clutter- newspapers both cheap and of quality, trousers, bottles of salve and liver pills, learned annals and quarterlies, plates of crumbs-that made treacherous the crossing of his parlor, and open his front door to the world. Indeed the daunting prospect of the journey from armchair to doorstep was among the reasons for his lack of commerce with the world. (9)

In depicting the old man's tranquil retirement, Chabon also refers to detective' career and his remarkable deductive successes, noting, "this the old man-though he had once made his fortune and his reputation through a long and brilliant series of extrapolations from unlikely groupings of facts-could not, could never, have begun to foretell" (8). The portrayal of the elderly detective remains faithful to Doyle's original vision, acknowledging Sherlock Holmes' achievements as a private detective. Although "there were few now living for whom he would willingly risk catching the toe of his slipper in the hearth rug and spilling the scant remainder of his life across the cold stone floor" (Chabon, 2006, p. 9), the old man's instincts are evident when he notices the potential danger from his window. Seeing a young boy about to fall onto electrified tracks, the old man immediately felt compelled to act. Despite the painful journey to the door due to his aching bones, the instinct to save a life drives the retired detective to take action. Ignoring his physical limitations, the old man has a sudden burst of energy to prevent an acceident as depicted in the following quotation:

> He wavered a moment, groping already for the door latch, though he still had to cross the entire room to reach it. His failing arterial system labored to supply his suddenly skybound brain with useful blood. His ears rang and his knees ached and his feet were plagued with stinging. He lurched, with a haste that struck him as positively giddy, toward the door, and jerked it open, somehow injuring, as he did so, the nail of his right forefinger. (Chabon, 2006, pp. 9-10).

The elderly man's intervention not only rescues the boy from a tragic fate but also revives his own sense of purpose, propelling him into another adventure. This act of heroism serves as a testament to the character's enduring spirit and willingness to embrace new challenges, which in turn exemplifies the transformative nature of fan fiction. Through creative reinterpretations of Sherlock Holmes adventures, fan-writers "explore, remix, and interpret" (Barenblat, 2011, p. 172) established narratives to craft fresh stories. As Kristina Busse (2009) states, this process of deconstructing and reimagining existing tales demonstrates how "transformative works take existing artifacts and add to or alter them to create a new message or meaning" (p. 104).

The narrative continues with the encounter between an elderly man and a nine-year-old boy named Linus Steinman at a cottage. However, it is the boy's parrot, Bruno, that draws the old man's interest and motivates him to leave his home in pursuit of a new adventure. Chabon presents Bruno as a central figure, being the companion of Linus, a German Jewish refugee traumatised and rendered mute by the Second World War. Linus is depicted as having lost his parents and "a quiet nine-year-old boy whose face was like a blank back page from the book of human sorrows" (Chabon, 2006, p. 16). After rescuing Linus from the electrified tracks, the parrot begins to utter a sequence of numbers in German, "Zwei eins 765ieben fünf vier 765ieben drei[6]" in a "soft, oddly breathy voice, with the slightest hint of a lisp" (Chabon, 2006, p. 10). This moment uncovers Bruno's deeper significance, acting as the voice for the boy whose parents were likely victims in Germany. Additionally, this scene highlights Bruno's remarkable abilities beyond his role as a symbolic figure. Its talents extend far beyond mere imitation, as he demonstrates through various performances. Besides reciting these cryptic numbers, Bruno is also capable of singing German opera and reciting poetry, showcasing his extraordinary imitative linguistic skills. Accordingly, Mr. Panicker, the stationmaster at the train station where the elderly detective first encounters the mute boy and his African grey parrot, describes, "Bruno [as a] . . . remarkable animal. He recites poetry, as you hear now. He sings songs. He is a most gifted mimic and has already startled my wife a number of times by counterfeiting my own, perhaps overly vehement, manner of sneezing" (2006, p. 20). Startled by the sudden appearance of German numbers, the old detective is compelled to revive his dormant skills to connect with the boy, as "[i]t had been thirty years since he had last spoken German, and he felt the words tumble from a high back shelf of his mind" (Chabon, 2006, p. 11). The old man is irresistibly drawn to unravel the mystery behind this peculiar incident since "[f]or the first time in a very many years, he felt the old vexation, the mingled impatience and pleasure at the world's beautiful refusal to yield up its mysteries without a fight" (Chabon, 2006, pp. 13-14). This enthusiastic drive to solve mysteries is a quintessential trait of Sherlock Holmes, originally crafted by Doyle, and it naturally lends itself to reinterpretation by fan-authors. Thus, Chabon introduces a new mystery for the detective to delve into, providing a deeper examination of his later years. Moreover, by creating a narrative centred on an aged detective, Chabon delves into new dimensions of fan fiction writing, as fans often reinterpret and expand upon underrepresented aspects of beloved characters to fill gaps and offer fresh perspectives.

When a tenant named Shane is murdered and Linus' parrot Bruno vanishes from their boarding house, the police turn to the old man for his expert help in solving the case, reminiscent of his earlier days. During a conversation between Sherlock Holmes and Detective Bellows, the detective mentions knowing Bellows' grandfather, prompting the young inspector to respond, "'I heard him curse your name.' The old man nodded, gravely. The inspector's sharp eye detected a fleeting sadness, a flicker of memory that briefly seamed the old man's face" (Chabon, 2006, p. 26). In spite of the strained relationship between the old man and the police, after a team of inspectors arrives at his cottage to enlist his help, they find him ready and prepared to inspect the crime scene, even before being informed about the incident: "[t]hey found him sitting on the boot bench outside his front door, hatted and caped in spite of the heat, sun-burnt hands clasping the head of his blackthorn stick. All ready to go. As if – though it was impossible – he were expecting them" (Chabon, 2006, p. 25). For Sherlock Holmes, investigating a crime takes precedence over past animosities, and the police, despite their personal dislike, trust in his unmatched ability to crack cases.

Nevertheless, as the old man begins using his deductive techniques and insights, he feels more energized, exercising his weary mental capacities. Doyle's portrayal of the detective as a uniquely intelligent and skilled investigator is mirrored by Chabon, who depicts an impressive elderly Sherlock Holmes consistent with the canonical character. Observations of the old man in action highlight his remarkable presence: "Oh, she thought, what a fine old man this is! Over his bearing, his speech, the tweed suit and tatterdemalion Inverness there hung, like the odour of Turkish shag, all the vanished vigour and rectitude of the Empire" (2006, p. 53). Upon first meeting, the girl compares the detective to a valuable item, Turkish rug, and respected entities like the British Empire. Hence, despite his age, the elderly man succeeds in solving the murder of Mr. Shane, killed by a burglar, attempting to steal the bird for himself, demonstrating

[6] The translation of "Zwei eins sieben fünf vier sieben drei" into English is "2175473."

that Sherlock Holmes' deduction technique remains functional. Thus, Chabon transforms the aging process into a journey of wisdom illustrating how he is revitalised and ready for new adventures.

Another perspective on this evolution is how the elderly man employs his extraordinary deductive abilities to shed light on the parrot's mysterious disappearance. His superior reasoning and analytical prowess are particularly evident when he is alongside other characters, notably his close friend John Watson, lacking Sherlock Holmes' exceptional skills and sharp intellect. Conversely, Watson neither makes an appearance nor is referred to in Chabon's novel, which is narrated from a first-person perspective. While Watson's presence is essential for the intellectual function of the detective in the original canon, his absence in this fan fiction narrative plays a significant role. Without Watson's friendship, Sherlock Holmes lacks a confidant to whom he can relay his detailed analyses during the case. As a result, unlike the canonical detective, who enjoys providing a detailed explanation of each observation to his friend, the elderly man in Chabon's novel talks to himself, providing the detailed deductive steps for those near him:

> The old man sank slowly back into his chair, but this time with an air of great abstraction. He was no longer looking at her or at Reggie, or, so far as she could see, at anything in the room. . . . After a full minute of furious smoking, he said, 'Parkins,' clearly and distinctly, and then he gave a little mumbled speech whose words she couldn't catch. He appeared, she would have said, to be delivering a lecture to himself. Once more he made it up onto his feet, and then headed toward the door of the waiting room, without a backward glance. It was as if he had forgotten them entirely. (2006, p. 56)

The old man's ability to make deductions is greatly aided by his smoking habit and his tendency to speak to himself rather than to those around him. Chabon presents the old man's thought process through this method of self-dialogue, allowing readers to experience and understand the detective's reasoning as it is revealed from Watson's perspective. This narrative approach, which involves presenting the detective's deductions as they are explained to Watson, is known as the Watsonian style in canon, where "prose is invariably clear. . . . Watson's stories have a dignity presenting as they do riots in the streets of Cambridge, explicit sexual encounters of various kinds, and astonishing behaviour on Holmes' part" (Redmond, 2009, p. 216). Vincent Starrett (1965), the poet behind the renowned poem "221B," underscores the importance of employing the Watsonian style in writing fan fiction, asserting, "Holmes is an old favorite of mine—I am even now producing a book about him—and it was inevitable that I should adopt the Watsonian style of narration in some degree when I began to write detective fiction of my own. . . ." (211). In Chabon's novel, however, the readers do not hear complete explanations from the detective; instead, they are presented with the fragments of his deductive reasoning because the lack of the old man's closest companion results in the omission of the Watsonian narrative style. Without Watson's presence, portrayals of Sherlock Holmes in Chabon's fan fiction are left fragmented and incomplete. Hence, this choice is intentional, aiming to depict the old man as more disconnected and isolated from his surroundings, thereby highlighting his solitude and the challenges of his solitary existence. Additionally, the author dedicates a whole chapter to depicting the viewpoint of the young boy's parrot while it is held captive by thieves. While this kind of approach is not employed in canonical works, Chabon implements it effectively to highlight the emotional and psychological depth of the characters. As the parrot reflects on its troubling situation, it observes:

> He had seen madmen: the man who smelled of boiled bird-flesh was going mad. He knew the smell of bird-flesh, for they ate it. They ate anything. The knowledge that the men of his home forests would burn and eat with relish the flesh of his own kind was a stark feature of his ancestral lore. In the first days of his captivity the contemplation of their bloody diet and the likelihood that he was being kept by them against the satiation of some future hunger so troubled and revolted him that he had fallen silent and chewed a bald place in the feathers of his breast. (Chabon, 2006, p. 47)

This perspective enhances the narrative by showcasing Chabon's innovative storytelling techniques. By incorporating elements that diverge from the conventional style found in traditional Sherlock Holmes novels of the Victorian period, such as including a chapter from the parrot's perspective rather than following the classic Watsonian style, Chabon mirrors how fans blend the original canon with creative approaches in their fan fiction. This re-imagining of a solitary detective challenges the established conventions of Sherlock Holmes narratives, encouraging fresh and transformative interpretations of the character and stories.

Fan-authors delve into new dimensions of established characters by transforming or expanding their personality. In this instance, they take Sherlock Holmes and portray the absence of a close friend, leaving few who remember the detective's distinguished past. The old man is sometimes referred to as a "half-legendary friend," (11) with his investigations and deductive abilities considered legendary: "He had heard the tales, the legends, the wild, famous leaps of induction pulled off by the old man in his heyday, assassins inferred from cigar ash, horse thieves from the absence of a watchdog's bark" (Chabon, 2006, p. 29). While Doyle portrays the famous detective as a solitary figure with only John Watson's company, Chabon depicts an even more isolated elderly man, devoid of any friends. Nevertheless, there is one person in the story who recalls the elderly man's past successes and trusts him to locate the whereabouts of the boy's parrot: "When he heard the old man's name, something flickered, a dim memory, in the eyes of Mr. Kalb. He smiled, and turned to the boy. . . . giving the boy's shoulder an encouraging squeeze. 'Here is the man to find your bird. Now you have nothing to worry about'" (Chabon, 2006, p. 41). By depicting a career that has been nearly forgotten, Chabon transforms Doyle's notable detective into a more isolated figure. This creative narrative framework expands the canon, offering an alternative portrayal of an old detective. In doing so, Chabon exemplifies how fan fiction serves as an "expansion of the established narrative: a reimagining and reinterpretation of the original narrative" (Ilias 48).

Even though the detective successfully locates Linus' parrot following the resolution of the crime, he fails to decipher the true significance of the numbers spoken by the parrot, which led to the bird's kidnapping and a competitor's death. As a contrast to the consistently accurate detective depiction in the canon, Chabon's Sherlock Holmes admits his failure to decipher the German numbers recited by the parrot and their true meaning. The parrot's tendency to repeat these numbers captures the interest of various individuals. Despite their fascination and efforts, none of them are able to understand the true meaning or importance of the numbers. Several theories emerge to explain the numbers repeated by the parrot. One theory, proposed by the British Intelligence Service, suggests that the numbers could be a code related to the German navy, potentially taught to the parrot by Linus' father, who was once a pet psychiatrist for a high-ranking member of the Nazi Party (NSDAP). Another hypothesis is that the numbers are linked to a Swiss bank account, as Linus' father was rumoured to be a wealthy Jewish individual. In this scenario, Kalb aims to seize the funds by capturing the parrot with the help of his brother, who works at a Swiss bank. A further theory proposes that the numbers might correspond to the boxcars used to transport Linus' parents during the Holocaust which was the part of Hitler's "Final Solution."[7]

In the chapter narrated from Bruno's perspective, there is a suggestion that the numbers are connected to a train. The parrot refers to them as "the train song, the song of the long rolling cars" (Chabon, 2006, p. 111), which could symbolise Linus' separation from his parents. On the novel's final page, following Linus' reunion with his parrot, the boy begins to recite the same numbers while observing a military train go by. This moment likely evokes memories of his parents' loss, as the scene parallels his earlier experiences: "He watched the cars, his eyes flicking from left to right as if reading them go by. 'Sieben zwei eins vier drei[8],' the boy whispered, with the slightest hint of a lisp. 'Sieben acht vier vier fünf[9]'" (Chabon, 2006, p. 127).

[7] "The Final Solution" specifically refers to the Nazi plan for the systematic genocide of Jews during World War II. Additionally, the phrase "Final Solution of the Jewish Question" is used to describe the brutal campaign that led to the extermination of more than half of Europe's Jewish population, highlighting the extensive and devastating impact of this genocidal strategy (Michman, 2011, p. 1-2).

[8] The translation of "Sieben zwei eins vier drei" into English is "72143."

[9] The translation of "Sieben acht vier vier fünf" into English is "78445."

The novel's title carries numerous hidden references that perceptive readers can uncover through various hints. However, this additional knowledge escapes all the characters within the story, including the elderly Sherlock Holmes, who is unable to decipher the meaning behind the numbers. He acknowledges, "I doubt very much . . . if we shall ever learn what significance, if any, those numbers may hold" (Chabon, 2006, p. 125). This inability to solve the final puzzle leads the old man to the realisation that his abilities have diminished compared to what they once were, a fact that Chabon effectively illustrates through his portrayal of the character:

> With the consciousness of failure, a grey shadow seemed to steal over his senses as if, steady as a cloud, a great obstructing satellite were scudding across the face of the sun. Meaning drained from the world like light fleeing the operation of an eclipse. The vast body of experience and lore, of corollaries and observed results, of which he felt himself the master, was at a stroke rendered useless. The world around him was a page of alien text. (2006, p. 85)

As Sherlock Holmes grows older, the rising occurrence of "eclipses" symbolises his internal battle with the harsh reality of his inability to fully solve the case. This recurring inability underscores his frustration and sense of inadequacy. By the conclusion of the story, the old man is tormented by the feeling that a crucial element is escaping his grasp, reinforcing his deep-seated anxiety over his perceived shortcomings and unresolved issues:

> The application of creative intelligence to a problem, the finding of a solution at once dogged, elegant, and wild, this had always seemed to him to be the essential business of human beings – the discovery of sense and causality amid the false leads, the noise, the trackless brambles of life. And yet he had always been haunted – had he not? – by the knowledge that there were men, lunatic cryptographers, mad detectives, who squandered their brilliance and sanity in decoding and interpreting the messages in cloud formations, in the letters of the Bible recombined, in the spots on butterflies' wings. One might, perhaps, conclude from the existence of such men that meaning dwelled solely in the mind of the analyst. (Chabon, 2006, p. 125)

The passage offers a critique of the detective genre by highlighting its conventional structure, where clues usually result in a clear resolution by illustrating that not all detection works this way. A sharp mind does not always uncover the deeper meanings behind clues, as interpretations can vary greatly among individuals. Although Sherlock Holmes manages to find both the killer and the lost parrot, he fails to unravel the true significance of the numbers uttered by the parrot. This highlights the theme of human imperfection, as illustrated by Chabon through the elderly man's introspections: "That it was the insoluble problems – the false leads and the cold cases – that reflected the true nature of things. That all the apparent significance and pattern had no more intrinsic sense than the chatter of an African grey parrot" (2006, p. 125). In contrast to Conan Doyle's straightforward stories, where the detective typically follows a clear trail of clues to arrive at a resolution, Chabon's narrative introduces a more intricate puzzle that even the old man's renowned deductive skills cannot unravel. The unresolved mystery, hinted at through a seemingly arbitrary sequence of numbers linked to the Nazi genocide, reflects the young boy's silence and the elderly man's struggle with his own aging. This scenario not only highlights the old man's failure to solve the deeper mystery but also forces him to confront his existential fears, including his own mortality, as explored further in another passage by Chabon:

> He did not fear death exactly, but he had evaded it for so many years that it had come to seem formidable simply by virtue of that long act of evasion. In particular he feared dying in some undignified way, on the jakes or with his face in the porridge . . . The prospect of setting

> himself on fire with his own pipe conformed to his worst ideas of the indignity that death would one day visit upon him. (2006, p. 78)

By portraying Sherlock Holmes as an aging, ineffective, and diminished figure, *The Final Solution* illustrates a significant challenge that even the most celebrated detective cannot overcome: the inevitable progression of aging. This depiction emphasizes the vulnerability and limitations that come with growing older, presenting a striking contrast to the once infallible detective who now faces an overwhelming personal struggle, revealing the universal and nature of human frailty. Imagining the old detective's retirement offers readers the chance to engage as active participants in fandom, rather than passive observers, and to critique a canonical character like Sherlock Holmes. In his fan fiction, Chabon explores the retired Sherlock by illustrating an old detective, contrasting sharply with the young, dynamic figure in the original canon. This subversion of the canon allows for the character's evolution within fan fiction.

Conclusion

In *The Final Solution*, Chabon reimagines Sherlock Holmes as an elderly, retired figure, offering a portrayal that departs significantly from the canonical depictions of the detective. Chabon uses symbolic references, such as the detective's worn hunting cap and old Inverness cape, to reflect his transformation from a sharp, energetic detective into a shadow of his former self, yet still a figure of enduring wisdom. The recurring imagery of bees serves as a metaphor for the old detective's persistence in remaining active despite his declining faculties, symbolising his desire for purpose even as his abilities diminish. The novel also contrasts the detective's past brilliance with his present struggles, such as his failure to solve the mystery of the parrot's numbers, illustrating the limitations of aging. Moreover, the absence of Watson emphasises the old man's isolation, as he faces challenges without the intellectual companionship he once relied upon, deepening his sense of solitude. Through this reimagining, Chabon offers a unique approach to fan fiction that diverges from the common tendency to preserve Sherlock Holmes' brilliance. Therefore, instead of focusing on the detective's continued success, Chabon explores the vulnerabilities and limitations brought by age, presenting a more humanised detective.

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