

# The Theory of Narrative Causality

“Things happen because the plot says they should.”

TO BE HONEST, I had to click the link at least five times before it... clicked.

“The Theory of Narrative Causality.” The story was recommended all over—but the links kept dumping me in this random fan opinion posting board. Some Sherlock Holmes fan going off about some other Sherlock Holmes fan going off about the Guy Ritchie/Robert Downey Jr. movies. Sherlockian A wasn’t a fan of this Johnny-come-lately fandom, and let his opinions be known. Everywhere. Sherlockian B wasn’t a fan of these opinions... and on and on.

OK. Fine. Lots of Sherlock Holmes purists disliked Ritchie’s entertaining alternate universe steampunk fanfic of a film. I am anything but a purist—I thought it was fun—and fandoms ranting about various reboots or pro-fic (licensed, sanctioned, moneymaking fanfiction, called “pastiche” when published as Sherlock Holmes stories, called “movies” when large entertainment corporations are behind it) is nothing new in *any* fandom. Fan commentary can be insightful, sometimes astonishingly so, but it wasn’t surprising that a fan of the Doyle canon and Jeremy Brett’s classic Holmes wouldn’t like Downey. It wasn’t *new information*.

I was looking for the brilliant fan commentary that was also smart, well-written fiction. That’s kind of my kink.

“The Theory of Narrative Causality.” It kept coming up, site after site, rec after rec. I clicked again, hoping *this* link would be fixed. The title sounded so promising—at least, you know, to a fan of “theory” and “narrative,” and, well, David Hume. (OK, fine, to fans of Terry Pratchett, too.)

But no. Same fanboard. Fans making a “meta” post (self-reflexive critical commentary, we’d call it in my business) complaining about the arrogant fan “Consulting Detective” and his arrogant ways. It wasn’t completely uninteresting, but there comes a point where you’ve seen one fan v. fan conflict, you’ve seen them all.

Disappointing, but it happens. Links break. Sites change, fall away, or get repurposed. When amateur writers post their fiction online, free of charge, chapter by chapter, sometimes they finish it, sometimes they don't. Sometimes you go back to a story, and it's gone: a change of heart, worry about work or family ramifications—a host of reasons to stop hosting. The archive failed (Geocities, once the third most browsed site on the web and home of many a fanfic archive, was just taken down one day—October 26, 2009—and most of its content was lost). Someone flounced—left the fandom in a huff, or a panic, or for a paid publication. You just never know.

That's also partly what this book is about: not knowing. In various ways, fanfiction resembles all storytelling, ever. People like to swap stories, period, and the internet is like a big electronic campfire. These continuities with past forms and traditions as well as with contemporary sources can (mis)lead us into believing that fic is a known quantity, familiar ground. It isn't always, despite the fact that by its very nature, fic revisits known material.

That isn't all it does.

Fanfiction also responds to—and even helps bring about—very specific shifts in technology and culture, and it does so more quickly, nimbly, and radically than anyone who benefits from the commercial status quo is ever likely to. Yet commercial culture—with its massive distribution, which helps create the fan communities that become fanfiction communities—is also an integral part of the fanfiction equation.

Example: Sherlock Holmes stories first begin to see mass distribution in *The Strand* in 1891. The mimeograph was invented in 1890. Sherlock Holmes fueled the imaginations of the first fanfic fandom; the mimeograph was to become the engine of fanwriting publication and distribution for decades.

Example: Broadcast television brought science fiction material to vast new audiences, including many more women. The fandom that grew up around the show quickly adapted to use phones, electric typewriters, photocopiers, and soon personal computers and desktop publishing to create networks, lobby the show's creators and producers, and ultimately distribute their fanworks, creating the mechanisms of fanfic culture that lasted until . . . the internet.

Example: Fan culture was ahead of all commercial enterprises in using the internet as a creative space for the production, distribution, and promotion of writing. The publication of *Fifty Shades of Grey*

drew the world's attention to this enormous yet somehow still shadowy online culture, and the world is still trying to figure out what it all means.

Today, right now, the contracts (social and literal, explicit and only implied) between writers, readers, and publishers are changing along paths first established in fanwriting communities. When one of my undergraduate classes recently conducted an experiment in reading self-published "indie" fiction commercially available online, I asked them to imagine systems that would distribute, rate, and edit such fiction, making it easier to connect suitable readers, writers, and stories. The system students came up with resembled not commercial publishing but fanfiction communities: collectives in which readers and writers took on varied and active roles.

The way my students imagined it, these roles and expectations would be spelled out: readers, for example, might collect credits for edits or comments offered to writers; credits would grant them access to new material. In amateur online writing communities, however, these contracts governing expectations are often not explicit, and so . . . wires cross. Links break, get redirected. So you click on the story everyone's raving about, and it's *not there*. "Yeah, you should've been there," internet fandom shrugs sympathetically in your direction, "back in the day. When things were good. Last year. Last month. Last week."

My frustration and disbelief at not finding fanfiction where the internet said it would be reflects outmoded expectations of physical continuity. For a long time, the physicality of reading a story, putting it down, and coming back to it was predictable. We have a book, we put it on the shelf, and, unless someone steals it, it stays there. We might not remember where we put it, but it doesn't *move*. Such an experience has long seemed basic to us, but like so many of our assumptions about how literature is created, disseminated, and consumed, this expectation is a relatively recent development.

For most of human history, of course, stories were not a matter of reading and writing. Written manuscripts and initially even printed books were not only extremely rare but also useless to most of the population. As print and paper technology evolved and literacy increased, cheaply produced abridged and illustrated versions of existing stories and histories were distributed in chapbooks and other ephemera, publications that did not always make an obvious distinction among genres, or even between fact and fiction.

Imagine that. It wasn't always clear exactly what kind of thing you were reading.

Even as mass print culture began to resemble what we're now used to, and the novel began to assume the commercially dominant role in fiction it occupies today, *owning* these books was not part of most readers' experience. Paper was not cheap and binding was exorbitant, so novels were published by subscription, in costly volumes available from circulating libraries for a fee (see Jane Austen's send-up of novel-reading culture in *Northanger Abbey*), or in serial publication (see Charles Dickens). It was long rare for any but the most affluent readers to have their hands on more than one volume of a novel at a time.

For well over a century, though, we've expected to be able to buy a book, a discrete object of more or less uniform size and shape that would, upon purchase, take up residence on our shelves and *stay put*. We owned that copy—or maybe we borrowed it, but still. It might burn, it might wander, we could certainly lend it, but it didn't simply vanish out of existence.

*Not so with the internet*, I thought, staring at the Sherlock Holmes fandom discussion with chagrin. The vaunted story, "The Theory of Narrative Causality," was simply not where the internet said it was going to be, forever replaced by a posting on a fandom discussion site that didn't even seem interested in the show (BBC's *Sherlock*) whose fans kept linking me to it.

This kind of commentary is an integral part of the online reading environment fanfiction helped create. In fact, my interest in fanfiction per se started with fan commentators, not their stories. I first discovered fanboards when I was a TA teaching *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* in a course at Princeton (Tamsen Wolff's course on musical theater, inspired by "Once More, with Feeling," the series' musical episode). Fans, it often seemed, were paying more attention and saying smarter things than my Ivy League students (or, for that matter, than their TA). Plus the fans did it for fun. They *enjoyed* attending closely and making arguments based on their observations. For all I knew, some of these fans *were* my students, but how could I get students to do this stuff *as* students?

It was in quite serious pursuit of this teaching question that I initially engaged fan culture. As I moved on to the kind of commentary that could be found in fic—a slow development, because first forays into fanfiction seem invariably to turn up nearly unreadable texts—I began to connect this kind of writing with other research interests. I've been interested in the ways fanfiction blurs a whole range of lines we

(mistakenly) believe to be stable: between reading and writing, consuming and creating, genres and genders, authors and critics, derivative and transformative works.

“The Theory of Narrative Causality.” In a way, by using that absent fic’s title as my own, I’m ficking it—twisting it, taking it out of context. Perhaps as revenge. It *bothered* me. The history of the Sherlock Holmes fandom is interesting (I promise), but I wanted to write about the *fiction*, not fandom dynamics. I do write about fandom dynamics, and I do find them relevant to fanfiction as a writing culture, but there’s been a lot of ethnographic study of fandom done already, and I’m your literature professor, dear, not your anthropologist. However, since I planned to be writing about *Sherlock* fic for this book, I thought it wouldn’t hurt to brush up on some of the personalities of the greater Holmes-related fandoms.

So. Sherlock Holmes Fandom Dynamics 101. “Theory of Narrative Causality” kept linking to the following conflict: Consulting Detective is clearly one of those “Big Name Fans” (BNFs) common to any fandom—he’s an artist, an illustrator. Other fans love his work, but they are sick of his telling everyone what’s good, what’s bad, what to post, what not to post. Fandoms are full of these self-appointed arbiters of good taste (their own, of course). I couldn’t read Consulting Detective’s actual opinions on other matters, because a lot of the links on this page were weirdly inactive, although it was a fairly recent post. The discussion did link to some recent Conan Doyle–inspired fanfiction. I love this. I love that people are still writing for Sherlock Holmes. J. M. Barrie wrote Sherlock Holmes fanfiction when he wasn’t busy writing *Peter Pan* or collaborating with Arthur Conan Doyle on a failed drama. Rex Stout was in this fandom and wrote genderswap “meta,” infamously claiming that “Watson was a woman”; some speculated that Stout’s Nero Wolfe was Holmes’ son. It’s like Conan Doyle wrote the best writing prompts ever.

This discussion page helpfully glossed some of the basics of this fandom history:

So Sherlock Holmes fandom has been small and refined for the longest time. (Many would have it that it’s the First Fandom Ever, and that Holmes/Watson is the first slash ship sailin’ the seven seas, back when all fapping [masturbating] material fans had were ’zines and mail chains.) The original stories have been adapted left, right, and center — see Basil Rathbone and Bumblin’ Nigel Bruce, or the scrumptious Jeremy Brett and his two Watsons. And then there’s been the ’09 movie by Guy Ritchie, starring

Robert Downey Junior as a disheveled, scruffy Sherlock Holmes and Jude Law as gambling, gun-savvy John ‘REALLY FUCKING HOT’ Watson.

Fandom, as a result, exploded in many and various ways. Fanfic was written. Fanart was drawn. Discussions were had. There were challenges. And at least two kink memes.

Online, each of those underlines acts as a link that takes you to a different corner of the Sherlock Holmes fandom. (I can’t do that in a book.) It’s a snapshot of an internet fandom reinvigorated but also dismayed by a new reworking of its source material.

The rest of the discussion also gets at some of that multifaceted writing culture, how it transpires among and around sites and authors and artists, responding to prompts and challenges (to give a famous example from the *X-Files* fandom: “Exactly five hundred words and an eggbeater”). Sometimes, at some of its best times, fanfiction is a game writers play for the game’s own sake. A great game, even.

Sherlock Holmes fans have long played something they call the Great Game, which entails very intently insisting on the “fact” that a real biographer named John Watson chronicled the real adventures of a real detective. In the game, these chronicles are known as “the Sacred Writings,” for which Sir Arthur Conan Doyle served as literary agent, and they are discussed exhaustively in these terms. The Great Game is itself a kind of participatory fiction—a roleplaying game (RPG) in which the fans play exaggerated versions of themselves, taking their obsession seriously and ironically at the same time.

*This* fandom post mentions another kind of game, though, one less tweedy and respectable: the kink meme. This game ushers us into the nitty-gritty of online fic-writing today, a writing underground where stories start and percolate. Sometimes these stories evolve and make it on to less chaotic archives, sometimes not. Sometimes they are finished, sometimes not. It’s a very mixed bag. The furthest thing from pure.

A kink meme typically posts a pairing, or grouping—whatever floats the poster’s boat—with a “kink.” The kink doesn’t have to be kinky in the sexual sense, though of course it often is; it could simply be a kink as in twist, or plot element (the eggbeater, for example, in the *X-Files* challenge). Writers then fill the requests. So a kink meme prompt could be Sherlock Holmes and John Watson and a seabird, specifying fluff (that

is, sweet, not upsetting, a happy ending), or it could be Sherlock Holmes and John Watson and the implied sexual abuse of a seabird, with the stipulation that Sherlock is asexual.

Although not, to my knowledge, actually written for a kink meme, the latter is a superb short *Sherlock* fic by A. J. Hall titled “Breakfast at 221B.” (Summary: “Anyway. Enough of my embarrassing sibling brothel stories. Tell me yours.”) The story draws not just on the new BBC production but on deliciously arcane *Holmesiana*. The cormorant (the variety of seabird in question) has a rich *Holmesian* history, in the fan-authored pastiche “The Adventure of the Trained Cormorant,” originally published in *Blackwood's* in 1953. This story (and the many that have since followed) is a “fill” for one of the cases Watson refers to but does not recount—in “The Adventure of the Veiled Lodger,” he threatens those who have attempted to destroy his archive: “The source of these outrages is known, and if they are repeated I have Mr. Holmes’s authority for saying that the whole story concerning the politician, the lighthouse, and the trained cormorant will be given to the public.” This untold story in turn hearkens back to Doyle’s own 1881 (pre-*Sherlock Holmes*) photographic sketch “After Cormorants with a Camera,” which details the author’s own adventures photographing seabirds near a lighthouse. You don’t need to know the trivia about cormorants—but if you do, you get rewarded. A. J. Hall’s title also taps into the original stories’ beloved Holmes/Watson breakfast scenes—even casual fans of Doyle’s stories will recognize this allusion. The best fic writers are fantastically close readers, and they write layered stories for layered audiences. If not, there’s still the brothel story. That’s the game.

So, a kink meme is also a game—sometimes, a kink meme is a great game—but the writings it produces aren’t sacred, nor are they put up to be. It is really no place for purists. This Consulting Detective fellow would not feel at home in one. Consulting Detective embraces canon, and the much-loved Jeremy Brett, and not much else. He has scathing critique for the *Ritchie* movie franchise:

The *Ritchie* movie is nothing more than American-bait with many explosions and basic appeals at the impressionable human psyche with supernatural stupidities

How To Butcher A Strong Female Character, or why they turned the most intelligent woman of the entire stories into a trousers-wearing,

fighting-savvy, men-dominated femme fatale with red lipstick and no brains of her own

I liked those movies, but you could see Consulting Detective's logic. Fandom can be pretty exacting on matters of gender representation.

At this point, the whole discussion devolves into an account of an enormous wank—not, despite the terminology, a group masturbation session, but rather a blanket term for a particular kind of fandom drama: usually, fans in a terrible race to take down other fans. It's a pattern familiar to anyone who's spent any time around a fandom. The site `fandom_wank` (from which this post is apparently a page) is explicitly dedicated to mocking "self-aggrandizing posturing. Fannish absurdities. Circular ego-stroking." Seeming to take seriously the activity to which you devote hours of your life can be a kind of fandom high crime. You can see how this Consulting Detective would be a prime target.

This, too, is familiar territory. The disagreement starts, then the insults, then a moderator comes in and tries to calm everyone down. In this case, the moderator is called "`let_us_trade`"—heh. Lestrade. Police officer. Keeping the peace. Cute. Someone else steps in to recommend fic by "jumperfucker," apparently another Big Name Fan, but this one with a Martin Freeman icon. At least someone here likes the BBC *Sherlock*—Martin Freeman is a fabulous Watson, seamlessly honors and updates canon, and does look adorable in his jumpers.

But wait. Now I'm in the middle of his LiveJournal post . . . not on the same fanboard, but on the same page, that is, the same web page, the same address, I was on before. It's confusing. It's not the usual way of things, not protocol. And then . . . I'm in the middle of a private message exchange between jumperfucker and Consulting Detective, discussing how they've been paired in something called the Sherlock Holmes Big Bang, a collaborative fiction and art challenge and exchange and . . .

The game is afoot. Or rather, as BBC *Sherlock*—whose fandom I am apparently in after all—puts it, the game is *on*. This is the metafiction I've been looking for.

The Theory of Narrative Causality. It's fiction, it's theory, no, wait—since when do I think that's an either/or question? I feel like my students must when in literary theory class I assign them Borges' "Pierre Menard" and they write saying they read the Don Quixote essay but couldn't find the story. I let my judgment about what I was reading be swayed by the context I found it in, and the form that context led me to expect. Of all



people, I should know that like art in the blood, fanfiction is liable to take the strangest forms. But I didn't. Isn't it *glorious*?

As it turns out, there's an explanatory post; I just didn't see it. "The Theory of Narrative Causality" started life on the BBC *Sherlock* kink meme. It is named after a trope—a popular culture and fandom convention—on the website TV Tropes, to which it also links from time to time. In fact, the story uses a range of TV Tropes to define its characters and advance its plot. It even creates a fake entry on the real TV Tropes site for Consulting Detective, an entry that in turn proceeds to confuse the readers of the real site, who did not sign on to become a part of a fanfiction.

"The Theory of Narrative Causality" is what fandom calls "meta." It is fiction as cultural criticism and self-commentary. It not only evokes but eventually performs in the internet formats via which fanfiction—not just its writing, but its community activity—is created and disseminated. It is a fanfiction about fanboys writing fanfiction, and the fanfiction they write closely resembles the fanboy-penned (legal, professional) fanfiction of a television show that "Theory" is fic for. "Theory's" own source—this Sherlock Holmes fanboy-penned show—is famous for expanding what is meant by "canon." What is more, it does so from within the first fandom to use the word "canon" in its current, more restrictive sense of the official, authorized storyline. Referring to the fifty-six stories by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle as "The Sacred Writings," and subsequently "canon," was the Sherlockian Great Game's (and hence modern fandom's) original defining gesture. But *Sherlock* creators Mark Gatiss and Steven Moffat explicitly include all Sherlock Holmes' many film, play, and pastiche iterations: "There's an enormous amount of stuff and everything is canonical, the Billy Wilder film [*The Private Life of Sherlock Holmes*], the Basil Rathbone films—they can all be drawn upon as a *Sherlock* source."<sup>1</sup> One of *Sherlock*'s finest episodes is named after the Great Game. Fandom is canon. It's *all fine*.

"The Theory of Narrative Causality" spins an irreverent alternative origin story for the irreverent BBC *Sherlock*—but it doesn't just riff on plot and character. It fics *Sherlock*'s method: its relationship to authorship, media, and source material. Where *Sherlock* updates investigative and communicative technologies (John blogs; Sherlock prefers to text) and its mode of storytelling (highly produced effects, John Watson's blog actually being on the internet), "Theory" twists internet fandom technologies into both plot device and narrative medium. It creates and links to the fic and art of its characters; it stages "watchalongs" of prior Sherlock Holmes productions so (fictional) community members can comment

on their own predecessors while advancing their own plot. It features BBC *Sherlock*'s characters as fandom personalities playing key internet-appropriate roles: Sherlock's brother, Mycroft, and Scotland Yard's Inspector Lestrade as moderators; supervillain Moriarty and his various sock puppets (aliases) as obsessive internet trolls; Mike Stamford as the man who introduced John to the fandom—all ultimately contributing, according to the logic of the fanfiction, to the creation of their own story.

As in any internet fandom, in “Theory,” anonymously authored “wanks” stir up drama about the BNFs. In this fanfiction, the drama arises around fanfiction, specifically “Real Person Fic” (RPF)—fanfiction about real people rather than created characters—written about the BNFs themselves. In “Theory’s” fictional fan community, RPF is banned and derided—as it is on many other fanfiction forums in real (virtual, online) life. When the (fictional) “real persons” jumperfucker and Consulting Detective themselves OK RPF and even start writing it themselves, about themselves, the plot, well, thickens. And, in a common enough sequence of events after thickening, the plot disperses, spreads itself around.

The characters in this fictional world have “real” social media accounts—active virtual identities. These accounts have comments, some from fictional characters, some from nonfictional characters (from real people, or at least from real internet personae. Real virtual people, then). But these fictional accounts of fictional characters weren’t recruited by the “original” author of the “original” “derivative” “origin story” (that is to say, of the initial fanfiction “The Theory of Narrative Causality”). Readers created them, and started playing along—taking the fiction in different directions than the “original” (first?) author ever intended. It’s hard to know which are the fictional and which are the “real” readers, where one author/character/reader stopped and another took over. The visual codings that signal our (virtual) presence in these (virtual) virtual venues are exact enough to fool experts—not just professional observers, like myself, but people who have actually run Sherlock Holmes communities (I asked around). (The (real, nonfictional) author did not do these codings, but rather enlisted a friend.)

As part of its plot and part of its telling, “The Theory of Narrative Causality” gives a snapshot of fandom activity, fiction exchange, and typical fandom relationships. It also transposes the story of its source and inspiration in the terms and dynamics of its own online media. And in rewriting BBC *Sherlock*'s “origin” as taking place among fans, it only tells the truth: *Sherlock*'s creators are gleefully creating fic for fic for fic.

Of course they are. As Jacques Derrida (frequently cast by detractors as a literary supervillain) might say if he stumbled into a *Sherlock* fic, that's what writers *do*.

But "The Theory of Narrative Causality" doesn't stop there; it goes all Roland Barthes, and the readers take over. The story morphs into a multi-player internet RPG. It continues outside itself, as successful stories and characters have always done—but with a difference. However similar to past forms of collective storytelling, this is something new.

This newness has to do with technology, speed, format, and the conventions and forms these changes enable. Fanfiction communities collect people who may be very far apart in physical space and connects them, in "close" proximity in virtual space, through near-simultaneous activities of authoring, editing, responding, and illustrating. Neither the codex nor our contemporary notion of literary authorship could accommodate the models of authorship we see in "The Theory of Narrative Causality." It's the fic that is not one. The author is not dead; the author is *legion*.

I can't help but think of "Theory" in terms of, well, theory—the literary and critical kind. I know that stuff; I teach it. I like it. I'd bet that some of the "Theory" writers and readers and collaborators know it, too, though I'd also bet that many of them don't. All that theory didn't keep this fiction from completely surprising me, again and again—despite the fact that knowing the structure of the show meant I knew what would happen in a fic where "things happen because the plot says they should." *How* the fiction reached these points was an endless surprise.

This element of surprise is what I love about fanfiction generally, which in "Theory" is concentrated and made explicit and maybe too postmodernly clever for a lot of readers. But they don't have to like this one—there's plenty of other fic in the sea. Similar dynamics unfold in more traditional fic, especially when taken as a large body of collected, interactive, related narratives rather than fixed, isolated stories. Most fan readers read around in fandoms; some read around in taste groupings similar to genres (hurt/comfort, slash, gen, fluff, BDSM, PWP, plot-driven, etc.), but they read *around*, often following many unfolding stories simultaneously. These stories are read comparatively; they riff on one another, borrow back and forth. Plot threads cross, become confused, create patterns—if not in the individual stories, then often in the readers' minds. Fic experienced in this way is more like a web (appropriately enough) than like a series.

Plenty of literary theorists would say this is what's always happening in literature. They'd use a word like *intertextuality* (if they were Julia Kristeva) or *palimpsest* (if they were Gérard Genette). Then they'd remember, along with Walter Benjamin, that *text* comes from the Latin word for web and they'd hug themselves and smile. Fanfiction makes all that theory very, very apparent, and makes those theorists appear a bit redundant.

A good deal of the literary theorizing of the past half-century has been devoted to dismantling the ideology of the single, autonomous work of art as a literary standard. But no fic *pretends* to be an autonomous work of art. Fic makes no claims to “stand on its own.” It doesn't need anyone to point out its props and sources because it doesn't hide them; it celebrates them. A work of fic *might* stand on its own as a story—it might be intelligible to readers unfamiliar with its source—but that's not its point. Asking whether fic stands on its own is “interrogating the text from the wrong perspective”—to put a famous quote by the well-known fic-opponent Anne Rice to a use she would likely hate. Fic can be uncomfortable for writers who believe they create autonomously in a void. Fic lets its seams show in ways other works that also build from sources and predecessors may be at pains to hide—even, apparently, from their authors (later in the same text, a response to an Amazon review, Rice claims that for her, “novel writing is a virtuoso performance. It is not a collaborative art.” Someone should let Bram Stoker and John Polidori know).

I began this book with “The Theory of Narrative Causality” because it condenses the universe of fanfiction: it feeds on its predecessors and its contemporaries, interacts with them, makes them new. It is in a constant state of conversation and exchange. It is often unclear where its boundaries are. It is often unclear who is a writer and who is a reader and what the difference is. It sometimes references actual “real world” events; it sometimes custom-crafts fictional elements masquerading as real. It extracts what usually transpires over many texts and places them in a partly real, partly fictional virtual network. It's also funny and romantic and erotic at times. It showcases complex relationships, which are sometimes fraught and angsty and sometimes very sweet. Like its important predecessor, *Tristram Shandy*, “The Theory of Narrative Causality” is at once entirely typical and not at all typical of its genre.

OK. “The Theory of Narrative Causality” impresses me because—much like fanfiction, but in a very condensed way—it broke my mind a little bit. But I have peculiar tastes in these matters.

The wages of sin, Watson, the wages of sin.

Images from “The Theory of Narrative Causality.” This story began life on the BBC Sherlock kink meme. The author falling voices credits user misha0529 for “formatting and coding what was previously a terrible mess of fake hyperlinks and html confusion into actual LJ entries, TV tropes articles, and gmail chat.” (LiveJournal has been a popular platform for fic writers and readers since 2000, and continues to be used today.)<sup>A</sup>

The screenshot shows a LiveJournal post interface. At the top, there's a navigation bar with 'Home', 'Create an account', 'Explore', 'Shop', and 'LJ Extra'. A user profile picture and name are visible. The post title is 'fic: the theory of narrative causality; i'. Below the title, there's a paragraph of text: 'things happen because the plot says they should.' This is followed by a link to another post: 'u\_less\_sirane posted in v\*fandom\_wank. @ 2011-03-27 20:43:00'. The main body of the post is a detailed analysis of the Sherlock Holmes fandom, discussing fanart, canon, and the relationship between Sherlock and Watson. It includes several paragraphs of text with various links and references. The post ends with a 'Highlights include:' section listing specific fanart and critiques.

