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PEDAGOGICKÁ FAKULTA

Ústav cizích jazyků

BAKALÁŘSKÁ PRÁCE

A comparison of serial fiction and webnovels examined on the examples
of *The Hound of the Baskervilles* by Arthur Conan Doyle and *Murder in
Heliopolis: A Solarpunk Mystery* by HybalsWriting

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podpis

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Anotace

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Název práce	Srovnání próz na pokračování a webových románů na příkladech <i>Pes baskervillský</i> od Arthura Conana Doylea a <i>Vražda v Heliopolis: Solarpunková záhada</i> od HybaIsWriting
Název práce v angličtině:	A comparison of serial fiction and webnovels examined on the examples of <i>The Hound of the Baskervilles</i> by Arthur Conan Doyle and <i>Murder in Heliopolis: A Solarpunk Mystery</i> by HybaIsWriting
Zvolený typ práce	Výzkumná práce - přehled odborných poznatků
Anotace práce:	Bakalářská práce je zaměřena na definování typů publikace próz na pokračování a webových románů, rozbor jejich podobností a rozdílů, rozbor jejich možností publikace a zpeněžení obou typů, a rozbor vlivu těchto typů na obsah literárního díla. Praktická část sestává z rozboru a srovnání děl <i>Pes baskervillský</i> od Arthura Conana Doylea a <i>Vražda v Heliopolis: Solarpunková záhada</i> od HybaIsWriting v jejich funkci jako příklady obou zmíněných typů publikace.
Klíčová slova:	Próza na pokračování, webový román, detektivka, mysteriózní román, publikace, zpeněžení
Anotace v angličtině:	The bachelor work is focussed on defining the modes of publication that are serials and webnovels, examining the similarities and differences between them, examining the means of publishing and monetization of both, and examining the impact of said modes of publication on the literary content. The practical part of this work consists of an examination and comparison of <i>The Hound of the Baskervilles</i> by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and the webnovel <i>Murder in Heliopolis: A Solarpunk Mystery</i> by HybaIsWriting in their capacity as examples of both aforementioned modes of publication.
Klíčová slova v angličtině:	Serial, webnovel, detective fiction, mystery novel, publication, monetisation
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1. Introduction

This thesis sets out to define serial literature and webnovels with the aim of ascertaining their similarities and differences. A further goal is to examine the means of publishing and monetisation inherent to each medium and the medium's impact on the literary contents.

The practical part will consist of a comparison of one specific example each for serials and for webnovels, specifically the serial *The Hound of the Baskervilles* (1902) by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and the webnovel *Murder in Heliopolis: A Solarpunk Mystery* (2022) by HybaIsWriting. The comparison will consist of discussing the settings, characters and their relationships between the two works and a direct comparison of examples from both works.

This thesis aims to deepen the understanding of the relationship between serials and webnovels, and postulates that the webnovel is an adaptation of the serial in the digital space of the internet.

2. Literature review

Literary works concerning serial literature in an academic setting tend to focus on the specific time periods and impacts of said literature on the readers. *The Victorian Serial* by Linda K. Hughes and Michael Lund especially focuses on the impact serial literature had on the society of Victorian era Britain rather than on the nature of serialized literature in general. Similarly *America's continuing story: an introduction to serial fiction* by Michel Lund while as the title indicates contains an introduction to serial fiction it is overshadowed in scope by the 285 titles of fiction published from 1850 to 1900 in America and their impact on the American society both at the time and their lasting cultural impact.

Of the many academic works that include the keyword “serial” many tend to focus on television serials rather than the literary kind, making searching for relevant materials rather difficult. Among those chosen for this work is the dissertation *Narrative Space and Serialized Forms: Story-Spaces for the Mass Market in Victorian Print and Contemporary Television* by Laura Daniel Buchholz which makes connections between the serialized literature produced between 1830-1860 in Victorian England and serialized televised narratives produced after the year 2000 in both Britain and the United States.

Works concerning the webnovel, while more easily discerned from keywords tend to specialize on specific subcultures of webnovels. The two notable subcultures are mobile web novels such as those discussed in *A Study on Literary of Mobile Web Novel* by Yong-Won Seo and Hye-Won Han, and fanfiction such as those discussed in *INVENTING A UNIVERSE: READING AND WRITING INTERNET FAN FICTION* by Juli J. Parrish. Seo and Han focus mainly on the mobile environment and its impact on the literary works, especially in Korea. Parrish discusses specifics of the culture of fandoms and fanfiction with a focus on dissuading the notion of fans as lazy “textual poachers” and instead uplifts the work necessary to understand a work of fiction in order to write fanworks based on it and the value these amateur writers have as critics of their work of choice.

Further discussion of fanfiction comes from the work *Mature Poets Steal: Children's Literature and the Unpublishability of Fanfiction* by Catherine Tosenberger which discusses the constraints of the publishing world, to which works of fanfiction are not beholden to. An argument can be made that this freedom from constraints carries over to webnovels which do not use pre established intellectual property as well.

Last to focus on within the secondary sources is the community aspect of writing on the internet. Both *Informal creative labour practices: A relational work perspective* by Ana

Alacovska and *Beyond fans: The relational labor and communication practices of creators on Patreon* by Ross Bonifacio, Lee Hair and Donghee Yvette Wohn focus on the power that readers have over the author through their feedback. While Alacovska argues that economic incentive and personal relationships with the community are inversely proportional, Bonifacio et al. describe the Patreon community model of creator interaction in which personal relationship is a part of the product or service sold to the paying members of the community.

2.1. Definition of a serial

In order to properly discuss the similarities and differences between serials and webnovels it is necessary to first define them in order to examine potential overlaps in their definitions. During this process it is necessary to ascertain whether a potential definition of one mode of publication can be applied to the other to further highlight the similarities or differences that arise from these definitions

For the purposes of defining instances of serials there are several definitions of the serial to take into account. One such definition is used in *The Victorian Serial* by Linda K. Hughes and Michael Lund. They define the serial as “...a continuing story over time with enforced interruptions...” (Hughes and Lund, 1991, 279). Indeed this definition was also used in the dissertation *Narrative Space and Serialized Forms: Story-Spaces for the Mass Market in Victorian Print and Contemporary Television* by Laura Daniel Buchholz who used the definition as follows: “...serialized texts are defined as narratives that contain multiple enforced interruptions and which were originally disseminated in discrete parts over the course of months or years.” (Buchholz, 2014, 4).

Examining this definition in the context of modern works and webnovels, it can be argued that a webnovel may be distinct from a serial under the presumption that interruptions are not enforced. Considering the large amount of continuing fiction published on the internet comes from authors with self-imposed schedules, there is an argument to be made that these works do not meet the definition. An example of an environment conducive to this non enforced scheduling are Reddit.com communities focused on writing¹.

Equally a webnovel may be considered a serial provided that the posting schedule is enforced. This may be the result of contractual obligations imposed on the author by a publisher. An example of such an obligation is a minimal amount of 1,500 Premium words

¹ *R/WritingPrompts*. Online. Dostupné z: <https://www.reddit.com/r/WritingPrompts/>.

published a day in order to be eligible for the Contracted Works Guarantee System (China Literature Limited, 2018) offered by Webnovel.com.

A more lenient definition of the serial is one found in the *Dictionary of Nineteenth-century Journalism in Great Britain and Ireland* which defines the serial as “...a printing or publishing format by which a single larger work, often a work of narrative fiction, is published in smaller, sequential instalments” (Brake and Demoor, 2009, 567). The definition continues to mention these installments being published either separately or as a part of a periodical publication.

Examining this definition in the context of webnovels, the requirement of smaller sequential installments is commonly complied with by a large number of webnovels currently on the internet, most commonly utilizing episodes or chapters as separate installments.

2.2. Definition of a webnovel

The broad definition of a webnovel stems from the definition of web fiction, that is fiction available primarily or only on the internet. A webnovel is by extension of this definition a novel that is primarily or only available on the internet. This definition of webnovel does not specify whether it was written and published in parts or any enforced interruptions, however while not required these aspects are common amongst webnovels.

There exist branches of the umbrella term webnovel, such as mobile web novels², or fanfiction³ which would require a specific definition of their own. However, for the purposes of this work the umbrella definition of webnovels should suffice.

In defining a webnovel it is important to mention the distinction between a webnovel and an e-book. Where an e-book is defined by the means of publishing used, that is to say the digital version of any book regardless of how or when it was written, a webnovel's defining factor is that it was written for the web and then published there. While an e-book of *The Hound of the Baskervilles* by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle exists, that does not make it a webnovel, in part because it predates the web and in part because it was not written to be consumed on the web. A definition of a webnovel stemming from this distinction therefore requires webnovels to be written with the intent of being consumed on the internet.

Following the previously mentioned more lenient definition of serial from the *Dictionary of Nineteenth-century Journalism in Great Britain and Ireland* there are no

² A type of web novel made to be read primarily on mobile devices (Seo, 2017)

³ A type of fiction using the intellectual property which the author does not own (Parrish, 2007)

contradictions between the definition of a serial and the definition of a webnovel. By this definition of a serial, presuming the webnovel in question is published in segments, a webnovel may be defined using the definition of a serial as a base to be a narrative type of serial written with the intent of being published on the internet as a separate publication.

Another aspect to consider is word count. While no definition of a webnovel includes a word count, likely due to the inconsistent length of webnovels continually published in multiple segments, a word count that may be considered is the average length of a novel. “A typical novel is about **80,000** words long – but may be anywhere between **60,000** to **100,000** words. As a general rule, you should stick well within these parameters for a first novel” (Reed, 2022). Using this guideline we may wish to exclude works of insufficient length from being a webnovel. An arbitrarily postulation may be made that works under 40,000 words, that is under 2/3 of the average lower bound for novels, should not be considered webnovels. Should this rule be accepted the result would be an elimination of the majority of narratives with a single installment published on the web as most of these are shorter and may be considered short stories instead. An argument may be made for ongoing stories that have not yet reached the chosen threshold but will likely reach it in due time, to be included under the term webnovel however such cases may require a case by case consideration.

While regarding the lower bound of a novel for the definition of a webnovel has its merits, doing the same for the upper bound has little to no meaning. This stems from the fact that webnovels unlike their printed counterpart, do not need to be limited by the size of physical media and as such do not require to be split into volumes. While *Murder in Heliopolis* does not need this consideration, as it fits into the average bounds of novels with around 72,000 words, there are many webnovels that exceed the upper bounds. An example of this is the webnovel *Chrysalis* by RinoZ which at the time of writing exceeds 1,4 million words.

3. Means of publishing and monetisation

When discussing both serials and webnovels published on the internet, one of the important aspects to consider are the means of publishing and monetisation. While monetisation is technically not necessary and some authors completely forgo monetising their work in general it may be considered one of the end goals for authors. The exceptions include political and social commentary and satire, where the end goal is the commentary itself, and writing literature as a therapeutic exercise either self-imposed or within the confines of bibliotherapy and scriptotherapy.⁴ These examples are loosely connected to specific means of publishing; pamphlets and articles both in printed media and on the web in case of commentary, and self-publishing on the web if publishing at all in the case of therapeutic uses.

3.1. As concerns serials

The means of publication of serials historically has little variety. In order for these works to meet our definition of serial while not meeting the definition of webnovel, the works are necessarily primarily published in a physical medium, likely a periodical of some description. By extension the means of monetising one's literary work are similarly limited to selling the literary work for a fee and royalties received from sales.

For the purposes of this thesis, we will focus on specifically the means of publishing and monetisation of the work of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's work. Thanks to *The Annotated Sherlock Holmes* (Doyle and Baring-Gould, 1967, 13-15) we may look at some of the monetary compensation received for various literary works. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle sold his first story "*The Mystery of Sassassa Valley*" to CHAMBER'S JOURNAL in 1879, for three pounds three shillings, or a little over £490 adjusted for inflation in 2024 (Alioth Finance, 2024). His first Sherlock Holmes story "*A Study in Scarlet*" was bought by Ward, Lock and Co. in 1886 for a flat fee £25, or over £4070 adjusted for inflation. It is important to note that Ward, Lock and Co. bought the copyright along with the story, meaning Sir Arthur Conan Doyle received no royalties from the sales.

More important to the contents of this thesis however is that according to Baring-Gould, in 1891 Sir Arthur came up with the novel idea of a continuing series of short

⁴ The use of writing in counseling

stories centered around his characters. THE STRAND bought six stories for £195 (around £31400 in 2024 equivalent) and based on their success contracted Sir Doyle to write more.

In accordance with these findings we may confidently label Sir Arthur Conan Doyle as a success story, and an example of a successfully monetised writing career.

3.2. As concerns webnovels

3.2.1. Publication

Electronic publications as a whole have been broadly categorized into phases according to their differentiation from conventional publishing. The electronic publications as concerns webnovels fall mostly within Phase 4 as described by Roger Clarke, that is “Interactive, Adaptive Electronic Publishing” (Clarke, 1996)

By the nature of the internet, the means of publishing one’s work are numerous and as such it would be an exercise in futility to attempt to list them all; however, it is possible to broadly categorize them. One such category are personal websites; however, these are hindered in their recognition by their nature of hosting the works of only one author, something the other categories avoid. These categories are general forums, such as Reddit.com, literature focussed forums, such as ArchiveOfOurOwn.org, online publishing websites, such as Webnovel.com or Wattpad.com, and established publishers, such as Amazon.com. Many of these websites also use mobile apps to give readers access to the works published on their servers. As such there exists a significant overlap between webnovels and mobile web novels.

A webnovel’s popularity online may also have an impact on publishers and their willingness to pick up the story for physical print or other means of publishing through the publishing company (Yoesoef, 2020, 131). It is not uncommon for authors to publish their work on multiple websites simultaneously initially and further diversify it for traditional publishing. An example of this is the author RinoZ and his webnovel *Chrysalis*, which has been published on both Webnovel.com (RinoZ, 2019-2024a) and RoyalRoad.com (RinoZ, 2019-2024b) in installments and later on Amazon.com (RinoZ, 2022) in complete volumes as both ebooks, audiobooks and paperback. Another example is HybaIsWriting and the book used as an example of a webnovel in this work - *Murder in Heliopolis*, which has been published on RoyalRoad.com and later on Tapas.io. It is interesting to note that these publications are not identical as Tapas.io contains an incomplete version with different length of installments.

An aspect necessary to be considered is the impact a new contract with a publisher such as Amazon.com has on the previous publications on other websites. The contract may include clauses preventing the work sold through the publisher through other avenues, a so called exclusivity clause. An example of this happening is the aforementioned *Chrysalis* by RinoZ. The RoyalRoad.com page hosting the work includes the tag STUB “*Parts of this fiction have been removed by the author, likely due to third party exclusivity contracts such as Kindle Unlimited.*” (Royal Road, n. d.) A similar removal of free content was the removal of the audio-narration of *Chrysalis* done by Agro Squirrel Narrates on YouTube, which was done to comply with the exclusivity clause of the contract with Amazon regarding audiobook reproductions of *Chrysalis*.

3.2.2. Monetisation through contract

Means of monetisation are as varied as the means of publishing. Selling one’s work outright for a flat fee, with or without future royalties is a possibility that carries over from traditional serials and literature in general. It is however an option unavailable to the vast majority of writers on the internet as publishing companies have a wide range of works to choose from and most writers do not have the necessary connections or leverage to pick this option initially.

Another similar, though distinct, possibility is that of a contract with a website. An example of this is the prior mentioned Contracted Works Guarantee System (China Literature Limited, 2018) offered by Webnovel.com. under which writers get paid for their work so long as they fulfill their contractual obligation, most notably in this example the requirement of 1500 words published daily.

There are instances where a work is commissioned not by a company, but an individual. This means of monetisation is possibly the most unreliable one, by nature of not providing a continuous stream of income. The instances of personally commissioned works are generally more common in the territory of fanfiction.

3.2.3. Monetisation through crowdfunding

As opposed to a single individual providing capital for a work of fiction to be written it is far more common for authors to utilize some manner of crowdfunding. This model is more common with workers with a high degree of computer literacy (Alacovka, 2018, 1572) which contributes to its prolificity with authors of webnovels. This model of monetisation is commonly maintained through a subscription to websites such as Patreon.com, Ko-fi.com or

SubscribeStar.com. The utilization of this type of crowdfunding is also sometimes referred to as digital patronage. This model allows an author to have an expected monthly income as well as receiving one time donations. While this model of monetisation may seemingly incentivise locking a part of the author's work behind a paywall to drive more engagement with these websites and by extension generating revenue for the author, patrons oftentimes do not expect to receive a product on par with the monetary compensation they offered (Bonifacio et al., 2023, 2689). Many creators on these platforms don't offer any perks for the subscription and rely on their established relationship with their patrons as the would be compensation for monetary support. As such, authors often keep their works publicly available and instead they provide other perks such as access to early drafts or direct means of communication as an incentive for new readers to subscribe to their account on these websites.

4. Impact on literary content

When it comes to the impact the means of publishing have on the content of the literary work itself there are several aspects to consider. Those are the lengths to which an author may go to cultivate a base of returning readers, the use or lack of use of mature content in regards to both reader retention and the restriction of publishers and hosting sites, the use of intellectual property and fanfiction, and the impact of contractual obligations on the work.

4.1. Reader retention

Perhaps the most notable impact of publishing a work in parts on its content is the use of certain strategies to retain the reader's attention over the period of time between instances. While the use of literary devices such as cliffhangers and foreshadowing, which will be discussed as a part of the direct comparison of the chosen examples, is a part of some of these strategies, instead the focus will be the strategies that they are a part of, specifically the cultivation of intrigue. While intrigue between chapters may be created by using the aforementioned literary devices, intrigue should be cultivated from the very first sentence. While a striking first sentence and an interesting premise outlined in the first few pages or the first few chapters are pieces of advice not unique to the serial and webnovel means of publishing, they are nonetheless important, perhaps more so due to the need to capture the reader's attention for a potentially long period of time.

Another strategy used to cultivate long term engagement is the use of well-established themes and premises in the genre of the narrative. It is not entirely uncommon for a single continuous narrative the length of multiple novels to shift themes and even genre as the story progresses, but keeping in line with the initial premise, that is with the thing that got people to read it in the first place, is a good strategy for keeping readers interested.

A strategy focussed less on the content of the work is a cultivation of a relationship with the author's reader-base. The term parasocial relationship may come to mind, however it may not necessarily carry bad connotations in this case. A reader that feels like their feedback has an impact on how the author proceeds with their work is more invested in said work and is more likely to come back to read the next installment. The minutiae of the readers impact on the contents themselves will be further discussed in a later part of this work.

4.2. Mature content

One of these aspects is the intended demographic and its impact on monetization. During an interview on the Agro Squirrel Narrates YouTube channel⁵, RinoZ, when speaking about keeping his writing child friendly, went on record saying: “*Yeah I think it depends on how sort of mercenary you want to be as an author because if you're just interested in people who are going to sign up for your Patreon or whatever you're going to feel comfortable making more adult content,*” (Agro Squirrel Narrates and RinoZ, 2021) insinuating that profit oriented writing on the internet is often aimed towards adult audiences. This works particularly well with the aforementioned Patreon.com which gives creators the option to lock content behind a paywall, a feature oftentimes used to make profit off of mature content.

On the other side of the argument lay websites that make profit from advertising on their platform, as advertisers for various reasons wish to keep the content next to which their ads are displayed family friendly and non-problematic. As such authors with the desire to make profit from their work may be pushed to tailor their work to be inoffensive.

4.3. Using established intellectual property

While mention of intellectual property in connection with web fiction in general tends to insinuate fanfiction, it is not the only instance in which intellectual properties get used outside of the original author’s influence. However, fanfiction is a large part of serialized fiction on the internet and is therefore worth mentioning. A number of authors prefer to work with established characters and stories, as it provides a framework for the less experienced to work with. While there seems to be an academic consensus that most fanfiction engages in textual poaching⁶ and that this is to a degree inevitable when discussing fanfiction in an academic setting (Parrish, 2007, 54-68). There are however some authors that write fanfiction with such vast changes to the original intellectual property that their texts may as well be considered original webnovels in their own right, for example Coeur Al’aran’s *Arcanum* (Al’Aran, 2019-2022), which engages in textual poaching only to the degree where the names and familial relationships of characters remain the same as in the original work.

⁵ Agro Squirrel Narrates. *Agro Squirrel Narrates*. Online. YouTube.com. Dostupné z: <https://www.youtube.com/@AgroSquerril>.

⁶ directly quoting or paraphrasing the original text or source material

Whether or not fanfiction can be monetised by the author depends on the owner of the rights to the original intellectual property. Using the example of Coeur Al'aran and the large amount of fanfiction using the *RWBY* intellectual property, we may observe how an author may get around the limitations of using an intellectual property they do not own. While the original creators of *RWBY* were fairly supportive of fanfiction, the intellectual property has changed owners multiple times and is at this time uncertain who will come to own it next as its parent company RoosterTeeth is shutting down (Atkinson, 2024). Regardless, Coeur Al'aran technically never monetised his fanfiction. His work instead serves as marketing for his Patreon.com page on which Coeur offers monthly articles on writing and short story commissions at the highest tier of patronage. While this doesn't directly violate commercial rights of the owner of the intellectual property, the use of fanfiction published on Fanfiction.net has its own problems, most importantly that the use of the publishing of fanfiction to advertise products and other sites is prohibited by the end user agreement of Fanfiction.net, this stipulation is however widely disregarded by its user base despite the automatic detection and deletion of links in the document before publishing. The end result is, however, as follows: *"Many of the best fan stories (as well as many of the mediocre and the worst) are completely unpublishable [in the sense of conventional publishing by a publisher]"* (Tosenberger, 2014, 4).

The use of ideas from existing media is an established phenomena in fiction as a whole as it is difficult not to be inspired by prior works. However, webnovels suffer in this regard from the lack of oversight and to a degree a lack of criticism as some works that proclaim themselves original sometimes include characters that are recognisably a part of a different intellectual property, sometimes without so much as changing the name of this character. It is however rare for reputable publishers to pick up a piece of work with such blatant use of preexisting intellectual property, which is why authors tend to do at least the bare minimum to disguise the character. The way these characters are integrated changes depending on the reason for their inclusion, in cases where the inclusion is used as a selling point to the reader the work may well be included under the term fanfiction, despite being presented as original. In cases where some effort was undergone to disguise the use, it is likely used as a writing shortcut or an archetype and the work as a whole may be considered an original work.

4.4. Direct contact with the author

In traditional media, the avenues a reader may take in order to directly contact the author are limited. There will likely always be dedicated readers that go through the avenues available to them to deliver their comments and criticisms to the author; however, works published on the internet make this effort negligible (Vadde, 2017, 27). Websites hosting works of fiction often provide an easy way for the reader to comment on the work or directly message the author. Even authors that deliberately ignore these avenues may open themselves to direct contact through other means, be it public access to their personal email address or providing a way to contact them directly as an incentive through the aforementioned websites that provide the subscribe model of monetisation. An example of this behavior can be found within Patreon, which provides both on site chat rooms for supporters, and an option to integrate access to off site alternatives, such as Discord, into the subscription. Though neither of these options necessitates the author's involvement with these chat rooms, the commentary is easily accessible to them.

This abundance of commentary provided to the author may impact the way they write. This may be a good thing for beginner and amateur authors, so long as the criticism is constructive and valid. It may however also lead to unfortunate choices the author may make in order to appease their audience. One such instance is the Japanese webnovel *Overlord* (Maruyama, 2012) written by Kugane Maruyama (丸山くがね), during the writing of which Maruyama polled his readers on how they would like a certain event to play out in the story. Ultimately despite going through with the wishes of his audience Maruyama felt dissatisfied with the event. Notably this event was revised during the rewriting of the story for publishing as a Light Novel⁷.

To further complicate the reader-author relationship, it is not entirely uncommon to encounter readers whose actions are contradictory to themselves. These readers may provide monetary support while simultaneously providing negative commentary. Though it is unclear what drives each individual instance of this behavior, a generalization may be made presuming that these readers enjoy not the work of the author, but the act of criticizing them. To a well adjusted author this type of behavior may be beneficial as the reader provides monetary support and their comments may be ignored based on their previous behavior. Additionally there exists a possibility that increased engagement with the material will drive

⁷ A Japanese novel primarily targeting young adults, typically illustrated and containing not more than 50,000 words.

further engagement from new readers, either because of curiosity over the conflict or due to automated algorithms pushing the page to a more prominent position as a result of the engagement.

4.5. Contractual obligation and commissions

Another way a means of publishing can impact the contents of a work are the requirements of the legal entity or individual paying for its creation. While not entirely unlike the impact readers may have on the author through various channels, especially the readers who contribute financially to the author's income, the impact a sole payer has is distinct and has more weight. The aforementioned commission of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle by The Strand to write more Sherlock Holmes stories fall under this category, since despite Sir Doyle's reported unwillingness to continue with writing Sherlock Holmes, a large monetary sum played a role in his eventual agreement.

4.5.1. Contractual obligations

As previously mentioned when discussing contracts with a publisher, publishers tend to have requirements. The example used was the prior mentioned Contracted Works Guarantee System (China Literature Limited, 2018) offered by Webnovel.com. The requirement of 1500 words daily mentioned when discussing both the definitions and monetisation has an impact on the content through the fairly harsh requirement of not taking any breaks during the first month and limited amount of breaks after the first month.

The requirement can be used to explain the relative lack of quality of some works on Webnovel.com and webs with similar arrangements for their contracted authors, as some authors are forced by their contractual obligation to write a significant amount of narrative every day. Some readers may find that some authors lack the creativity required to produce daily updates of this length and the quality may suffer as a consequence.

In the case of a traditional publisher with the intention of publishing the work in physical print, whether that be the case with serials or webnovels, there is a possibility of the publisher requiring a reduced wordcount. If published as a part of a periodical with a set amount of space for the installment of literature, a set limit on the length of a chapter is necessary. Similarly a work previously published in parts may require alteration before being published as a single volume, which may include shortening the narrative in order to fit a single physical volume.

4.5.2. Personal commissions

The impact personal commissions may have on the contents of work have been discussed to some extent though not in connection to the practice of an individual commissioning a piece of work. As personal commissions do not necessarily need to be published publicly or may be published in such a way that all readers have access to them, the commissioner may be able to push the boundaries of what the author would otherwise be comfortable with writing and publishing.

An example of this is the aforementioned mature content which may even be the primary reason the commissioner may want to pay for the creation of a piece of content instead of reading a similar one elsewhere. And while it is up to the author whether to accept the commission in the first place, a promise of a large sum of money in payment may influence authors to create material outside of their comfort zone.

Another reason may be the use of established intellectual property. Some authors are more than versed in using existing intellectual property in their works through the medium of fanfiction. However, with the amount of intellectual property in existence, certain scenarios involving specific characters or settings do not exist in any work published. A commissioner may either set out to have the author create the narrative using these intellectual properties or push for their inclusion later in the process.

A type of influence practically unique to works of personal commissions are so called self insert characters⁸. While it is not uncommon for an author to have a character they identify with in the story to the point where boundaries between them blend, so called author self insert characters, self insert characters fitting the description of the commissioner are less so. Self insert characters of this type typically include a physical description fitting or closely resembling the real life counterpart, typically use the same name or a name the commissioner identifies with, and their behavior may be inspired by or be consulted on with the commissioner.

It should be noted that two of, or all three of these types of influences may converge in a single commission and publicly published examples can be found on both [Reddit.com](https://www.reddit.com) and [ArchiveOfOurOwn.org](https://archiveofourown.org), though the practice is not limited to these websites.

⁸ Typically a character with no described features made specifically for the reader to relate with.

5. The Hound of the Baskervilles

The Hound of the Baskervilles is a detective story set in 1889 Britain, more specifically the city of London and the moors of Devonshire. A case of death under mysterious circumstances is brought before Sherlock Holmes by James Mortimer, the physician and friend of the deceased Sir Charles Baskervilles. The mystery concerns a legend of a demonic hound connected to the Baskervilles family, though Holmes dismisses the possibility of the supernatural and attempts to make sense of the mystery: [Holmes]: “Yet you must admit that the footmark is material.” [Dr. Mortimer]: “The original hound was material enough to tug a man's throat out and yet he was diabolical as well.” [Holmes]: “I see that you have quite gone over to the supernaturalists” (Doyle, 1902, 31). Throughout the book the mystery expands in scale dealing with stalking and petty theft, various lies and deceptions, false identities, murder and attempted murder.

5.1. Setting

The narrative is set in Victorian Era England, beginning in London, more specifically in the home of Sherlock Holmes - 221b Baker street. Most of the plot takes place in the moors surrounding Baskerville hall, in Devonshire. The setting gives the narrative a depressing aesthetic, lending itself to the gothic genre.

The Hound of the Baskervilles has many of the hallmarks of the gothic genre. The mystery concerns the supernatural, an ancient prophecy and death. This all wrapped in the form of the investigation of criminal activities, which are typical for the gothic as well.

The narrative is framed as a recollection of an old case, retold from the case file, letters sent during the case, and Doctor Watson's own recollection of the events.

5.2. A brief overview of characters

The narrator is Doctor John Watson, the assistant and friend to the famed detective Sherlock Holmes. Watson is in a position of being the main investigator for a large part of the narrative, reporting his findings to Holmes. Once Holmes enters the scene ready to solve the crime, Watson takes on a supporting role. Despite this he remains the narrator as the whole story is framed as a retrospective: “So far I have been able to quote from the reports which I have forwarded during these early days to Sherlock Holmes. Now, however, I have arrived at

a point in my narrative where I am compelled to abandon this method and to trust once more to my recollections” (Doyle, 1902, 147).

Sherlock Holmes is the famed detective whose brilliant mind is the one to solve the mysteries the narrative tells of. Holmes is a man who through explaining his reasoning proves to the reader as well as any characters present to hear them that he is a very smart man, keen on solving any case that catches his interest.

James Mortimer is the physician of the deceased Sir Charles Baskerville, who upon learning of the legend of the hound and summoning the beneficiary of Sir Charles’s will, Sir Henry Baskerville, brought the case before Sherlock Holmes.

Henry Baskerville is the heir of the significant Baskerville fortune. Throughout the story he serves the role of the presumed next victim and object of both Holmes’ and Watson's observations.

The titular Hound of the Baskervilles is a mythical construct with little basis in the material world. While the legend mentions a hound in connection with the death of Hugo Baskerville it is impossible to confirm the specifics of the historical event. Even though a physical hound does exist and serves as a murder weapon, the physical hound has little connection to the hound of legend which inspired its use as a means of murder. The myth is further utilized by the perpetrator to keep locals from investigating the moor as that could lead them to the human murderer.

Mr. Stapleton and his sister Miss Stapleton, later revealed as a married pair using a false identity, are initially portrayed as friends of James Mortimer and neighbors to the Baskerville estate. Mr. Stapleton is portrayed in the role of an eccentric naturalist interested in the fauna and flora of the moor. In truth he is the man distantly related to the Baskervilles who chose murder as a tool to get his hands on the estate and money connected to it. Miss Stapleton is a woman whose attempts at forewarning Sir Henry of her husband's intention predate her first interaction with Dr. Watson and Sir Henry. Mr. Stapleton plans on using her to lure Sir Henry to his doom through the pretense of a romantic affair, though his plan fails due to his own jealousy. The relationship between the Stapletons is portrayed in a way which may be recognised as abusive from today's point of view, though through the lens of the Victorian Era it is less provocative.

Mr. and Mrs. Barrymore are the servants of the late Sir Charles Baskerville. In terms of contributing to the core mystery, they are amongst the first to be suspected and provide key evidence. However, some of their behavior, which is at first construed to be connected to the murder of Sir Charles, serves the role of a red herring in the narrative. The Barrymores are

instead revealed as accessories to a completely separate crime, that is harboring an escaped convict by the name of Selden.

Selden, the escaped convict, is the brother of Mrs. Barrymore. While his case doesn't hold the interest of Sherlock Holmes initially, it is nonetheless solved and later resolved in the pursuit of the Baskerville mystery. Selden meets his end during an attempt on Sir Henry's life thanks to being mistaken for Henry due to receiving his old clothes from Mr. Barrymore, who in turn received them from Sir Henry. This mistake lies with both Mr. Stapleton who visually mistook the figure, and with the physical hound which identified the correct scent on the incorrect man.

A supporting role is played mainly by two characters - Laura Lyons and Mr. Farkland. Laura Lyons found herself in a difficult situation after being disowned by her father Mr. Farkland due to marrying against his wishes. The man she married soon abandoned her however which puts her in a difficult situation in which she turns to Mr. Stapleton and Sir Charles for help. This in turn has her unwittingly involved in the murder of Sir Charles.

Mr. Farkland is a mostly comedic character known for suing people, regardless of if he thinks the case is winnable, for the fun of it. His biggest contribution to the mystery is his hobby of astronomy which he uses to look over the moor with a telescope, though his unwillingness to share his observations with the police make them largely inconsequential.

6. Murder in Heliopolis: A Solarpunk Mystery

“The year is 2504, and sprawling eco-cities built over the ruins of fallen metropolises have created a haven for the people. In the most prosperous areas of the world, skyscrapers bursting at the seams with vibrant green life and towering turbines litter the cityscapes. Heliopolis is one such supercity, renowned for its spectacular architecture, sun-drenched climate, and numerous natural reserves” (HybaIsWriting, 2021, synopsis).

Murder in Heliopolis is a homicide detective story set in a futuristic solarpunk setting. The narrator Laith Alazraq is a detective working for the Heliopolis Police Department (HPD). The initial mystery set up is a closed room murder mystery with a clear murder weapon with fingerprints upon them. The victim Cassia Grove was murdered in her home while none of the systems that should have alerted first responders or authorities did so. The fingerprints present on the murder weapon, much to the detective’s surprise, are not present in the city’s database. To further the mystery, Cassia’s husband, Aster Lockwood is missing and is therefore a prime suspect. Throughout the book the mystery expands in scale dealing with financial fraud, further murder attempts, identity theft, destruction of evidence and grand conspiracy.

6.1. Setting

The story is set in an unspecified region of Earth in the year 2504. The narrative takes place mostly within the super city of Heliopolis, with constant mentions of the futuristic eco-friendly architecture and technology inherent to the solarpunk genre.

For the sake of clarity, it is prudent to provide a rough overview of the solarpunk genre. Solarpunk, a branch of the cyberpunk setting, is a setting with a largely eco-friendly and clean aesthetic, on its surface it may be considered a portrait of a bright future for humanity. As is the case with most punk settings, however, solarpunk too is in reality a portrait of a dystopian future.

In the case of *Murder in Heliopolis* this dystopian setting shows itself through the reality of enclosed city states, the titular Heliopolis being one of them. The citizens of these city states are by large those lucky enough to prosper from the technological miracles such as clean renewable energy, hydroponic farms and in the case of Heliopolis the city-wide system of artificial intelligence keeping the city running flawlessly. This comfort however is only afforded to citizens. Echoing perhaps the most famous dystopian work, George Orwell’s

1984, the citizens pay no mind to the non-citizens living outside the city, dismissing their existence. These non-citizens live in the wastes of ecological disasters, which the denizens of the city states have all but abandoned.

More prudent to the story is the law enforcement in Heliopolis. While on the surface the law is up-kept by the police, it is only done so with the help of this artificial intelligence - PATET. The relationship between the detectives and PATET is initially considered to be such that PATET is the one to solve crimes, where the detectives are simply the extended limbs of the system and the human hand required to close the case. *“The PATET system took care of most of the crime-solving and prevention in Heliopolis, anyway. Nobody could steal a pin without the PATET recognizing their actions, identities, and sending word to law enforcement before the store-owners themselves knew anything had happened. It was the perfect system, and because it was so effective, crime rates had decreased drastically since its launch”* (HybaIsWriting, 2021, Chapter 1).

6.2. Characters and their narrative use

Laith Alazraq is the detective from whose perspective the narrative is told. He is a Muslim man with a wife and no children. Laith is initially put in a position of an analogue to Doctor John Watson, whereas PATET serves as an analogue to Sherlock Holmes. During the course of the narrative, as it becomes increasingly clear that PATET is unreliable, Laith's role shifts into one of a true detective as opposed to the assistant to PATET.

PATET is a city-wide system that facilitates nearly every digital function in Heliopolis, from financial transactions to opening doors. Within its database are data on all citizens of Heliopolis and information on the movement of people. While PATET isn't sentient in any way, rather being a very complex system of queries, replies and data storage, it is inevitable that it plays a role in the story. In a way PATET takes on the role of Mortimer in that it brings the case to the attention of the detective and provides the initial background of the case. Another parallel can be drawn between PATET and Mr. Farkland due to their nature as observers unwilling to share their observation with the police. Though Mr. Farkland does share his findings with Dr. Watson, and PATET technically no longer has memory of the observations it made, the parallel is there. Further PATET may be linked to Laura Lyons as well through their unwitting use in the initial murder of their respective narratives, though their connection is fairly weak and inconsequential.

A case may also be made for PATET serving a similar role to the mythical Hound of the Baskervilles. Both are used as a means in committing murder and to a point serve the role of keeping the public from investigating the truth, though while the legend of the hound does so through fear, PATET does so by propaganda of infallibility.

Cassia Grove is a successful businesswoman who made her success as the owner of a successful club called Nymphaeales, in the area called the Floats. She earned her citizenship in Heliopolis through marriage after moving from Nouveau Atlantis, another city-state separate from Heliopolis. She had made use of her husband Aster Lockwood's identity to claim citizenship in Heliopolis and used his inherited wealth to jumpstart their careers. Unlike her counterpart in *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, Sir Charles Baskerville, she plays a major part in the narrative from beyond the grave as her past actions have a large impact on the actions of others, mostly her husband Aster Lockwood and the hacker initially known as Invidia.

Aster Lockwood is the husband of the deceased and a successful businessman in vertical farming. He is the CEO of a company called Greenland Farm. Early in the investigation of his wife's murder he is found missing, and his slate is located outside of Heliopolis in the ruins. He is perhaps the most interesting character as his identity isn't entirely clear during the investigation. The man himself is missing for most of the narrative, photos of him preceding a certain date are missing from PATET's database and the database of Nouveau Atlantis shows photos of a different man. Once both men surface in a hospital it is revealed that the identity of Aster Lockwood has been stolen and appropriated by Pheonix Zamarad, the man who then married Cassia Grove in order for her to gain citizenship and him to gain the considerable wealth Lockwood inherited.

Neither of these men are particularly innocent as one is using a stolen identity and the other, the original Aster Lockwood, was using his considerable wealth to engage in people hunting outside the city and after reclaiming his identity uses PATET to continue doing so within the city while covering his tracks.

Aster Lockwood, Pheonix Zamarad and Cassia Grove may be considered parallels to Mr. and Mrs. Stapleton. The original Aster Lockwood pairs well with Mr. Stapleton through their actions and motives, both using murder as a means to claim wealth and status. The interloping Aster Lockwood shares some characteristics with the Stapletons through his use of false identity, though perhaps more so with Mrs. Stapleton due to being an accomplice to their spouses, though Pheonix is far more willing to take on that role.

Cassia Grove's character draws a parallel to Mr. Stapleton as the idea of claiming the identity of Lockwood was hers. Though since she couldn't take on Lockwood's identity for herself she needed an accomplice which she found in the man then known as Phoenix Zamarad, who then took on the identity of Aster Lockwood.

The hacker known as Invidia, later connected to the identity of one Audra Haize, is an employee of PATET HQ, the agency responsible for maintaining the system. She is an accomplice to several of the crimes committed and an accessory to the murder of Cassia Grove. From the perspective of the reader, however, her character serves the role of a red herring and as such, from a narrative standpoint may be likened to the escaped convict Selden and Mr. and Mrs. Barrymore. The parallel with Selden may be built upon the idea that they are both criminals that end up being helpful in solving the case, although Ms. Haize does so of her own will in an attempt to save her life and assist the detective with bringing the murderer to justice, while Selden does so unwittingly, losing his life in the process.

6.3. Characteristics in relation to mode of publication

While not necessarily the case with all webnovels, the relative inexperience of the authors is prevalent. HybaIsWriting specifically is a published author with several years of experience in writing, their first published book is *Apartment* (Hyba, 2020) which is described as an *eerie suspense novella*.⁹ Despite the experience, their writing within *Murder in Heliopolis* exhibits some of the same pitfalls an amateur author may fall into, namely over-exposition regarding the world setting.

The exposition surrounding PATET is handled in a way one may call a wall of text. This is likely in an attempt to enlighten the reader to the core idea and setting as fast as possible, which is a worthwhile endeavor in the time close to the beginning of publishing. Later on in the life of serialized fiction it can appear as rushed and sloppy exposition which would be more palatable if spread over a larger part of the narrative. While the exposition is to some extent necessary in order to enlighten the reader to the inner workings of the PATET system, which plays a key role later in the story, it is so dominant in the first chapter that the rest of the setting takes a background role. A sentiment raised in the comments section of the chapter on RoyalRoad.com goes as far as to critique the lack of solarpunk in this supposed "Solarpunk mystery", likening the setting to cyberpunk with how much the PATET system is mentioned; a sentiment HybaIsWriting seems to agree with in the reply to said comment.

⁹ *Apartment* - Payhip. Hyba Is Writing - Payhip [online]. Dostupné z: <https://payhip.com/b/8ONd>

This interaction around the exposition problem is a prime example of reader's comments having immediate and in this case positive impact on the narrative. While not unfeasible in traditional serials, the pervasiveness of these kinds of interactions is commonly higher in webnovels and related web based literature.

7. Direct comparison based on both examples

7.1. Narrative

7.1.1. Cliffhangers

The serialized nature of both serials and webnovels lend themselves to the use of cliffhangers, a literary device which entices the reader to continue reading the narrative. This serves to solidify the readers interest in the next part and creates demand for more to be written and published.

This narrative device was utilized heavily in *Murder in Heliopolis*, however *The Hound of the Baskervilles* seems to lack the use of cliffhangers in between most chapters. An example of the use of cliffhangers in *Murder in Heliopolis* is the end of chapter 6: “Almost immediately, the screen became tinged with red – a warning sign. He read the message that popped up on his helmet’s visor, the sense of unease hurtling into full-blown panic as the flashing words registered in his mind. Warning: You are under attack” (HybalsWriting, 2021, Chapter 6).

This seeming lack of cliffhangers in the book version can be explained by the fact that *The Hound of Baskervilles* was published in nine installments in *The Strand* while the book version is divided into fifteen chapters. As such the cliffhangers, while present, may not be immediately recognisable as such due to not being consistently placed between chapters.

Alternatively the sparser use of cliffhangers may be attributed to the reluctance of the author to continue writing the narrative as according to *The Annotated Sherlock Holmes* (Doyle and Baring-Gould, 1967, 13-15) - Sir Arthur Conan Doyle was ready to end the narrative centering around the character of Sherlock Holmes, but was persuaded by a large sum of money to continue. It is therefore not outside the realm of possibility that the lack of cliffhangers was a deliberate decision by the author, with the intention of quelling the public’s desire for more Sherlock Holmes stories.

Upon further inspection of the relationship Sir Doyle had with fans of Sherlock Holmes, one may find themselves commiserating with Sir Doyle. Entire case studies have been written about the actions of fans contemporary to the author; for example *A case study of early British Sherlockian fandom* (Katherine Brombley, 2017), which include but are not limited to writing letters addressed to Sherlock Holmes asking for replies and signatures and posting them to Sir Doyle, construing Sir Doyle's actions in the context of Sherlock Holmes

such as in the article Pigs of Celebrities (Bacon, 1899, 338-342), and generally semi ironically roleplaying the existence of Sherlock Holmes.

7.1.2. Foreshadowing

Another narrative device used is foreshadowing, which can be considered to be a core part of the mystery and detective genres. To an observant reader foreshadowing serves the role of extra clues that may be more noticeable to the reader than the characters. However foreshadowing is often clad in irony or is in itself a red herring, therefore only being recognisable after the event referenced comes to pass within the narrative.

In *The Hound of the Baskervilles* foreshadowing is used in several instances to direct the reader towards the culprit behind the mystery. A notable example is the foreshadowing of Mr. Stapleton's death in the moor via Mr. Stapleton warning Dr. Watson of the danger the terrain poses: "*A false step yonder means death to man or beast. Only yesterday I saw one of the moor ponies wander into it. He never came out. I saw his head for quite a long time craning out of the bog-hole, but it sucked him down at last...*" (Doyle, 1902, 139). The mention of death of both beast and man can be construed to foreshadow both Mr. Stapleton's death in the moor and his involvement with the beast that is the titular hound. Another instance in *The Hound of the Baskervilles* is Holme's response to the theory that the events of Sir Charles Baskerville's death may be of supernatural origin. The supposed foreshadowing here is that Holmes believes there to be a rational explanation: "*The devil's agents may be of flesh and blood, may they not?*" (Doyle, 1902, 54). A reader with even a passing knowledge of Sherlock Holmes may however come to the conclusion that this foreshadowing is of no consequence as it would be difficult for Sherlock Holmes to untangle a mystery that was not rooted in rational thought.

Murder in Heliopolis uses foreshadowing as early as the name of the first chapter "The All-Seeing Eye of PATET". Further into the chapter a forensic specialist notes "*PATET doesn't lie*" (HybaIsWriting, 2021, Chapter 1). Both of these are technically true, PATET does not have blind spots and doesn't lie, it is however unreliable thanks to deliberate human intervention making PATET effectively blind to the actions that were erased from its database and therefore in effect untruthful when queried for answers. Other instances of foreshadowing are often used to facilitate cliffhangers, foreshadowing an event that occurs within the same chapter, but does not resolve until the next chapter. An example can be found in chapter 6 which postulates: "*Find the Slate and go home. That was all he had to do*" (HybaIsWriting, 2021, Chapter 6) setting up the expectation of the opposite being true,

foreshadowing the conflict which begins at the very end of chapter 6 and itself serves as a cliffhanger.

7.1.3. Suspense

Suspense is used in both works to great effect. While in *The Hound of the Baskervilles* the suspense stems in great part from the absence of Sherlock Holmes from the narrative for a large part of it, *Murder in Heliopolis* utilizes suspense mainly in the latter parts of the story as while the mystery is being solved it becomes increasingly clear that the main character is not safe from the murderer. There is an argument to be made about the lack of Holmes' presence in *The Hound of the Baskervilles* and the reason for it. The suspense is the result of the detective's absence in a large part of the narrative. The moment of Holmes' return is the beginning of the story's culmination. [Dr. Watson]: "But how in the name of wonder did you come here, and what have you been doing? I thought that you were in Baker Street working out that case of black-mailing." [Sherlock]: "That was what I wished you to think." (Doyle, 1902, 183)

One may infer that Sir Doyle used the absence of the detective to avoid writing more of Sherlock Holmes, whether in an attempt to quell the fans of Sherlock, to simply avoid having to write Sherlock's dialogue for a while, or if this presumption is true at all, is unclear.

7.1.4. As a part of a larger narrative

An aspect of both *The Hound of the Baskervilles* and *Murder in Heliopolis* that is worth considering is their place as a part of a larger narrative. *The Hound of the Baskervilles* is generally known to be a part of the Sherlock Holmes story which brought great fame and renown to Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. *Murder in Heliopolis* stands in a more complicated place. It was initially chosen as an example of a webnovel due to it being a finished book with the intention of continuing the narrative in the next volume. This comparison would have been an equal one and fairly represent webnovels with an example that was close to *The Hound of the Baskervilles*. This choice was made despite the fact that many webnovels do not separate themselves into books or volumes at all, instead being a large collection of chapters. As previously discussed, however, the plans for the continuation of *Murder in Heliopolis* have recently changed. As such it is currently unclear whether the next planned volume will follow the rewritten version of *Murder in Heliopolis* as planned, or whether the continuation of the narrative will be included in the rewrite in its entirety, forgoing the need for multiple volumes. It is equally unclear whether the newly edited and continued version of *Murder in*

Heliopolis will have a designated endpoint to the narrative or whether it will continue indefinitely. The likely safe assumption based on the author's other work is that the narrative will have an end and will be packaged into one or more volumes in order to be published on the author's website, this is however merely conjecture. It is safe to say however, that *Murder in Heliopolis* has not yet brought HybaIsWriting fame and renown comparable to that of Sir Doyle.

7.2. Publishing

According to Goodreads (Goodreads, c2024) there are 8100 editions of *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, which includes various translated editions, audiobooks and distinctions between physical appearance (such as leatherbound, hardcover and paperback versions of the same book). With such a large amount of editions variations in contents are almost inevitable, especially so where translations and audio readings are concerned. Despite this variety one may expect that the core narrative remains largely unchanged between editions.

Webnovels as a whole largely avoid the problem of many printed editions by nature of being primarily digital media hosted on websites. There are however variations that may occur should a single literary work be hosted on multiple websites simultaneously. Using the example of *Murder in Heliopolis* it may be pointed out that while the edition published on RoalRoad.com is complete, the publication on Tapas.io is not. The Tapas.io edition is different in a few key points, most notably however in that it has not been published in full, the edition being abandoned at chapter 9 out of 29. Another notable difference is that the publication is split into episodes instead of chapters. Episodes 1 and 2 for example cover chapter 1 split in two parts, while episode 3 covers the full chapter 2. The publication ends on the 16th of January 2022 with episode 12, which covers the full chapter 9. The likely reason for this is the lack of engagement with the website as Tapas.io shows a total of one subscriber and 693 views at the time of writing.

A unique aspect of webnovels that traditional serial cannot fully replicate is the mutability and editability of already finished work. The last chapter of the first book of *Murder in Heliopolis* was published in April 2022 and the book was considered finished by the author at the time. However, on the 9th of February 2024 a notice was published by the author notifying readers of ongoing work being done on the book. These changes include “(...) **major and significant plot changes**” and “**The story will continue past its "ending"**” (HybaIsWriting, 2024, Notice). As such *Murder in Heliopolis* can be considered both a

published work and a draft. It is currently unclear whether the author overwrites the current iteration of *Murder in Heliopolis* or publishes the updated version separately.

Edits of this magnitude tend to be rare in webnovels although there are instances of so-called rewrites where an ongoing series is put on permanent hold or canceled after which the author may start a new project attempting to tackle the same narrative or concept from the beginning. The ability to edit and change stories posted on the web where the majority of consumers will not have a private copy stored outside of the website is commonly used to correct small errors such as misspellings or switched up names.

An argument can be made for the transition between the publications in *The Strand* and the later editions of *The Hound of the Baskervilles* being the equivalent action to the currently ongoing editing of *Murder in Heliopolis*. However, some aspects prevent this from being a fair comparison, namely the amount of times and the extent of changes the publisher would allow, as there is theoretically no limit on how many times and how much or how little HybaIsWriting decides to change in their work. Another factor is the limited reach changes made to an already published work in traditional media would have as changes in newer editions do not in any way project themselves into previous editions. By comparison, readers would need to go out of their way to preserve the previous version of the text hosted on the internet. Older versions of the text, even in the event that some readers have preserved a personal copy off site, will be effectively lost to the public should a webnovel author decide to overwrite their previous work.

In the specific case of *Murder in Heliopolis*, should HybaIsWriting decide to overwrite the RoyalRoad.com publication of the book, it is plausible that not all of the old text would be lost completely. Taking into consideration the author's apparent abandonment of the Tapas.io publication, it is likely that they would not update that publication, preserving the first nine chapters. The alternative would be marking the webpage of the current publication as obsolete and creating a new instance of the webpage for the rewritten version or marking only the old chapters as obsolete and publishing the rewritten version on the current webpage of the book.

8. Conclusion

This thesis set out to compare serial literature and webnovels. In conclusion, depending on the examples used, both may be commonly defined as a single larger literary work published in several parts over a period of time, provided the webnovel in question wasn't published in one piece. Webnovels further require to be published on the internet. Concerning publishing and monetisation, while serials are typically reliant on publishing companies and publishers of periodicals, webnovels have a wider range of choice on the web in addition to the publishing companies and publishers of periodicals that adapted to working on the internet. The means of publishing range from websites hosting literary works to self-publishing. The means of monetizing further includes contracts, crowdfunding and commissions. When examining the medium's impact on the content of the works, a relevant finding of great significance was the impact of direct contact of readers with the author on the contents.

The comparison of a specific example of a serial and a webnovel revealed few significant differences between *The Hound of the Baskervilles* and *Murder in Heliopolis* that could conclusively be attributed to the difference in mediums with the exception of a specific example of the impact of the reader's direct contact with the author in the case of the chosen webnovel. This finding is somewhat dampened by the relationship between Sir Doyle and Sherlock Holmes fans.

Future endeavors into this topic should reconsider the qualities sought for in webnovels examined and may wish to choose a more contemporary example of a serial or choose an earlier example of Sir Doyle's work from before he reportedly came to despise his fans. It may also be prudent to examine a webnovel that doesn't meet the definition of a serial and was published in a single piece in order to highlight the contrast.

This thesis contributed to the understanding of the relationship between serials and webnovels, which this thesis concludes to be an evolution of the medium of serial literature and its move to the internet.

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