

THE SENSATION OF SHERLOCK HOLMES

A Thesis by

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The following faculty members have examined the final copy of this thesis for form and content, and recommended that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree Master of Arts with a major in English

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DEDICATION

To the character and spirit of Sherlock Holmes:
may he continue to inspire and evolve inquiring minds.

“It was worth a wound; it was worth many wounds; to know the depth of loyalty and love which lay behind that cold mask. The clear, hard eyes were dimmed for a moment, and the firm lips were shaking. For the one and only time I caught a glimpse of a great heart as well as of a great brain.”

Dr. Watson

“The Adventure of the Three Garridebs”

ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the Sherlock Holmes stories written by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and how they relate to the late-Victorian Sensation Novel. First, a brief introduction to the Sensation novel is made. It makes a study the character of Sherlock Holmes, his habits, and his cases to show the sensationalism of his character. It considers the setting of late-Victorian England and its connections to the world created by Conan Doyle. Finally, it takes into account the significance of Victorian class structure within the stories. All these come together to confirm that the Sherlock Holmes stories belonged within the sensation genre.

The research materials include critics such as Philip Davis, author of *The Victorians*, Russell Goldfarb, author of *Sexual Repression and Victorian Literature*, and Steven Marcus, author of *The Other Victorians: A Study of Sexuality and Pornography in Mid-Nineteenth-Century England*. Other sources also include the 1898 Poverty Map created by Charles Booth, works by Dr. William Acton, and articles from the *Penny Illustrated Paper*. These sources help to form conclusions about the Sherlock Holmes stories as sensational stories providing detailed descriptions and examinations of Holmes' character, sexuality, and lifestyle and how they pertain to the Sensation genre. The thesis will also take into account different interpretations of Holmes' character as it has evolved through the 20th and 21st centuries thus far.

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CHAPTER I

THE SENSATION OF SHERLOCK HOLMES

There has seldom occurred in literature a character as interesting and as unique as Sherlock Holmes. Never before had a single literary character so completely captured the minds and imaginations of his audience. For nearly one hundred and twenty-five years Sherlock Holmes has retained the position of the most esteemed detective in the literary world. His stories have been translated into numerous languages and writers continue to mold and rework interpretations of his character to this day in both literature and media. Holmes was not an overnight success, however. His meager literary beginnings stemmed from an author who had no real interest in continuing the character and no aspirations toward writing detective literature. On a whim, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle created the Great Detective and, in doing so, accidentally tumbled into the world of sensation literature, and everlasting fame.

The sensation that was Sherlock Holmes began in 1887 in *Beeton's Christmas Annual* with the piece that would become Conan Doyle's first Holmes novel, *A Study in Scarlet*. In the tradition of Wilkie Collins' *Woman in White* and Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, Conan Doyle had successfully created a Sensation Novel, the first sensational story of his rather queer and temperamental detective's long career. When the sensation novel debuted around the 1860's it immediately caught on with Victorian audiences in both positive and negative ways. Many Victorians believed that sensational literature threatened their moral well-being, while others felt that sensational literature was a drastic relief from the required religious and moral readings found in the churches and schools. Sensation novels brought a new level of excitement to the repressed lives of many Victorians, especially sensational crime literature. A case can be made

that Sherlock Holmes is also a “sensational character.” Aspects of his personality and life, as well as the cases he accepts, all help to support the claim that the Sherlock Holmes stories are sensation stories.

The most interesting aspect about Sherlock Holmes is not the cases he solves, but the man himself. Readers are given a fairly objective view of Holmes through the writings of his well-known companion Dr. Watson. Not only does Watson describe in great detail the accomplishments and abilities of Holmes but he also examines his flaws and failures in just as exceptional detail. The two characters are nearly complete foils for one another and this is perhaps the reason readers are given such a successful analysis of Holmes' character. The differences between Holmes and Watson also help to highlight what exactly makes the character of Sherlock Holmes so sensational. Where Watson's personality is quite mellow and truthfully, somewhat boring; Holmes has moments of intense energy and passion as well as just as intense moments of depression and contemplation. Watson is also the viewpoint from which readers view women in the stories, which is interesting when considering the question of Holmes as a sexual character. Though he lacks romantic interests, he is much more sexual than Watson, though Conan Doyle approaches his sexuality quite subtly. Finally, Holmes' dramatic and sometimes dark moods lend to the sensationalism of his character.

The conflict of morality and sexuality within the Holmes stories is very subtle. Conan Doyle would have had to write carefully about it; otherwise he would have risked losing his audience. He would have had to be especially careful when developing Holmes' character. One of the most noticeable things about the Great Detective is his absolute lack of a love interest in any of the stories. Though some critics like to claim he had romantic interest in Irene Adler, no

evidence definitely supports it. Other critics suggest a romantic interest between Dr. Watson and Holmes, but again no overt evidence suggests such a thing. However, occasional hints indicate a sensual being behind the mask of the detective. These hints become apparent especially in Watson's physical descriptions of Holmes. His observations of Holmes' face and hands are particularly telling in indicating that sensuality can be found within Holmes.

Another hint at Holmes' sensuality can be observed in the presence of his drug use and his attitude toward solving crimes. The detective uses a 7% cocaine solution to keep his brain occupied when he has no cases that interest him. When he does come across an interesting case he works tirelessly, barely eating and rarely sleeping until it is solved. His single-minded attitude toward his cases may be seen as similar to the act of sex and sexual completion. He pursues his quarry with a passion he never shows in any other situation and the moment he solves the case, he seems to be gratified by the experience in way that could be read as subtly sexual, as a feeling of sexual satiety.

However, proving that Conan Doyle's stories belong in the sensation genre requires more than just analyzing Holmes' character. A study of the stories of his cases and how they would have been perceived by the late Victorian audience Conan Doyle was writing for must also be taken into account, as well as a study of late Victorian London with which Holmes and his audience would have been familiar. Victorian England was a place of great moral and sexual turmoil and both are aspects that can be found within the sensation genre as well as the Holmes stories. To examine why sexuality is important, since it is a vital aspect of sensation literature, and the effects it would have had on both Conan Doyle's writing and his audience. Two writers, one a Victorian and the other a more modern critic, Dr. William Acton and Stephen Marcus, are

very important sources to take into account when considering Victorian sexuality, especially since Dr. Acton was a Victorian specialist in sexuality.

Understanding Victorian repression was another key to creating the Sherlock Holmes stories as sensational stories. Russell M. Goldfarb is a particularly knowledgeable and useful author to use when examining late Victorian repression and sexuality. He writes at length about the social and educational reforms that took place to encourage sexual repression and its consequences upon Victorian society. Because most of Conan Doyle's readers were starved for emotion and excitement within literature, they tended to devour sensational literature for the emotional and sexual gratification it provided them. This idea is confirmed within Winifred Hughes' study, *The Maniac in the Cellar: Sensation Novels of the 1860's*. She writes about the novels of Wilkie Collins, Mary Elizabeth Braddon, and the Brontë Sisters and how they pioneered the way for the popularity experienced by the sensation genre.

Other critics a reader should look at are critics familiar with the workings of late nineteenth century London. For Conan Doyle to make Sherlock Holmes into sensational literature, he first had to create a sensational setting that would engross the minds of his readers. London, with its dingy streets and dark alleys, was the perfect place. London was a dynamic city; not only was it a city known for crime and death, it was also known for its upper, middle, and lower class societies. Franco Moretti uses a particularly engaging map created by Charles Booth. It was known as the "Booth Poverty Map" and it shows the different clusters of classes throughout the city. Conan Doyle would have been familiar with the different class-clusters within the city and wrote his stories accordingly, although he made some changes to Holmes' London for "tactical reasons." Most of the murderous crimes within the stories usually occur

within the country and within the upper classes. In the real London, the opposite was true.

Examining the historical and social aspects that made Sherlock Holmes the sensation he grew into will help readers better understand the importance of the Sherlock Holmes stories and the impact they had, and continue to have, upon the imaginations of people of multiple professions and interests. Not only did Holmes go on to inspire numerous interpretations of his character in both literature and media, but he also helped to inspire real improvements in forensics and criminal investigation. By looking at the sexual aspects of his character, his cases, and the London he was so fond and familiar with, a picture of the man Sherlock Holmes begins to form. He was a man of multiple facets and he is a character that continues to change with time. Perhaps these are some of the reasons readers, listeners, and viewers continue to adore and revere Sherlock Holmes as the one and only, Great Detective.

CHAPTER II

THE SENSATION THAT WAS SHERLOCK

Violence, seduction, and crime were the primary components for the formula of what would come to be known in the Victorian era as the “sensation genre”. As institutions like education and journalism increased in both quantity and quality, the levels of literacy in the lower and middle classes of Victorian London began to increase. The reforms brought about in the 1800's for public education allowed common people access to literature that had previously been unavailable to them. Groups of readers became more and more diverse and their expectations for newer and more exciting forms of literature began to rise. Audiences began to call for literature that was more “real,” more palpable, and the call was answered. In 1860 author Wilkie Collins wrote a novel called *The Woman in White*, which was widely considered an early example of detective fiction and possibly the first in the genre of Sensation Novels; a genre that would go on to inspire the most well known detective in fiction, Sherlock Holmes.

The term “Sensation Novel” was originally ascribed to crime, horror, and mystery stories (Victorian Web). The characteristics of the Sensation Novel are best described by Winifred Hughes in her study *The Maniac in the Cellar: Sensation Novels of the 1860s*, “what distinguishes the true sensation genre as it appeared in its prime during the 1860's is the violent yoking of romance and realism, traditionally the two contradictory modes of literary perception” (16). The sensation genre combined the sublime and the real. Rather than the spectacular holding sway in the mind, the mundane took hold and became something close to an obsession. Real-life crime, all types of crime in fact, presented the greatest form of inspiration for sensation authors, particularly for Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and Sherlock Holmes.

By the 1860's journalism, criminal journalism in particular, had become enormously popular with the Victorian public. All kinds of crime ran rampant in Victorian London, particularly the East End (also the location of Whitechapel and the Ripper murders) and journalists could not help but “jump” at the abundance of stories. Nearly every day some local paper or another would regale the public with sensational recounts of theft, battery, and divorce (though divorce was not a crime it usually meant that a spouse had been either adulterous or immoral in the relationship). The introduction of the new Metropolitan Police Force only helped to further the wildfire of tabloid journalism that was growing increasingly popular for the time. Established in 1829, the new police force was supposed to help quell the rising number of crimes occurring within the city of London (Victorian Web). Unfortunately their resources and technologies were too deficient and all too often crimes went unsolved or willfully unnoticed. There were even areas of London so infested with criminals that many officers refused to take patrols that would force them into the undesirable parts of the city.

Journalism both hindered and helped the police force. It hindered by pointing out the flaws in the system while drawing public attention to the fact that their officers were understaffed and out resourced. The awareness of the inadequacies of the police force brought about by journalism helped to develop improvements in the training of officers, the introduction of new methods such as fingerprinting, and the use of private detectives. With the increase in criminal journalism and the improvements made for mass printing methods, literary authors were also able to take advantage of the popular news and turn it into novels that would go on to be serialized in popular literary journals such as *The Strand* and *Bentley's Miscelany*, to name a few. As the availability of these publications increased, more and more readers were given the

opportunity to enjoy the stories of Charles Dickens, the Brontë sisters, and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. This abundance of fiction also exposed readers to new philosophical, political, and economic ideas from many different perspectives of different social classes. Because more readers were now able to read for pleasure, they began to look for newer and more entertaining forms of literature.

Even the upper classes of Victorians, prudish as they might have been, were enormously drawn to the new types of literature being produced and serialized in popular journals. With the arrival of the Sensation Novel, Victorian readers began to read with genuine gusto stories that had previously been unobtainable. The Sherlock Holmes stories were particularly interesting to the Victorians because of the sensational nature of the cases and the characters. But the most notable thing about the “sensation genre” was the language. To keep the interest of its readers the authors of sensation novels developed a very distinct form of description that was specifically designed to tantalize the senses. Because the Victorians were so starved for a grittier, newer form of expression as an outlet for the stress they felt from repression, they found the language used by authors such as Wilkie Collins and Charlotte Brontë in their novels utterly irresistible because within the literature they were finally allowed to experience the very things they were encouraged to repress.

The Sensation Novel was not without its critics who were both in favor and agitated against the new genre. Many critics and more conservative Victorians felt that the Sensation Novels had no place in the literary world. Barbara Leckie quotes one such critic, W.R. Greg, on the language of the Sensation Novel and what he called a “national craving for stimulants” in her study *Culture and Adultery*:

The unhealthy appetite—ravenous because unhealthy—became clamorous for more; like the voluptuous despot, it offered a reward for a new sensation, a new pleasure, a new dish; and, as in that case, since the genuine and natural was exhausted, the monstrous and impure must be resorted to.... Voluptuous pictures of illicit love, in all its phases and in all its stages of progress, constantly approaching the limits of decency and often overstepping them, offered at once the most natural and the most vulgar source of excitement for the jaded appetite and perverted taste. (117)

Greg's comments are interesting, particularly when one considers the language he uses in the passage. The passage itself seems to indicate that Greg, consciously or unconsciously, found the novels attractive. He writes almost lovingly, or lustfully, of the effect the novels had on readers. Using words such as “voluptuous,” “pleasure,” and “vulgar,” verifies that while Greg was drawn in by the novels, he was at the same time repulsed by them. Greg's simultaneous reluctance for and fascination with the Sensation Novel was a common reaction among most Victorians. Though readers felt an internal pull toward the literature, they also felt a sense of disgust for it. No good explanation exists for the feelings the novels produced in the Victorian populace, but it is safe to assume that they made readers feel pleasurablely uncomfortable, to say the least. The Sensation Novel also brought to light the importance of the novel itself, something that had existed as an entity separated from “real” literature for centuries. Novels were what their names suggested, “novelties.” This new “sensational” genre may have also helped to prove that novels were worthy of consideration as a form of art. The novelists' ability to touch

audiences through works so large and complicated showed a level of skill in literature that had not been seen before in prose fiction. The Sensation Novel was perhaps the darker side of the art of the novel, showing horror, insanity, and sensuality, combined in language to create a sensation that was palpable to the audience, particularly through the stories of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle.

Defining and examining Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes stories as part of the sensation genre will help one to draw conclusions about why the stories were and still are so popular. One must take into account the idea that crime literature presented a type of sensation that was coveted by repressed Victorian readers. Something about crime and crime literature fascinated readers and left them wanting more. By the late Victorian era the idea of the “modern” (“modern” meaning that the prose contained a plot, a form of narration, and functional/relatable characters) novel had been established. The “modern” novel led to a rise in sub-genres such as romances, social critiques, and horror. These had slowly risen to become popular forms of literature, though much of such literature was considered unreadable by prudish Victorian standards. The sensation novel became one of these sub-genres and was scorned by more conservative Victorian critics such as Margaret Oliphant, who spent much of her time reviewing novels for *Blackwood's Magazine*. She believed, though it is not known for sure, that the sensation genre originated with the Brontë sisters, Charlotte Brontë in particular (Davis 322). Mrs. Oliphant belonged to what was then known as the “Realist” genre of fiction, a response to the Romantic era that had preceded it. The sensation novels turned the realist tradition on its head with stories such as Dickens' *Oliver Twist* and Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*. Dickens in particular was a master of the sensational crime novel (literature that inspired readers' senses on an almost palpable level) and inspired other writers with his plots and his style. As Davis notes,

“with his murders and madness, his family secrets and hidden ancestries, his lurid scenes of common life transformed into fantastic grotesquerie—that was becoming increasingly less acceptable to the realists of the later nineteenth century, such as Mrs. Oliphant herself” (322).

From a tradition of sex, crime, and madness in literature, the Sensation Novel was born. Any novel that appealed to the senses of readers was included in the genre. Crime literature in particular was an explosive example of the Sensation Novel. The popularity of Sensation Novels was astounding considering the Victorians' predisposition to distance themselves from anything considered even slightly unwholesome. But the unwholesomeness of the Sensation Novel drew in its audience, an audience that desired to feel. Sensation novels broke through the artificial barriers of repression and began to legitimize for a part of the public the real feel of emotion once more. The Sensation Novel's predisposition toward sexual feeling were well-suited for crime. Of all the possible crimes in Victorian society, crimes of sexuality were perhaps the worst due to the audience's moral presumptions. To be sexual was to forsake one's morality and to jeopardize the soul. Going back to the myth of Adam and Eve, sexuality was seen as the cause of the breakdown of society. In the case of the Sherlock Holmes stories the obvious sexuality seen in novels such as *The Lady in White* and *The Lustful Turk* was completely absent. However, subtle hints of sexuality can be found if the stories are read carefully. A certain emphasis on Holmes' physical appearance and habits during a case serves to draw the readers more closely to his character sexually. For Holmes, the act of working a case was similar to sex and the moment he solved it, akin to an orgasm. Several times within the stories Watson narrates scenes where readers can observe Holmes' growing excitement as he nears solving a case and how many of these cases end in an outburst of passion [orgasm]. Very few stories addressed sex and even

fewer displayed the character of Holmes himself as obviously sexualized. However, sex seems implicit in the stories even though it may exist only in the mind of the reader of Conan Doyle's stories. It is doubtful that Conan Doyle meant for his work to be sexual (or at least he tried to repress whatever sexual implications worked their way into the prose) but in the hands of his readers his words can be read in a multitude of ways, one way being sexual. Christopher Redmond states that there are elements of physical sex that can be found throughout the Sherlock Holmes stories and the novels:

But sex also happens in the mind—the author's mind and the reader's mind—and it may be conveyed through those overt touchings and couplings in the stories, or it may be conveyed in much more indirect ways, so that the reader will be affected, moved by the power of sex to see the beauty of human beings...even though no bride or seducer or prostitute has been mentioned. (25)

When Sir Arthur Conan Doyle began writing his stories about the Great Detective he probably never imagined his famous character would so completely take over his writing career. Sherlock Holmes' adventures began in 1887 in *Beeton's Christmas Annual* with *A Study in Scarlet*. In this story Victorian readers were introduced to an excitable and contrary man whose habits and methods seemed to border on the eccentric and to his more subdued, down-to-Earth companion, Dr. Watson. Within these stories Victorians became acquainted with the dark, damp streets of London and its “less favorable” societies. Such stories of crime and criminal characters had certainly been produced in England before Conan Doyle. Works such as Charles

Dickens' *Oliver Twist*, with the artful Dodger and Fagin, and Edgar Allan Poe's Parisian detective, C. Auguste Dupin, were direct influences on Conan Doyle's stories and he even has Holmes criticize the methods of Dupin directly, as seen in *A Study in Scarlet*: "No doubt you think you are complimenting me by comparing me to Dupin,' he observed. 'Now in my opinion, Dupin was a very inferior fellow. That trick of his of breaking in on his friends' thoughts with an apropos remark after a quarter of an hour's silence is really very showy and superficial'" (12).

Though Holmes may have seen these detectives of crime literature as inferior, they all shared one common similarity, all were characters in sensational crime fiction. What separated the Sherlock Holmes stories from the other crime literature of the time was the popularity they had with the Victorian public, a popularity that would only grow with the passage of time. The sensational Holmes stories and novels written by Conan Doyle would inspire future sensational crime stories such as the *Batman* comic book series and the very popular and highly sexualized television series like *CSI* and film interpretations of Holmes by actors such as Basil Rathbone and Jeremy Brett. The question that needs to be answered becomes: what was it about the Sherlock Holmes stories that so strongly impressed the Victorians for them to help immortalize him for more than a century? A brief look into the history of Victorian crime will help to answer this question and its effects on crime literature.

The Victorians were particularly interested in crime as it was portrayed in the news media. On many street corners barkers called out the latest and most gruesome headlines in an attempt to sell papers. It seemed that every day more and more crimes had been committed and many of the crimes were very violent. Two of the most notable series of crimes (excluding the Ripper cases) were carried out by two particular men, doctors in fact, Dr. William Palmer and Dr.

Edward Pritchard. The trials and hangings of these two men were publicized to such an extent that nearly all of England would remember their names for decades to come as two of the most notorious murderers of the Victorian era. Both Doctors had murdered their wives and mother-in-laws by poisoning, and, after very short trials, they were sentenced to hang by the neck until dead (*Penny Illustrated Paper*). Dr. Watson makes mention of these men as disgraceful to the medical profession in “The Speckled Band,” a story which was directly influenced by the Pritchard case, yet another tale of a doctor who turns to crime by poisoning his stepdaughter. The reality of criminals such as these in combination with the well-known “Jack the Ripper” murders caused a sense of hysteria in the public, and an adverse reaction toward doctors. The Ripper himself supposedly possessed the medical knowledge required for the quick dissection and removal of internal organs. As a result only reputable doctors of high opinion and education were considered acceptable as personal and family physicians. The terror the public began to feel toward medical men manifested itself in one of the most popular crime novels, *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. Doctors began to be personified as men living double lives and were considered untrustworthy unless someone of repute would vouch for them. Perhaps for this reason Sir Arthur Conan Doyle created the character of Dr. Watson, to help rebuild the reputation of the medical man, Doyle having been a doctor himself. Indeed Dr. Watson does his profession proud, though he is far from being considered a spectacular doctor. However, he does possess the necessary characteristics of a medical doctor: a disposition of kindness towards women, a liking for children, love for his wife, loyalty to his friends, and a clear and uncorrupted conscience.

Indeed, if Dr. Watson was a credit to his profession, then Sherlock Holmes far exceeded him in bringing everlasting fame to his own profession, detective work. Watson often makes the

observation in the stories that Holmes would make a spectacular criminal if he were to focus his faculties in that direction. Even the police inspectors acknowledge his superiority from time to time, though not without some spite. However, Sherlock Holmes was a “notorious drug addict,” a breaker of laws, and a successful spy when he wished to be, all darker aspects of his rather peculiar personality. Sherlock Holmes was, by many definitions, a criminal. Like his counter-character Professor Moriarty, Holmes was more content to move about in the shadows and let others take credit for his work, as long as he was the one privileged and skilled enough to solve the case. The darker side of Sherlock Holmes became even more apparent when readers were given a greater insight into his personality characterized by the drastic ups and downs in his moods during the lull between cases. His saving grace, however, was that he felt more at home solving crimes than committing them. The stimulation of the case was far more gratifying for Holmes than acting the part of the criminal.

Beth Kalikoff, author of *Murder and Moral Decay in Victorian Popular Literature*, remarks on the relationship between detectives and crime:

Detectives and their criminal counterparts show strong and ominous resemblances to each other; virtuous and murderous impulses are often lodged within one person. In order to combat highly organized professional criminals, police and detectives adopt criminal methods. But sometimes the crime solvers become criminals themselves for other reasons...For revenge, for love, or for sport, detectives discard their personal profession with alacrity, occasionally even using their special knowledge to escape

punishment. Their liability to moral failings and human passions eliminates the final protection against thieves and murderers....the more adeptly police and detectives solve crimes, the better equipped they are to commit them. (157)

The particular character of Sherlock Holmes was just what the Victorian public needed in the latter part of the nineteenth century. At a time when people's moral attitude toward the police department and their ability to solve crime was at an all-time low, the character of Sherlock Holmes may have helped to establish a little, much needed, faith in the Victorian police force. Holmes also provided a refreshing look into the private lives of diverse groups of social classes and ideas. Victorian literature, especially late Victorian literature was more than often voyeuristic. The statement that the Victorians lived through their literature was as true then as it is today. People are obsessed with television shows such as *CSI*, a show depicting several Holmes-like characters solving modern day crime using modern technologies. The truth of the matter was and still is that many people live and feel through entertainment. For Victorians, sensational literature was their emotional release. Where repression of feeling, immoral or otherwise, was highly encouraged, the only outlet for those naturally occurring feelings, such as fear and lust, was literature. Literature was an intimate activity where the reader was encouraged to lose herself in worlds entirely of the novelist's own making. People could experience their fantasies within the pages of Sensation Novels, allowing them to release the built up stress of their repressions. The act of reading crime literature for sensation gave the public an outlet for their repressed feelings and desires. Through crime literature one could be the solver of great crimes and a savior of society as well as a diabolical fiend bent upon schemes of murder and

revenge, all without breaking either moral or social laws. Crime literature tore away the constraints of repression, allowing readers to experience previously forbidden emotions in the privacy of their homes, away from the judgment of the general public. Detectives, Sherlock Holmes in particular, interested Victorians with his “outsider” status from the main police force. He was seen as a “dark knight” type of character who was able to weave between the shadows of good and evil, existing in both at the same time.

By the late 1800's, however, the general consensus in crime literature was that to be a successful detective like Sherlock Holmes, one had to have the potential to be a successful criminal as well. A Victorian detective, any detective for that matter, had to shed his sense of propriety for the sake of solving crime. He had to possess the capacity to blend in with the most common of folk and interact with the most prestigious of the upper classes. On more than one occasion Watson encounters Holmes dressed up in a wide array of costumes: beggar, clergyman, aristocrat, etc. Watson comments on Holmes' disguises in combination with his acting abilities, “His expression, his manner, his very soul seemed to vary with every fresh part that he assumed” (“A Scandal in Bohemia” 146). Indeed Dr. Watson tends to view his friend as the most capable of detectives and appears to overlook many of his bad habits and personal flaws. However, certain vices about his friend are never fully accepted by the doctor. Holmes worst weakness, as seen through the eyes of Dr. Watson, was his cocaine habit, a substance he used as a mental and physical stimulant when no cases interested him. Not considered a particularly addictive drug at the time, cocaine was equated with mild alcoholism rather than with the rampant opium addiction that was popular in the slums of London and other larger cities. Holmes' use of cocaine was often a response to his boredom between cases. His use of the drug was highly

sexualized as the reader can see by Watson's descriptions. It becomes obvious through his narration that not only does he view Holmes' preferred “seven-percent solution” as harmful, he also views it as immoral in the same way sexuality in Victorian society was considered immoral:

Sherlock Holmes took his bottle from the corner of the mantelpiece, and his hypodermic syringe from its neat morocco case. With his long, white, nervous fingers he adjusted the delicate needle, and rolled back his left shirt-cuff. For some little time his eyes rested thoughtfully upon the sinewy forearm and wrist, all dotted and scarred with innumerable puncture-marks. Finally he thrust the sharp point home, pressed down the tiny piston, and sank back into the velvet-lined armchair with a long sigh of satisfaction.

(Sign of the Four 1)

Of all the ideas conveyed in sensation novels, sex is the one topic that draws the reader in and leaves her panting for more. Although Sherlock Holmes never exhibits any obvious sexual behavior, he seems to be surrounded by sexuality. Watson rarely misses an opportunity in his narration to point out many of Holmes' female clients are either handsome or pretty as well as to give detailed and often flattering descriptions of their profile and dress. In fact, Holmes prides himself on being a great judge of beauty without ever being seduced by it. No woman or man has ever definitively captured the heart, or sexual interest of Sherlock Holmes, though some critics may disagree.

One particular story, “The Illustrious Client,” is so thickly steeped in sexuality that even the Victorians were forced to acknowledge it as “sensational.” The story outlines the events

surrounding the marriage of Baron Adelbert Gruner and Miss Violet DeMerville. The Baron, a notorious womanizer and murderer, is known by Holmes to have killed his first wife as well as others who had dared to make him cross, though he has avoided conviction for these crimes by a lack of evidence. As explained by Kitty Winter, a prostitute and a former mistress of Gruner, the Baron keeps a “lust diary” of his female conquests. Kitty is an unusual character in that she is the first and only prostitute introduced in the Sherlock Holmes stories, although she is never specifically referred to as a “prostitute.” Watson describes her as “a slim, flame-like young woman with a pale, intense face, youthful, and yet so worn with sin and sorrow that one read the terrible years which had left their leprous mark upon her” (948). The utter ruin of Miss Winter appears to have been brought about by the Baron, though the exact details of her ruin are never revealed in the story. The critic Christopher Redmond speculates the Baron may have used her and then sold her into white slavery. Whether this “despicable act” is true or not cannot be known for sure, but whatever crime committed against Kitty Winter was obviously a traumatic and hateful one. The plight of Kitty Winter is particularly tangible for the audience because of her status as a sexual woman. All at once she is beautiful and but marked by sin, innocent and passionate, the exact feelings often associated with sensationalism. The sex in Conan Doyle's stories is an implied one, perhaps made intentionally by the author due to the censorship laws that were in effect at the time. The types of sexuality in the stories are quite different as well, including instances of adultery, secrecy, prostitution, and, surprisingly, romantic love.

Interestingly, romantic love is only seen and experienced by Dr. Watson, who seems to be the more sympathetic of the two toward beautiful women in the stories. Where Holmes appears to experience no kind of romantic love throughout the series, Watson experiences it in

abundance. He seems to make up for the lack of feeling in his friend by being overly attracted to the women who cross his path. In comparing the types of sexuality seen in Holmes and Watson, particularly in *The Sign of the Four*, Christopher Redmond writes, “When the focus is on Holmes, whose business after all is the suppression of crime, the sexual elements tend to be violent and exploitative. When it is on Watson, there is a chance for them to be decent and gentle, for love to lead to marriage and the 'vanilla sex' that supposedly follows” (39). For Holmes sexual sensation was a rush of pent up passion released in an explosion of violence, while for Watson it was a sweet and leisurely stroll in the park.

The Watson and Holmes characters both show two very different dynamics of sexuality. While Holmes appears to feel very little sexuality at all (with the possible exception of Irene Adler¹), he is always surrounded by violence often inspired by sexuality or romantic love, Watson, however, is almost always surrounded by a softer, more protective form of sexuality that compels him to defend himself and others against the violence that often comes with Holmes. Though many may disagree, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's stories may be read as a later, more sophisticated form of the Sensation Novel.

Though there exists no concrete definition of the sensation genre, it became recognizable by the feelings conveyed to its audience by the skillful use of language by the author. Sexuality and fear are by no means absent in Conan Doyle's works on the Great Detective. Even Sherlock Holmes may be read as a sexualized character by studying the language of his physical descriptions and habits as seen through the eyes of Dr. Watson. Both characters present two sexual dynamics that are often found in Sensation Novels, a paradox of romantic love and violent lust combined so that both coexist within the stories. The obvious thing that makes the Sherlock

1 First and only woman to outsmart Sherlock Holmes and gain his professional admiration.

Holmes stories part of the sensation genre is the fact that the stories revolve around crime and the assumptions of feelings surrounding crime. Feelings of horror, sex, and madness all combined in the storied of the Great Detective to create a series that would be immortalized for the grotesque feelings and unique imagination it inspired in readers of all ages and classes.

CHAPTER III

THE SENSATION OF SEXUALITY

The role of the detective in late Victorian England was vague and unknown at best. Even the word “detective²” began around the time of the Victorian period (*Oxford English Dictionary*). In 1887, when Sir Arthur Conan Doyle published the first part of what was to become the series of stories featuring Sherlock Holmes, readers were given a concrete idea of the detective. Holmes was often irritable and sometimes unlikable, prone to passionate outbursts uncharacteristic of Victorian men, but he was utterly brilliant. The Great Detective swept into the scene of popular literature taking the Victorian populace by storm. Conan Doyle's stories were set in a world of dark deeds and even darker secrets, and his detective was the most unusual aspect of it all. Trolling the well-known streets of London for thieves and murderers, Holmes took his audience on a quest for morality and, surprisingly, sensuality within the human mind. A moody and brooding figure, Holmes made his way into every Victorian household. His stories gripped the suppressed imaginations of young and old alike, slowly drawing them out of their mental stuffiness and introducing them to a world where sensation held sway. Through the popularity of Sherlock Holmes it became apparent that the Victorians were not as pure as they would have the rest of the world believe them to be. Their religious mores and social constraints were brought into question by Conan Doyle's stories, forcing the Victorian audience to face and deal with the most criminal aspect of themselves, their sexuality.

To determine the role of the detective in Victorian sexuality, we must first make a detailed examination of the aspects of sexuality in Victorian society. Victorian sexuality, especially late Victorian sexuality, was nonexistent. Sexuality was forcibly repressed within the mind in the

² According to the *Oxford English Dictionary* the word “detective” first came into use around 1843

hopes that it would lead to a more pure body and soul. Early Victorians, inspired by Evangelists and by the Methodist movements of the previous age, were overtaken by the repressive forces of a “stern religious attitude toward English morality” which dictated that any form of immoral feelings (lust, greed), actions, and things (books, newspapers, etc.) were to be repressed (Goldfarb 22). Under the prudish thumb of Methodism, sex and sexual acts were equated with sinful and condemnable acts, sometimes even punishable by the law. According to the religious rules of the period, sex was used for the purpose of procreation only and not to be exercised frivolously or for pleasure. Many pre-Victorian religious leaders who preached suppression of sexuality viewed England as a place of rampant vice and immorality. Two men in particular influenced the censorship that controlled the popular literature of the Victorian era, John Wesley and Jeremy Bentham³. These two men, though from two very different schools of thought, made it one of their goals to better popular literature by discouraging inappropriate and immoral literature within the education systems (Goldfarb 30). Their philosophy was that if certain, unacceptable material was removed from literature then it would not corrupt the Victorian household or the minds of its inhabitants. This religious movement for censorship was also found in English schools. Taught primarily Greek and Latin literature, students' education was also supplemented with healthy portions of the Bible and popular sermons, though the public schools created under the Education Act of 1870 would also have focused on basic writing and arithmetic as well as basic religious readings. Reading for pleasure was discouraged in children, as it could lead to the corruption of young minds and bodies. Authors such as Lord Byron and Keats were saved for adults reading at home in their private rooms.

Such was the literary upheaval caused by censorship that some works, such as

³ (1748-1832) A famous Utilitarian, philosopher, and instructor to John Stuart Mill and Robert Owen.

Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, were so drastically changed that they could no longer be considered the same work. Victorian families were very particular about the literature they read. If a work could not be read in front of all the family then it was usually banned from the house. Acceptable literature in a Victorian home would have included the Bible, literary journals such as *Blackwoods*, and certain newspapers. Victorian literature was mostly controlled by the constraints of religious and social demands. Religion required that literature inculcate pure and wholesome ideas while general readers expected some entertainment. These two conflicting ideas so heavily influenced Victorian literature that authors such as Charles Dickens and Wilkie Collins rose to the challenge of creating popular literature that tested the religious and social boundaries placed upon sexuality in works such as *Oliver Twist* and *The Woman in White*.

Into the conflict between morality and entertainment emerged mid-Victorian physician, Dr. William Acton, a specialist in sexuality and repression. Although his work has mostly been forgotten, he has been considered by his contemporaries to have had the most accurate views and assessments on mid to late Victorian sexuality. Growing up in the same Evangelical society that preached such strict sexual repression, William Acton made it his mission in life to study sexuality and its impact on morality. But his views on the subject were in many ways contradictory. Dr. Acton's education and beliefs brought him to the conclusions that sexuality and acts of sex led to mental and physical deterioration. At the same time, he believed sexuality to be a natural occurrence in human nature but that repression of the sexual nature was the only way to avoid moral contamination. He wrote about the sexual excesses of one man, who was a fellow physician:

A medical man called on me, saying he found himself suffering

from spermatorrhoea. There was general debility, inaptitude for work, disinclination for sexual intercourse, in fact he thought he was losing his senses. The sight of one eye was affected...In answer to my further inquiry, he stated that since his marriage he had had connection two or three times a week, and often more than once a night! This one fact, I was obliged to tell him, sufficiently accounted for all his troubles (Goldfarb 38).

As a result the Victorian household and its members were deeply affected by Acton's views on sexual dynamics. Women, thought to be the most pure of all creatures, were kept cloistered within the home in the hope that their purity would be preserved. They were considered ethereal beings, something akin to angels, with little or no sexual feeling or desire. Gone were the feudal days when women were both blamed and persecuted for the “fall of man.” Women were now considered the “Angel in the House”; termed thus by a poem written in 1854 by Coventry Patmore about his own wife, Emily. The angels in the house were to be submissive and meek, obedient always to their husbands, and perfect mothers. Above all, they must be pure in body and mind. Women were to give no thought to the idea of sex or to even be taught the basic concepts of the physiology of their own bodies. To introduce women to their bodies was to risk tainting them with sin. Again, the “expertise” of Dr. William Acton describes the situation. Considered by many, and by himself, to be an expert in sexuality, especially masturbation, Dr. Acton points out that women can avoid the corruption of sexuality (intercourse and masturbation) by bearing children:

If the married female conceives every second year, during the nine

months that follow conception she experiences no great sexual excitement....And again, while women are suckling there is usually such a call on the vital force made by the organs secreting milk that sexual desire is almost annihilated. (Marcus 30)

The Victorians, Dr. Acton included, considered women the saviors of men. Men were prone to excessive sexual desires and spent most of their lives physically and mentally repressing their instincts. Women, and the institution of marriage, were seen as the “best” form of repression for men. The reasoning followed: if men were happily married with a good wife who bore him children and pleased him both sexually (but not in excess) and domestically, he would have no need for sexual liaisons or behaviors outside of marriage. A true “Angel in the House” served her husband in many ways because through her and her angelic purity, he could be saved. Women were to acquiesce to their husbands' natural desires because intercourse might provide children for him. But, according to Dr. Acton, women did not physically enjoy coupling with their husbands, their enjoyment came from serving their spouses. For the Victorians, and indeed for Dr. Acton, a sexually disinterested and obedient lady formed the ideal marriageable woman:

I should say that the majority of women (happily for them) are not very much troubled with sexual feeling of any kind. What men are habitually, women are only exceptionally...As a general rule, a modest woman seldom desires any sexual gratification for herself. She submits to her husband, but only to please him; and, but for the desire of maternity, would far rather be relieved from his attentions. (Marcus 31)

Female children, in an attempt to retain their purity, were kept completely ignorant of their sexuality. Even their mothers, having once been girls themselves, were incapable of accurately explaining the intricate functions of the female body. Doctors and specialists claiming to know about female bodies merely created a series of horror stories to cower young women into avoiding and repressing their sexual nature. Women were taught to mortally fear blood and regard it as unclean and unnatural and to view their menstrual cycle with distaste. Menstruation in girls and women was so improperly explained that many became hysterical at a slight irregularity or discoloration in their menses. The color of menstrual blood held a great deal of importance, bright, red blood and light flow were considered healthy for Victorian woman, while darker, thicker blood was a sign that the woman had been engaged in sinful acts such as immoral fantasies or masturbation (Donnelly 38). Women were encouraged by physicians to closely examine their and their daughters menstruation cycles' for indication of immoral fantasies or activities. So misguided was a woman's education that many women fell prone to nervous disorders due to their anxiety over menstruation and childbirth. One story shows the trauma faced by young women:

Blood was regarded as fearsome, even the usual spotting and light flow that continues for some days after childbirth. Harriet Beecher Stowe's daughter, Georgiana Stowe Allen, was afraid she would die from hemorrhage, for she mistook the normal discharge after childbirth for a sign of danger. Her anxiety was made worse by the tales of a morbid nursemaid, who chose to regale her with gossip about new mothers who had died in five minutes from

postpartum hemorrhage. (Donnelly 38)

Victorian woman's clothing also indicated purity. Women of the middle-classes and upper-classes had to be impeccably dressed to present the right kind of image to their friends and relations. They wore tight corsets to keep their waists small and large dresses made of fine silks and laces exquisitely tailored. A woman's poise had to be flawless, straight backs and heads held high. Children and women were both covered from head to toe in intricate layers of blouses and petticoats, respectively, from their necks to their ankles. Victorian women also adopted "drawers," previously men's and children's undergarments. These pant-like undergarments (similar in purpose to petticoats) covered the entire leg and hid its shape, for the leg was regarded as enticingly sexual. Even the names of undergarments were changed to be less sexual. They were no longer called "underwear"; they were now "unmentionables" or "underclothing" (Kortsch 57). By the late nineteenth century women in Victorian society had become so compulsive about their "private parts" and their "purity" that doctor's visits were always chaperoned, as no respectable lady would see an unknown man alone, even a physician. Examinations were conducted with clothing on (undergarments and all) and often without touching. Some physicians even kept dolls for the ladies to point out their area of affliction (Goldfarb 42).

According to Dr. Acton, men were the opposite of women in sexual desire. Because of their external organ of sexuality [the penis], men were more prone to sin, better known as masturbation. Known by the Victorians as the "solitary vice," masturbation was the epitome of sin. To masturbate was to slowly drain one's essence. With every orgasm and loss of semen a man's energy and constitution would be lessened until there was nothing left of him but a

withered husk of his former self (Miller and Adams 64). Chronic masturbation was considered a mental disease and physicians warned parents to closely monitor their sons for its signs.

Naturally, this idea drove parents to near hysteria for fear their sons might become addicts of the vice. Drastic measures and even more drastic punishments were enforced to prevent young boys from touching themselves in sinful ways. One particular device designed to prevent inappropriate behavior was a kind of male chastity belt. At night, parents would fit the device around the pelvis of their son and lock it so the child would be incapable of arousing himself and engaging in sinful behavior. As an extra deterrent, this particular device also came with sharp spikes jutting out, to prevent any erectile mishaps.

Though he was known to specialize in many different fields of sexuality Dr. Acton's best known specialty, however, was prostitution. Prostitution, as it had been since the Middle Ages, presented a major moral and health problem in Victorian England. It was seen as one of the most heinous and criminal acts a woman could commit against both God and society. Dr. Acton defines prostitution in his book: "all illicit intercourse is prostitution, and that this word is as justly applicable as those of 'fornication' and 'whoredom' to the female who, whether for hire or not, voluntarily surrenders her virtue." Acton goes on to list the possible reasons a woman might turn to prostitution, and they are numerous. One cause of prostitution, according to Acton, is that men, upon reaching puberty seek it out and that women, being the God-made companions of men, obey. Acton state that prostitution also arises from an "ill-regulated and uncontrolled desire," namely, "the natural instinct of man." But Acton does not just blame men for prostitution, he also lays some of the blame at the feet of women:

The unrestrained want and lawless demand, call[s] for the

infamous supply; but want and demand are insufficient of themselves to create supply; there are strong provoking causes, but not creative. We must go a step further to discover the sources of supply. It is derived from the vice of women, which is occasioned by: natural desire, natural sinfulness, the preferment of indolent ease to labor, vicious inclinations strengthened and ingrained by early neglect, or evil training, bad associate[s], and indecent mode of life, the inability to obtain a living by honest means consequent on a fall from virtue, extreme poverty. (118)

Dr. Acton, a liberal man himself, would have liked to remove prostitution from the streets of London altogether, but he was also a practical man. He had to admit that any woman willing to use her body to maintain her and her family's life had the right to do so and would usually return to a normal course of life after a short time (Marcus 5). At the same time, he thought the government should regulate the institution of prostitution: requirements for health, yearly physical exams, and such precautionary measures. His work *Prostitution, considered in its Moral, Social, and Sanitary Aspects, in London and other Large Cities and Garrison Towns, with Proposals for the Control and Prevention of its Attendant Evils* helped to influence the passage of what was known as the Contagious Diseases Act of 1866. This act required prostitutes, especially prostitutes who frequented army and naval barracks, to submit themselves to yearly health exams and if found to be diseased, they were required to receive mandatory treatment by the government or face possible jail time (Marcus 4).

The Victorian's view of prostitution was the same as their view about their own sexuality;

ignore it, or repress it. Dr. Acton's views of prostitution were far more practical: prostitution would not simply go away if ignored. He believed it was an ingrained, “organic” part of society and while he does not condemn prostitution, neither does he condone it: “to imagine that this irrepressible evil can exist without entailing upon society serious mischief; though incapable of absolute repression, prostitution admits of mitigation. To ignore an ever-present evil appears a mistake as fatal as the attempt to repress it” (Marcus 4). Acton seems to have believed that the Victorian's aversion to dealing with the issue of prostitution helped it to thrive. Prostitution, like all vices in Victorian society, was also viewed as crime. Victorians read about abused and murdered prostitutes in the newspapers and new cases were publicized all the time. The most infamous of these cases was known as the “Whitechapel Murders” or, more commonly, the “Jack the Ripper” murders. Never before had a murder case been so closely followed and romanticized by the English media and never before had a case so grotesque and shocking to the general public so utterly and completely baffled the British authorities.

For the British media, “Jack the Ripper” offered a new and gruesome view of the London underworld. No longer were prostitutes dirty, fallen women to be avoided, they were now citizens of London who were preyed upon for their sexuality. Though common Victorian notions of the institution of prostitution were beginning to change, the prevalent idea is best reflected in this 1888 headline from *The London Evening News*: “A Homicidal Maniac or Heaven's Scourge for Prostitution.” The Victorians were predictably shocked and fearful, but this particular series of murders only served to reaffirm their belief that the recognition, rather than the repression, of sexuality would lead straight to Hell. The media however, painted a much different picture of the victims of the Ripper. *The London Evening News* posted a report on one of the prostitutes

identified as Elizabeth Stride, titled, “Appearance of the Woman”:

The woman now lying at the mortuary of St. George's-in-the-East appears to have been about 30 years of age. It is difficult to judge of the length of a person in a recumbent position, but she appears to have been about middle height. Her features are pinched like those of one who has suffered want, but her expression is not unpleasant. Her cheek bones have a tendency to prominence, and her nose is sharp and well chiselled, with a slight marking at the bridge, far removed, however, from the protuberance of the Roman organ. Her hair is auburn, her lips thick, the upper one especially so, with that sort of double fold often noticed in lascivious women. She has the appearance of being an Irishwoman, but might be a German. She lies there on the stone with a smile on her pale face, as if she had died without a struggle. Her right hand, however, is encrusted with blood, as if she had tried to thrust her murderer away.

(casebook.org)

The killer was thought to have been a man with medical knowledge due to his speedy precision and fascination with removing the organs of his victims. Each case documented the speed and precision with which the killer removed the victims organs and body parts. That the killer seemed to get sexual satisfaction by committing such horrendous murders made the situation all the more deplorable. Finally, the idea that the killer might be a doctor terrified the public because doctors were the experts to be relied upon for both health and mental problems,

which sexuality was considered to be.

Significantly, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle began writing in 1887 to 1888, around the same year the “Ripper” killings began. Holmes first appearance in 1887 in *A Study in Scarlet*, brought a fresh face to Victorian crime literature. The story dealt with a crime of passion; the death of a beautiful girl at the hands of perverted religious men and the revenge her lover took upon them. Perhaps it is a coincidence that Holmes makes his appearance during the terror caused by the “Ripper” cases, but at this time Sherlock Holmes became the detective whom the London police could never match. Victorians were encouraged by his abilities to solve his cases with little or no effort, something not always seen in real criminal cases, and never seen in the “Ripper” cases. Though Holmes was not always admirable (he was subject to bouts of severe depression and drug use), he was endearing to Victorians as a man who had freed himself from the conventions of society. He had cast off the chains of repression and lived freely, though abstinent. He took little interest in women, except for those who could match him in wit and logic, sex for Sherlock Holmes was the exhilaration of the case.

Dr. Acton, much like Sherlock Holmes, was first and foremost a seeker of answers and here the connection to Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and Sherlock Holmes is made. Through medicine and the scientific method, Conan Doyle, like Dr. Acton, would have learned both the Victorian prejudices toward and the evils of sexuality. Through medicine, Conan Doyle also made the acquaintance of Professor Bell, Sherlock Holmes' real life counterpart and Conan Doyle's Professor at the University of Edinburgh. Professor Bell was known for having an uncanny ability to view the smallest trace amounts of evidence and deduce from them the probable outcomes of that evidence. Bell's ability so inspired Conan Doyle that the writer went

on to produce more than fifty Holmes stories, many of which are narrated by another medical man, Dr. James Watson. The connection between Victorian medicine and sexuality is so well established that it would have been nearly impossible for Conan Doyle to have written the Sherlock Holmes stories while abstaining from mentioning, at least implicitly, sexuality.

In fact, it may be possible that the lack of sexuality, the lack of a love interest for Sherlock Holmes, reveals an interesting aspect of his sexuality. Holmes is dedicated to his work, and he himself admits he feels no passion when his mind is not engaged. The excitement of the case brings him to life in a way no other experience can. For Sherlock Holmes, the act of working a case seems to be synonymous to a sexual experience (when there is no case to be solved his drug use takes its place). These dark and hidden details of the Great Detective's life make Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's stories sensational to say the least. But it became a sensation that would grip the minds and imaginations of the late Victorians and, eventually, the rest of the world as well.

CHAPTER IV

THE SENSATIONALISM OF THE PRIVILEGED

Most famous fictional detectives are associated with a particular location. DuPin with Paris, Hercule Poirot with London, so too, location seems to have become a central theme for crime throughout Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's stories, particularly in London with its many neighborhoods and boroughs. Often times Sherlock Holmes is depicted moving through many twists and turns on the bustling streets of London and the more placid, verdant surrounding countryside. The first two Sherlock Holmes novels, *A Study in Scarlet* and *The Sign of the Four*, take place in the notably less wealthy areas of Victorian London, known as the "East End." *A Study in Scarlet* gives a particularly interesting view of the city from the perspectives of both Dr. Watson and Sherlock Holmes. To portray the locations within his novels Conan Doyle used a cunning, and common, method of showing the city, which was well known to Sherlock Holmes, through the eyes of the Scotchman and recently returned ex-soldier, Dr. Watson. Watson, like Conan Doyle's readers, is amazed by his companion's knowledge of the twists and turns of the streets of London.

The real London was not so very different from the London so well known to Holmes and later to Watson, save for one fact: fictional crime and real crime occur in the exact opposite places. As shown by Franco Moretti in *Atlas of the European Novel*, an inversion of the local crime occurs between fiction and reality. As shown by Charles Booth's 1898 poverty map, many of the crimes dealt with by the Sherlock Holmes are either confined to the West End of London (the wealthier part of the city) or occur in the countryside, especially for the more gruesome crimes. In reality, the city's crime was concentrated mostly in the East End and the poorer

districts made up of beggars and immigrants. Taking this dynamic between fiction and reality into account, readers must question the motives of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and his decision to ignore the reality of the actual locations of crime in favor of his fictional locations of crime as seen in his stories.

When one considers the map of poverty in the city of London created by Charles Booth, the coding of the map is such: yellow represents the upper and upper-middle classes; the progressions of red show the middle to lower-middle classes, blues represent the lower classes, and black, the lowest of the classes and vicious semi-criminals. All these colors paint London as a strange collage of twisting lines, showing clusters of the classes all throughout the city. Certain areas show either a large concentration of yellows or blacks, and more often than not, red. Conan Doyle, as an inhabitant of and writer about the streets of London, would have been aware of these clusters of class and may have strategically used specific streets and houses of the middle and upper class areas as inspirations for the locations in his stories.

Charles Booth Poverty Map (White Chapel Street)

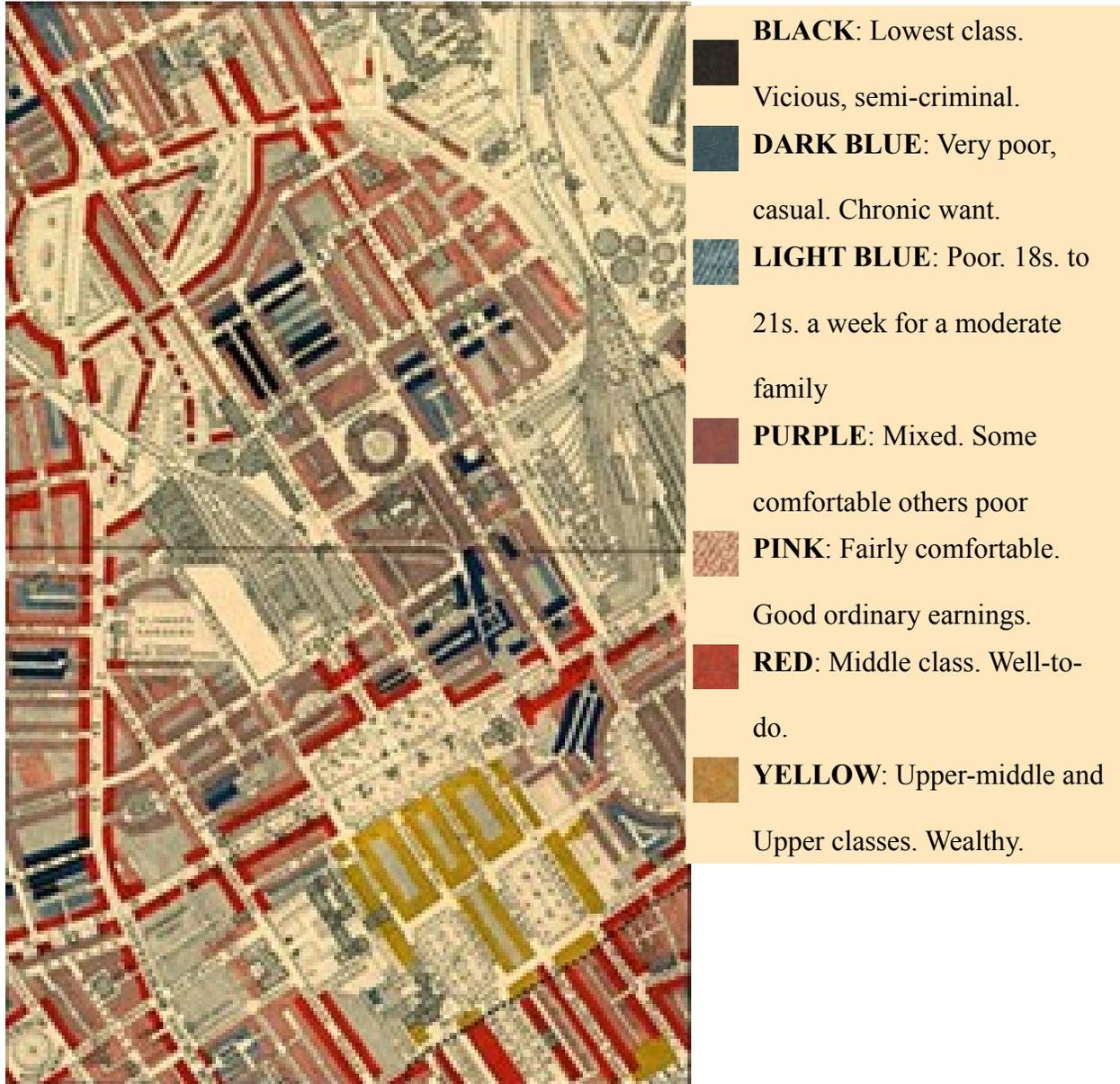


Figure 1. Charles Booth Poverty Map

But simply using real locations and everyday crime would not have been enough to keep fans of the Holmes stories coming back time and again. Conan Doyle needed something for his stories that was utterly unique, and he found it not in his character, but in the crimes themselves. To make his crimes memorable for both his demanding main character and his readers, Conan Doyle set out to make the crimes in his stories crimes of class privilege and all its vices. For these types of crimes he had to look outside the newspapers and tabloids; and in doing so he was forced to deviate from the reality of crime. Franco Morretti suggests that Conan Doyle deliberately avoided real cases such as “the Ripper” for “‘tactical’ reasons”:

Doyle is forging the myth of the omniscient detective, and it would be unwise to let him go near Jack the Ripper's Whitechapel....But apart from this, there is a deep symbolic logic behind those two Londons. Booth's criminal world is the nearly inevitable result of urban poverty: it is a visible, widespread reality, which has absolutely not mystery about it. For detective fiction, however, crime must be precisely an *enigma*: an unheard-of event, a 'case', an 'adventure'. And these things require a very different setting from the East End: they need fancy hotels, mansions overlooking the park, great banks, diplomatic secrets...It's the old London of privilege, that we encounter in detective fiction: the same streets, the same houses and squares of silver-fork novels. (137)

Perhaps one reason Conan Doyle avoided writing about the East End was because of the “commonplace” crimes committed there. His readers would tend to expect crime in the lower

classes, and this point of view was certainly common among the middle and upper classes in Victorian London. Another reason Conan Doyle may have avoided taking his character to the East End was due to its association with the Whitechapel murders. Because the Ripper cases were so widely publicized Conan Doyle may have realized that taking Holmes into that area would have associated him with those murders by location, something he may have wanted to avoid due to the controversial nature of the murders continuing to go unsolved.

But in order to make a brief review of the streets of the London of Sherlock Holmes, one must begin at his headquarters and flat at 221B Baker Street. The Baker Street Holmes would have been familiar with is a far different Baker Street today. In 1881, the year Watson and Holmes first meet and set up lodgings together in Baker Street, the streets of London bustled with carriages, horse-drawn taxis, and trains, all of which were readily available for the Great Detective and Dr. Watson from their new home. The street also boasted a good number of pubs and shops where the pair may have spent time either together or alone. Since the appearance of Sherlock Holmes many people have tried to pinpoint the exact location of the legendary 221B address. In reality 221B Baker Street never existed since, at the time, the street only ran from numbers one through eighty-four (Harrison 47). Fictionally, the “B” designates that the lodgers' residence was placed over a shop of some sort, though nothing is ever alluded to within the stories. Currently a post office occupies the site where the fictional 221B Baker Street was determined to exist.

From the lodgings at Baker Street one is able to trace the paths traveled by Holmes and Watson across the streets of London. Most notably, after the publication of *A Study in Scarlet*, Holmes tends to avoid the South and East Ends of London, going to the East End “exactly once

in fifty-six stories” (Moretti 134). For the most part Holmes tended to keep to the middle-and upper-class areas of the West End and the London countryside. Moreover, as pointed out by Moretti, the further into the countryside crime took Holmes, the more bloody the crime that had been committed. Perhaps the worst crimes committed in the stories within the limits of both country and city crime were *The Sign of the Four* and *The Man with the Twisted Lip*, though neither story is particularly violent; one is a case of revenge and greed, the other a case of mistaken identity. This deviation from the most common areas of real crime in London by Conan Doyle may have been his response to the mundane, commonplace crimes he and his fellow Victorians would have read about nearly every day in the papers. To catch his readers attention and keep it, Conan Doyle would have recognized that he needed to take common crimes and turn them about in ways that had never been explored before in crime literature. Because location was so central to many of the crimes in his stories one may assume Conan Doyle realized that to create a new genre of crime literature, one based on the science of observation, fact, deduction, and technology, the basis for his stories would have to come from the world in which his readers lived and were familiar with, namely London.

It is apparently coincidental that the debut of the Great Detective in 1887 was so closely followed by the Whitechapel murders and the police force's spectacular failure to solve them. One may speculate that in some ways, Conan Doyle may have meant for his character to help the police force save face in light of their failure. However, Holmes never addresses the “Ripper” cases. Some believe Conan Doyle made this decision because he did not want to falsely speculate on the identity of the killer. But a large, glaring difference occurs between Sherlock Holmes and the regular London police force and its detectives: he was what he referred to as a

“consulting detective,” the only one in the world. Holmes established himself as an outsider from the regular police and he used his own methods and means to solve the crimes brought to his attention.

One of Holmes most notable abilities was his knowledge of the geography of the city of London and its inhabitants. Unlike the police, Holmes seemed to think that all of London was knowable, from its upper-class districts to the lower-class ones. In fact, he had made a rather extensive study of the whole city, making himself aware of the haunts of criminals and the gentlemen alike. Perhaps Holmes greatest asset in solving his cases was the ease with which he was able to move about the city and its various classes. Nevertheless, criminals of privilege seemed to be Holmes' particular specialty since he was able to move in and out of their circles without detection through his mastery of disguise. At this time in England's history when the middle classes were on the rise, the ability to blend into the various classes proved to be invaluable to Holmes. As a man comfortable with the inner workings of all levels of society, Holmes was able to communicate and interact flawlessly with people from kings to beggars. But it was not just Sherlock Holmes who moved through the social strata, others of the middle classes were capable of such mobility as well; and this mobility is what Conan Doyle began to experiment with in his novels in an effort to generate interest and popularity in his stories.

His ability to move freely through the various classes of society made Holmes such a fantastically successful detective. In his youth he had taken several classes in acting, and according to Watson, Holmes was a superb actor, when he put his mind to it. So convincing and realistic were his mannerisms and disguises that the he was able to fool Watson on more than one occasion. The most notable example of Holmes' successful disguises occurs in *The Empty*

House, the first story where Holmes reappears after his “death” at Reichenbach Falls. Watson, walking the streets, runs into a rather dirty man overloaded with books and knocks him down. Thinking nothing of the man after assisting him with his volumes, Watson continues on his way. Once Watson returns to his practice, the man enters his office and dramatically transforms into Sherlock Holmes, who Watson assumes has been dead for three years. Watson's initial reaction is to faint dead away from the shock.

Holmes' flair for the dramatic rather hurt Watson in this particular instance, but it also served to prove that Holmes was a master when it came to moving through social classes undetected even by those who knew him well. Holmes was not only able to move through the various social classes, he also had his own methods of communicating with and spying on them as well. He had a well-established information system, known as the “Baker Street Irregulars,” a group of rag-tag street urchins, whom he paid for information. As children, reminiscent of the child-thieves in Dickens' *Oliver Twist*, the Irregulars could move unnoticed through London, watching and listening for information that would be useful to their employer. It was a clever and much quicker way for Holmes to scour the streets without doing all the work himself, a distinct advantage for a detective who would otherwise have to take valuable time away from solving the case. Plus, as impoverished children and often overlooked as threats, Holmes was certain that the Irregulars were far more capable of gathering information quickly and accurately than any constable or police detective.

Victorian London was and still remains one of the the most popular settings for crime in detective fiction, and one used frequently in Conan Doyle's stories. With the city's dark cobblestone streets that encouraged the eerie echoes of footsteps and smog filled alleyways,

London was an ideal setting for the most nefarious and licentious of criminals to thrive and prey off reader's minds in literature. But what made his fiction unique was, like Sherlock Holmes, Conan Doyle's most successful villains also had the ability to move in and out of the shadows using disguises and trickery to roam about the streets of London undetected amongst the privileged and well-to-do. Two stories highlight such class mobility rather well, *The Man with the Twisted Lip* and *The Final Problem*.

The first example, *The Man with the Twisted Lip*, shows a rather interesting trend of downward mobility from a middle class setting, twice in fact. As Dr. Watson is implored by the wife of a friend to rescue her husband from the confines of his opium-induced stupor, he encounters Holmes within the opium den dressed as a filthy old man. By disguising himself, Holmes moves more freely through the opium-clouded underworld than he would as a detective, who would put the people he investigates on guard. Holmes reveals to Watson that he is investigating a case of a missing husband for a worried wife, a similar task to the one that brings Watson to the opium den in the first place. By proving himself to be there only for business, Holmes assuages Watson's initial fears that Holmes has added opium to his cocaine habit. Neville St. Clair, a character in the story, is a supposed businessman who disappears after his wife spots him in a room above the very opium den to which Watson is sent to retrieve his friend. Mrs. St. Clair has hired Holmes to find her missing husband. The case becomes even more perplexing as it moves from a disappearance of a husband to a suspected murder. As the case progresses Holmes and Watson discover that St. Clair had indeed been coming into town every day for work, but not as a businessman. Through Holmes's observations it becomes clear that St. Clair had been going to the opium den, but only to don the disguise of Hugh Boone, a well-

known and much liked beggar on the streets of London. Like Holmes, Neville St. Clair had been something of an actor in his youth and was able step out of his role as a gentleman and into the role of a beggar. This training also provided him with the knowledge of costume make-up, a skill which allowed him to alter his physical appearance to that of a man with a “twisted lip.” It was only by coincidence that St. Clair discovered begging as a career. Sent to research beggars by his editor, he found he was able to make more money as a beggar than as a businessman. As he explains to Holmes and the police:

I painted my face, and to make myself as pitiable as possible I made a good scar and fixed one side of my lip in a twist by the aid of a small slip of flesh coloured plaster. Then with a red head of hair, and an appropriate dress, I took my station in the busiest part of the city, ostensibly as a match-seller but really as a beggar. For seven hours I plied my trade, and when I returned home in the evening I found to my surprise that had received no less than twenty-six shillings and four pence....Well you can imagine how hard it was to settle down to arduous work at pounds a week when I knew I could earn as much in a day by smearing my face with a little paint, laying my cap on the ground, and sitting still. (224)

While modern readers may commend St. Clair on his ingenuity and his cunning. Most Victorian readers would have condemned him for his laziness. By not working for his income, St. Clair violated a middle-class standard and equated himself with the lower classes while at the same time earning enough income to live comfortably with his wife and children. Vocational

inactivity, living off income that was inherited rather than earned, was perceived as a problem within Victorian society that was becoming more and more common during the Victorian era, especially among the upper and middle classes. The idea that a man was more fulfilled by the work he did and the income he earned as a result of his work was quickly becoming a popular idea, especially in the middle classes. A very specific idea of the upper/middle-class British “gentleman” in English literature had been carefully developed in social critiques since the times of Jane Austen and Elizabeth Gaskell. Gentlemen tended to belong to a more domesticated sphere (fishing, hunting, attending dinner parties, and indulging in popular fashion), they were encouraged to enjoy their leisure time as members of the upper-classes and to watch their investments, rather than join others in strenuous work.

By the later stages of the Victorian era however, the idea of the “gentleman” in literature had begun to change. As industrialization and the working middle-classes began to dominate Great Britain, gentlemen were considered less and less like the “dandies” found in the early Victorian literature and began to be associated as men of their own making, relying on themselves for success. Men were expected to work on a regular basis for their income rather than relying on the old wealth and social standing of their families. By participating in business gentlemen were able to distinguish themselves from the lower classes, as the poor were considered slothful by nature and incapable of rising up the social ladder. Since laws were in place at the time that kept welfare payments lower than the wages of the actual workers, the idea that Boone, a beggar could live comfortably from the charity of others when honest workers could not, was an idea with which many would have found fault (Joyce 153-54). Simon Joyce, author of *Capital Offenses*, shows that the case of *The Man with the Twisted Lip* is truly unique:

It is clear that begging can only be profitable because Hugh Boone appeals to gullible city-dwellers, who are perhaps comforted [by] his educated patter and respond with a steady “stream of pennies, varied by silver.” In terms of this political economy, however, this weakness has more serious consequences, to which the story implicitly alludes. (153)

The working middle classes looked with contempt toward the lower classes, especially the people they labeled as the “undeserving poor.” Their “contempt” was justified as a result of the ideas of Social Darwinism that was to last through to the present day (Claeys). The privileged members of Victorian society tended to view their poorer counter parts as lesser examples of the human race, an idea that once again was supported by the science of the time. But what the upper classes failed to take into account was the growing mobility of the middle classes and their high level of competitiveness among one another. Because many members of the upper classes seldom participated in working for and earning their own income, the middle classes perceived this as inferiority and slowly began to work their way into the position of a new upper class, where status was earned rather than inherited. Conan Doyle uses this competitiveness in his character of Neville St. Clair, perhaps to criticize the differences, and inequalities, between the classes. He shows the middle-classes slowly catching up to upper classes; the middle classes gaining wealth while the upper classes began to stagnate. However, one could not say that Conan Doyle suggests that all beggars were capable of becoming rich by begging, because that was obviously not the case. As St. Claire points out,

I found that I was saving considerable sums of money. I do not

mean that any beggar in the streets of London could earn £700 a year—which is less than my average takings—but I had exceptional advantages in my power of making up, and also a facility of repartee, which improved by practice, and made me quite a recognized character in the city. (224-25)

Neville St. Clair in *The Man with the Twisted Lip* personifies the upward and downward mobility in the upper classes and the criminal activity that was often depicted as a result of such mobility. Because of their higher social status and wealth, it was assumed that the middle and upper classes were above committing the crimes observed in the lower classes. But, because of their wealth and resources, the middle and upper classes were more capable of committing even more heinous crimes than the lower classes.

This situation is perfectly demonstrated by Conan Doyle with the introduction of Professor Moriarty, Holmes' arch-nemesis who is introduced in *The Final Problem*. Moriarty, as described by Holmes, “is a man of good birth and excellent education. Endowed by nature with a phenomenal mathematical facility” (440). From this it becomes clear immediately that Moriarty himself is upper class. Born into privilege, he was a renowned mathematics professor and gentleman. Though, as Holmes points out, “the man had hereditary tendencies of the diabolical kind.” He is aptly dubbed “the Napoleon of crime,” which also indicates both his class status as well as the fact that he is at the center of a criminal network. Holmes explains, “He is the organizer of half that is evil and of nearly all that is undetected in this great city....He sits motionless, like a spider in the centre of its web, but that web had a thousand radiations, and he knows well every quiver of each of them” (440). Sherlock Holmes' descriptions of Moriarty

only help to drive home the idea that upper-class criminals were far more dangerous, and capable than the petty thieves of the lower classes.

Upper-class criminals, as portrayed in Conan Doyle's stories, were the “*crème de le crème*” as far as crime was concerned, and that was one of the things which made his stories so much more popular than those of other writers at the time. His criminals, as he demonstrated with Moriarty, were capable of creating intricate webs of criminal activity while maintaining a distance from the actual crime. The detachment seen in Conan Doyle's upper-class criminals proved that they had no need for disguise, unlike their lower-class counter parts. Conan Doyle does seem to suggest that master criminals, such as Moriarty, had no need for disguise since their money could buy them freedom from punishment. The fact that these criminals were able to move so openly without consequence may be the source of the conflict between the master criminal and the Great Detective: the ultimate clash of the classes. Though Sherlock Holmes, as assumed by Watson, appeared to be a very wealthy man, he lived his life in a very middle class fashion. Perhaps his position in middle-class society allowed him the mobility and freedom he would not have been able to indulge in as an upper-class citizen, or perhaps he simply preferred the middle-class lifestyle. Moriarty, aptly named “the Napoleon of crime”, lived up to the high-class standards of his position. He spent great sums of money so that crimes were seen to fruition and was paid great sums in return for his services. The meeting of these two men from was bound to produce a monumental clash. Even Holmes, a man not normally prone to seeking trouble, admits to Watson his desire to face Moriarty:

The man pervades London, and no one has heard of him. That's what puts him on a pinnacle in the records of crime. I tell you

Watson, in all seriousness, that if I could beat that man, if I could free society of him, I should feel that my own career had reached its summit, and I should be prepared to turn to some more placid line in life....But I could not rest, Watson, I could not sit quiet in my chair, if I thought that such a man as Professor Moriarty were walking the streets of London unchallenged. (440)

The Victorian era was a time of mass changes in English society and the clash of the lower classes with the upper classes produced the largest and most controversial of these clashes. As a detective series that had dealt with crime and sexuality, it made sense that the controversy surrounding class status would become prominent in Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's story "The Final Problem" where Sherlock Holmes and Professor Moriarty meet for the first and last time. Conan Doyle had originally intended for this story to be the final tale of the adventures of the Great Detective; but due to popular demand he brought Holmes back a few years later in a brand new set of tales that occur after his, and Moriarty's, supposed deaths at the Reichenbach Falls. The class dynamics between Holmes and Moriarty were these: Holmes was a man of the middle classes (despite his own wealth); he preferred to work for his income and was perfectly capable of moving between the lower and upper-classes when he deemed it necessary; Moriarty was born to a wealthy upper-class family, given a first-class education, and was a man known for working in the shadows, using minions to carry out his work and rarely condescending to the level of his inferiors. This approach epitomizes the class problem in Victorian society; as the middle classes grew larger, the upper classes began to diminish in prominence and power. The idea that a person could change his class status through hard work and intelligence was a very new idea that

came about during the Victorian era and not a very popular one with the upper-classes. It seemed that the upper classes were doomed either to decline from their social status or to suffer the middle class's rise to fortune. In "The Final Problem" the clash of the middle and upper classes comes to a head in the fight between Holmes and Moriarty on the bridge at the Falls.

Not only was the confrontation between two of literature's greatest minds a fight for the history and prestige of their classes, it was also a fight to determine which would dominate the social structure. Conan Doyle seemed to make his position clear by having Holmes and Moriarty die at the end of the story. But after being prevailed up on time and again by his readers, he conceded to their demands and brought the Great Detective back to life, but without his arch-nemesis. This solution proved that the middle-classes had emerged as the winners of the class wars, at least in Conan Doyle's stories. The late Victorian notion of "survival of the fittest" can be observed at its epitome in *The Final Problem*. Only those who are productive should live in society, if they are not productive, they must exist through the kindness of others on its outskirts or perish. Gregory Claeys observes T.R. Malthus' definition of survival of the fittest as "distinguished between people who benefited society (as defined in terms of productivity) and those who did not, and he defines rights as solely derived from productivity, competition-as-natural-selection dictated the survival of the "fittest"" (232). This idea, along with similar ideas from others, helped to inspire Social Darwinism. Though it is not a prominent idea in the Sherlock Holmes stories, it can be seen to influence Conan Doyle. The fact that Sherlock Holmes almost always comes out on top helps to solidify the idea that the middle classes were considered to be the fittest and would survive while the upper and lower classes would continue to fail.

CHAPTER V

THE MODERN HOLMES SENSATION

As the possible forerunners of what might now be called, “modern entertainment” Sensation Novels laid the ground work for much of the literature and media that would become popular throughout the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st. Electronic media (radio and film) were perhaps the most affected by the sensation genre. It began with silent films and radio stories such as *Diary of a Lost Girl*⁴ and H.G. Wells, *War of the Worlds*. The narration of such entertainment, before only seen on the pages of books, was now presented in sight and sound with rich, sometimes playful, sometimes doleful, music. These shows, stemming from the sensational tradition, (*Diary of a Lost Girl* was considered to be a Sensation Novel) would go on to inspire new works in genres outside of sensational literature such as Science Fiction and Horror. Now the excitement, terror, and grotesquerie that were previously found only through words could be observed through both sight and sound, a much more palpable combination for the imagination; though feelings such as touch and smell were beyond the reach of technology at the time.

While the sensation genre was developing, so was the image and interpretation of the Great Detective. As perhaps one of the most beloved and intriguing sensational characters, Sherlock Holmes' fans and followers were not about to let his image remain solely on paper. The first portrayals of Holmes were in the London theaters. In 1899 the play *Sherlock Holmes, or The Strange Case of Miss Faulkner*, the character of Holmes was written and portrayed by William Gillette and later acted by Harry Arthur Saintsbury. On the stage the iconic curved pipe and deerstalker hat (images that can be seen illustrated in *The Strand* magazine) used by Gillette

4 1905 Novel by Margaret Böhme and later adapted to film by Georg Wilhelm Pabst starring Louise Brooks.

created a concrete and lasting modern image of the Great Detective, an image that by the 1920's had evolved to film.

The first and perhaps best-known actors to portray Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson in film were Basil Rathbone and Nigel Bruce, who played their respective characters in fourteen films and a number of radio programs. Rathbone portrayed Holmes as a mostly serious, sometimes depressed man who was always up for the excitement of the case. Bruce, on the other hand, played a bumbling and oafish, as well as much-older-than-Holmes, version of Dr. Watson (a portrayal that many Sherlockians disagree with due to the stories' portrayals of Dr. Watson as intelligent and capable). Though some critics of Rathbone may say that he was too calm and collected an actor for the character of Sherlock Holmes, the fact remains that Rathbone and Bruce had an uncanny way of bringing their characters to life. With his decisive way of speaking and unique speech inflections, Rathbone's Holmes became the iconic image of the character for most of the 20th century complete with his drug use. One of his most famous lines occurs at the end of *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, the final scene leaves Holmes and Watson in front rooms at Baskerville Hall. As the main characters prepare to make their exit, Holmes leaves his audience with the words, “Ah, Watson, the needle!”

Then came the actor Jeremy Brett. Brett, in association with Granada Television, breathed new life into Sherlock Holmes, along with his Dr. Watson costars—David Burke and Edward Hardwicke, respectively—as Rathbone's Sherlock had become somewhat clichéd and overused. Brett, with a figure quite similar to that of Rathbone, had a face of sharp angles and a long hooked nose. Rathbone's image of Sherlock Holmes began to evolve with the talent of Brett into a grittier, darker character for the audience. Brett's version of the character had a much

darker personality and outlook, which more closely followed the literary Holmes. His Holmes could often be found sulking about the parlor with his eyebrows drawn tightly together and his fingers brushing his lips, as if deep in thought. Brett's facial quirks (a slight, skeptical raise to his eyebrows and an unconscious pursing of his mouth) added a dramatic element to the character that had previously been missing. Brett's career as Holmes spanned some forty shows, including three full-length films, and covered many of the same original cases written by Conan Doyle. Brett's version of Holmes is perhaps the most well-established recent image of the Great Detective in modern media. His Holmes is often unfriendly and taciturn, subject to bouts of deep depression, and quite often more of an antagonistic character to his friend, Dr. Watson. More than once Holmes can be seen sharply correcting Watson for his inaccurate deductions, though he often apologizes for such outbursts, as though he is incapable of controlling himself during such times.

Even the character of Dr. Watson was refreshed by the Granada series. No longer was he a comical and cartoonish character; he was now the complement to Holmes. Though he was still portrayed as an older gentleman, he was much more energetic and spry than Bruce's portrayal. Often Watson can be seen in the series following Holmes around with a small notebook, which he uses to take notes on the cases and Holmes' methods in solving them. As the series progressed Watson was shown attempting to apply Holmes' methods, though he is still often incorrect in his deductions. He appears to be more of an adoring student to Holmes, though he is perfectly capable and intelligent in areas of his own strengths.

These “modern” sensational media versions of Holmes went on to inspire newer, abstract 21st century interpretations of the character such as Gregory House from the medical

comedy/drama *House* and Gil Grissom from *CSI*. Though these characters are likely based on Sherlock Holmes, they are not re-workings of the character, merely modern interpretations. House, a diagnostics specialist at a renowned hospital, is perhaps the closest in character to Holmes. Possessing the same insatiable desire for the case as Holmes, he also shares the same issues of drug abuse and depression, though his personality is far more cynical and offensive than the detective's. Gil Grissom also interposes for the character of Sherlock Holmes. A withdrawn, soft-spoken character, Grissom relies solely on facts and evidence to solve crimes, and, unlike-Holmes, he never impedes the police for reasons of morality. Grissom's similarities with the character include his involvement with police as a CSI, his loner personality, and his determination to solve the case (though he does not appear to suffer a "high" when working cases).

The evolution of the Sherlock Holmes sensation went far beyond just entertainment; even though he was and is perhaps one of the most sensational characters in popular fiction. This sensationalism found in Holmes was possibly one of the most influential things about his character. Not only was he an interesting character to read; he was also inspiring, giving people reasons to better their intelligence and reasoning capabilities. These characteristics made Holmes very "real" in the sense that not only did he inspire readers, he inspired improvements in the chemistry and forensic sciences and it was due to Conan Doyle's stories that Edmond Locard went on to found the first criminal forensic laboratory in 1910 in Lyon, France.

Though many of the forensic sciences (evidence collection, fingerprinting, toxicology, chemistry, etc.) had been explored for some time before the creation of Sherlock Holmes, they were mostly "dabbling sciences," or sciences that had yet to be used for practical purposes.

Generally, in England, when a person experienced an unexplained sudden death, the coroner determined the cause of death, although they rarely had either scientific or medical expertise. Determining the cause of death was mostly guess work. When Conan Doyle's first novel *A Study in Scarlet* first premiered both readers and followers of forensic sciences were introduced to a practical and plausible use for science in solving crime.

Through the observations of Dr. Watson in *A Study in Scarlet* readers came to realize the importance of the use of deduction and observation in everyday life. Sherlock Holmes' never cluttered his mind with information he could not use in his day-to-day doings. Thus, as Dr. Watson remarks, "His ignorance was as remarkable as his knowledge. Of contemporary literature, philosophy, and politics, he appeared to know next to nothing." Though Watson does note, ironically, that Holmes had "immense" knowledge and understanding of Sensational Literature (crime, mystery, horror, etc.). In fact, much of Holmes scientific knowledge and prowess can be observed in his debut novel. Dr. Watson's first meeting with the detective is in a chemistry lab where Holmes' meeting with him is synonymous with his discovery of a way to positively test for hemoglobin, no matter the age of the stain. Holmes goes on to explain that he also scientifically meddles with poisons, tobacco ash, and dead bodies; purely for the sake of conditional observation.

As the sensation of Sherlock Holmes grew to prominence, so did the importance of the use of scientific deduction and observation in solving crime. Holmes, like many forensic scientists of the Victorian era, was at the forefront of discovering the uses of fact over fiction within science. England had a history of using superstition and folklore as scientific explanations for the improbable rather than fact. Now, with the assistance of the popularity of

Sherlock Holmes, scientists, and science itself, were taken much more seriously in determining things such as the factual truth of the cause of a sudden, unexplained death. Holmes personified a breakthrough for forensic science; one which would go on to inspire some of the most sensational real-life and fictional technologies, stories, and places. As Holmes stated, and this still holds true, “How often have I said to you that when you have eliminated the impossible, whatever remains, however *improbable*, must be the truth” (*Sign of the Four*).

The fact that the character of Sherlock Holmes has survived for over one-hundred years in both literature and media, as well as helped to legitimize the use of forensic sciences in solving crime, testifies to his ever-popular and lasting character. The most sensational thing about the character of Sherlock Holmes is that people continue to read and interpret his character to this day. Conan Doyle's stories were so influential on Victorian minds that they went on to inspire legitimate progress in the improvement of criminal forensics and evidence collection as well as new, fresh portrayals of Holmes in literature and film. Clearly the sensation that was and is Sherlock Holmes is an image that will not likely fade in any near future, but rather grow and continue to envelop readers and viewers in a world of sensational possibilities.

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