



Facultade de Filoloxía

Traballo de
fin de grao



Sherlock Holmes as a barometer of Late Victorian England

Autora: Regina Martínez Ponciano

Director: Jorge Sacido Romero

Xullo 2015



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“Nothing is easier than to admit in words the truth of the universal struggle for life, or more difficult --at least I have found it so-- than constantly to bear this conclusion in mind.”

— CHARLES DARWIN, *THE ORIGIN OF SPECIES*

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ABBREVIATIONS

NOVELS¹

<i>Hound</i>	<i>The Hound of the Baskervilles</i> (August, 1901–April, 1902)
<i>Sign</i>	<i>The Sign of Four</i> (1890)
<i>Study</i>	<i>A Study in Scarlet</i> (1887)
<i>Valley</i>	<i>The Valley of Fear</i> (September, 1914–November, 1914)

SHORT STORY COLLECTIONS²

<i>Adventures</i>	<i>The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes</i> (1891–92)
<i>Bow</i>	<i>His Last Bow</i> (1917)
<i>Casebook</i>	<i>The Casebook of Sherlock Holmes</i> (1921–27)
<i>Memoirs</i>	<i>The Memoirs of Sherlock Holmes</i> (1892–93)
<i>Return</i>	<i>The Return of Sherlock Holmes</i> (1903–04)

¹ All subsequent references to the novels are to Klinger's edition listed under primary sources in the bibliography and are given in parentheses in the text.

² All subsequent references to the short stories are to Wordsworth Edition listed under primary sources in the bibliography and are given in parentheses in the text.

0. INTRODUCTION

“Fin de siècle,” murmured Lord Henry.

“Fin du globe,” answered his hostess.

—OSCAR WILDE, *THE PICTURE OF DORIAN GREY*

The late Victorian era marked a time in which modernity’s belief in Progress acted as a powerful driving force, but was nevertheless questioned from different corners. At the end of the nineteenth century, the peak of national, economic and imperial splendour was overshadowed by the decline and the critique of what had been High Victorian values, beliefs, social and personal Enlightenment standards of moral rectitude, religious orthodoxy, sexual reserve, and hard work. Darwinism, urbanization, pollution, crime, socialism, feminism, and the multiplication of sexual and psychological deviants put all traditional High Victorian values into question. To these domestic affairs, concerns of colonial setbacks, the rise of other colonial empires and the fears of colonial reversion were added.

It was in these circumstances that Sir Arthur Ignatius Conan Doyle (1859–1930) lived and wrote. He was, besides a physician and a writer, a firm endorser of masculine values and very much implicated in political life. He was an Arctic whale hunter during his university years, a Boer war physician at the turn of the century, and an avid British propagandist and apologist of the Empire throughout his life. He ran twice for Parliament representing the Scottish Unionist Party, and was, too, frontrunner in new sports as cricket, football, skiing and even one of the first motorists in Great Britain. For his propagandist pamphlet on the Boer War he was knighted by King Edward VII and appointed Deputy-Lieutenant of Surrey. In an opposite fashion, Conan Doyle was also interested in less material matters. Born in a Catholic family and brought up by Jesuits, he had never truly found comfort in Christianity and rather gravitated towards scientism as a means of understanding and categorizing the world. When modern atheism and materialism, too, proved insufficient, Conan Doyle turned

toward Spiritualism, a *via media* between science and religion. We have evidence of his interest in Spiritualism as early as 1886, that is, one year before the publication of the first Sherlock Holmes story. He joined the British Society for Psychical Research in 1893 —the year in which he famously killed his detective off. This society had been founded a year earlier to establish the scientific basis Spiritualism and other supernatural phenomena. Conan Doyle, adamant on scientific proof, was only completely converted to Spiritualism in 1917 and would remain a convicted believer until his death in 1930. Other than his contributions to the scientific research in spiritualism, Conan Doyle wished to be remembered for his literary production. In interviews he would state that from his literary career he wished people to value above all his historical adventure novels *Micah Clarke* (1889) or *The White Company* (1891), however, it would be his Sherlock Holmes stories that would be most successful.

Inspired by the methods of diagnosis of his professor of medicine Dr. Joseph Bell (1837–1911) at the University of Edinburgh, Conan Doyle refined and reworked the figure of the detective as established by Poe He created William Sherlock Scott Holmes (1854–?), the world’s first consulting detective.³ The now-worldwide phenomenon, however, did not have an easy start, and Conan Doyle’s initial expectations for a detached, ratiocinate Great Detective had to be readjusted. Three years after the relatively cold reception of *A Study in Scarlet* (1887), managing director of the American *Lippincott’s Monthly Magazine* Joseph M. Stoddart organized a literary soirée at the Langham Hotel in West End, London, to which Conan Doyle and Oscar Wilde (1854-1900) were invited. Stoddart sought sensation, which Oscar Wilde provided with *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890) and Conan Doyle with *The Sign of the Four* (1890). Conan Doyle, in need of both financial and literary success, adorned *Sign* with “what no other Holmes story was ever to have in such large measure... [m]ystery, adventure, excitement, exotic characterization, and, all importantly, romance” (McGregor

³ Sherlock was born in the same year as Oscar Wilde, five years before Conan Doyle.

qtd. in Riezenman 12). Though the novella received good reviews, and, with it, Conan Doyle consolidated the innovations he had implemented in *Study* and further refined Sherlock Holmes' eccentric, Dupin-like character, the stories did not yet take off.

The popularity of the Sherlock Holmes stories were abetted by improvements in literacy, a boom in mass-circulation periodicals, and a taste for celebrity culture. All had grown enormously in the last two decades of the century, creating a reading audience of unprecedented size and with a broader, middlebrow market. The *Strand Magazine*, which “gloried in its Englishness, treating its readers as lucky to be living in England at the heart of a great empire” (Press 12) targeted this middle-class market of a moderate educated level. This audience could relate very well to a narrator of the likes of Dr. John H. Watson (1852–1929), a fellow member of the middle class who not only had risked his life in the name of the Empire in the Second Afghan War but also embodied all the values that were expected from a Victorian gentleman. Although he was relatively unknown, Conan Doyle showed himself to be a professional writer capable of fitting the stories and their protagonist to the magazine's requirements. Bearing the *Strand's* potential readership in mind, Conan Doyle rewrote the initially anti-social, egoistic, bohemian detective of *Study* and *Sign* to fit the needs and tastes of the *Strand's* middlebrow readership in *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* (1891–92). As a result, the *Adventures* and subsequent stories portrayed an increasingly humanized and a more domestic detective. However, Conan Doyle, whose personal ambivalences towards modernity made it increasingly infeasible to use Sherlock's rationality as a way to combat what Max Weber (1864–1920) labelled ‘the disenchantment of the world’, inevitably grew tired of his detective. He ended Holmes' life at the end of *The Memoirs of Sherlock Holmes* in 1893. Persuaded by popular demand and a lucrative contract, however, Conan Doyle published *The Hound of the Baskervilles* almost a decade later, in 1901, and officially revived the detective in *The Return of Sherlock Holmes* in 1903.

By adapting to the popular standards of the time, Conan Doyle created a cultural phenomenon that remains alive today. Where Dupin will always be Edgar Allan Poe's, Lecoq Emile Gaboriau's, and Hercule Poirot Agatha Christie's, Sherlock Holmes is not only generally regarded as separate from Conan Doyle, whose occult affiliations have discredited him forever, but has ever since his *Adventures* also been considered the highest standard new detectives have to live up to.

The study of the Sherlock Holmes canon offers a valuable perspective on the socio-literary circumstances of the British fin-de-siècle, for they provide an ample exploration of quintessentially British preoccupations with bodily, moral, and imperial decline. Sherlock Holmes was tailored to respond to these middlebrow preoccupations. Although detective fiction is generally assumed to be ideologically void and a mere exercise of logic disguised as popular entertainment, my point throughout this essay is that Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes' deductive powers do not only solve specific mysteries but hold the promise of doing away with or finding relief from the anxieties of turn-of-the-century British middle class. The satisfaction of the solution that the detective story provides fits perfectly in an age of various uncertainties and anxieties that originated with scientific discourses of evolution and degeneration. My aim is to demonstrate that the detective's adventures, although designed to assuage the fin-the-siècle angst, only offered partial solutions to these uncertainties and anxieties.

As social and literary critic Max Nordau (1849–1923), who was on the lookout of traces of the artist's degeneration in literary texts, we will assume that “that individual character expresses (and thus reveals) itself most coherently through the medium of literary writing” and “that literary works exert a profound influence over the shape and ‘health’ of a culture” (Arata, *Loss* 55). This means that I will take into account Conan Doyle's personal

concerns while looking for signs that enable Sherlock Holmes to function as the middle-class' barricade against degeneration. This position assumes that Sherlock Holmes was an important factor in the protection of the 'health' of the English identity, which does not, however, necessarily mean he was unambiguous. To this end, a preliminary exploration of the development of evolution and degeneration theory will be given in sections 1.1 and 1.2, respectively, which will serve illustrate how these initially scientific concepts were translated to the popular spheres. Aware of the fact that these introductory sections are necessarily reductive, I wish to stress that there I concentrate more on how these concepts spread into and were assimilated by the popular spheres. This will focus on the *effects* of these two revolutionary scientific developments and on the late Victorian interpretation of both more than on the notions themselves. In section 1.3 I sketch some concluding remarks which will serve as a general overview of how these scientific discourses resulted in the multiplication of identities. Chapter 2 will serve two purposes. First, section 2.1 will examine one of the most important identity issues of the time, namely, the fear that Britain's degenerate colonial 'others' would infect the metropolis. Though I will take into account *A Study in Scarlet* and *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, my main focus of interest will be *The Sign of the Four*. Section 2.2 will take a look at Sherlock Holmes celebrated 'science of deduction' and argue how the scientifically inclined method of detection of *Study* and *Sign*, as it is mostly remembered today, shifted into the 'scientific use of the imagination' in *The Hound of the Baskervilles*. In this chapter I will consider fragments from *Study*, *Sign* and selected short stories, whose considerations of the former concept will serve as contrast with the analysis of the latter in *Hound*. I evidently take into account that the latter was published a decade after the detective had been killed off. These angles will permit to examine the Late Victorian period through a domestic and imperial lens.

Upon choosing the materials for this essay, *A Study in Scarlet* was immediately discarded for its primitive character, as was *The Valley of Fear* (1914) for its tardiness. Both *The Sign of the Four* and *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, however, reunited all the issues I sought to touch upon. Among the Sherlock Holmes narratives, *Sign* provides the most extensive treatment of colonial relations, while *Hound* is traditionally considered a classic of the detective genre in which scientism conquers the supernatural. Both respond to post-Darwinian uncertainties of national and imperial decline of contemporary society, and both present the victorious detective as indispensable for the survival and selection of middle-class virtues and for the solving of fin-the-siècle mysteries.

1. DARWINISM AND DEGENERATION: DISSOLVING HIGH VICTORIAN BELIEFS

“I learned to recognise the thorough and primitive duality of man; I saw that, of the two natures that contended in the field of my consciousness, even if I could rightly be said to be either, it was only because I was radically both.”

—ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON,
THE STRANGE CASE OF DR. JEKYLL AND MR. HYDE

1.1 EVOLUTION, OR DEVOLUTION?

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, evolutionary thought was associated with materialism, atheism and radical political thought, which meant that reputed scientists and intellectuals abstained themselves from participating in the evolutionary debate. The anonymous publication of *Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation* (1844) by Robert Chambers (1802–71) started lifting the taboo on evolution by proposing it as an acceptable topic of debate in the middle-class environment. The scientific elite of the time, however, rejected Chambers’ proposals and it was not until the publication of Charles Darwin’s *The Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection or The Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life* (1859) that evolution theory was legitimized (Lightman 288). Darwin’s *Origin* did not prevail because of its originality, for it rather “assimilated all the major prevailing evolutionary theories of the time”, but because of its “coherent, reasoned argument supported by the evidence of numerous practical examples” (Goldsmith 20). It constituted a rational, well-constructed Baconian hypothesis on the formation of the universe which Herbert Spencer (1820–1903) successfully “reduced to a system” (Lightman 286).

Within a decade of the publication of *Origin*, the theory of evolution had already started making an incredible impact on the Victorian mind. Popularizing activities undertaken over the next decades by distinguished scientists of the time as John Tyndall (1820–83),

Francis Galton (1822–1911),⁴ Alfred Russel Wallace (1823–1913), T.H. Huxley (1825–95),⁵ Leslie Stephen (1832–1904), William James (1842–1910), together with prominent literary figures such as George Eliot (1819–80), H.G. Wells (1866–1946), Joseph Conrad (1857–1924), and Thomas Hardy (1840–1928) contributed to the investigation, acceptance, and assimilation of evolutionary theory into everyday usage. During the 1860s and 70s, Darwin’s colleagues spread both Darwinism and their own take on evolution through books, public lectures, and the periodical press rather than recurring to specialized scientific publications (Carroll viii–ix). Ed Block Jr. provides examples of the numerous articles that appeared in non-scientific periodicals, such as the *Contemporary Review*, the *Fortnightly Review*, the *Nineteenth Century*, and *Cornhill Magazine* during the last quarter of the nineteenth century. These magazines juxtaposed accounts of dual consciousness, primitive man, animal intelligence, heredity and disease; provided speculations about dreaming, ethical philosophy and evolution, human personality, and the growth and decay of the mind (443). The Darwinians’ dissemination of evolutionary theory through these periodicals constituted an “open intelligent forum” available to the educated members of the middle-class (Lightman 294).

Although Darwin had clear intentions to persuade his fellow scientists of the value of theory of evolution, he also made considerable effort to appeal to the non-scientific communities. J.W. Burrow, in his introduction to *Origin*, wrote that Darwin’s writing style was “considerably above the general polemical standards of the time: calm, reasoned, mild and unrheterical in tone, yet capable of rising to the occasion” (qtd. in Goldsmith 22). To

⁴ Galton was Darwin’s half-cousin, they both were the grandchildren of Erasmus Darwin, whom had already developed ‘transmutationist ideas’ in his long poems *Zoonomia* (1794–94), *Phytologia* (1799) and *The Temple of Nature* (1803) (Cannon Schmitt in Lightman 20). Galton coined the term ‘eugenics’ in 1883, and popularized the expression ‘nature versus nurture’.

⁵ Huxley was the leading popularizer of science, and most notably of Darwinism in the late nineteenth century. Huxley had been a former critic of the *Vestiges*, yet was converted by Darwin into believing in evolution (Lightman 292).

this, Gillian Beer adds that Darwin's contemporaries shared this "non-mathematical discourse [...which] drew openly upon literary, historical, and philosophical material as part of their arguments" (Ibid.). The deliberate use of an uncomplicated language not only testifies Darwin and the Darwinians' intention to reach a wider reading audience, but also allowed for a "cross-fertilization of ideas between different types of writing and different types of writer [...and served] to blur the boundary between fact and fiction" among these non-specialists (Ibid.). The articles cited by Block Jr. were placed between actual police cases and fictional stories, as for example the Sherlock Holmes stories. The detective's stories drew heavily from the same scientific discourse as the Darwinians used, which only added to the illusion of the stories' scientism and credibility.⁶

Darwin's *Origin* did not sell as well as one might expect, and certainly not as well as Darwin's defenders had hoped it would. By 1875, only 15,000 copies had been sold, in spite of Darwin's efforts to make the book cheaper and more reader-friendly.⁷ This difficulty in the initial transmission of evolutionary theory was due to several reasons. On the one hand, the small number of Darwinians each defended a different take on evolution—and thus evolutionary theory was more vulnerable to large scientific and religious opposition (Lightman 289–293). On the other hand, the association between evolution theory and radicalism remnant from the beginning of the century that was still palpable during the backwash of *Origin*. Darwinians were forced to defend themselves, both individually and collectively, against charges of immoral materialism, which considerably obstructed the establishment "the evolutionary worldview" as a morally tolerable alternative to Christianity (Lightman 296). The respectability and credibility of the few Darwinians whom at the time

⁶ The stories are full of references to books or talks by Darwinians. "The Adventures of the Dancing Men", for example, one of the stories of *The Return of Sherlock Holmes*, relies on the premises of T.H. Huxley's "On a piece of Chalk" (1868)" to solve the mystery. As Huxley, Sherlock Holmes can unravel his clients past by understanding the meaning of the messages in chalk.

⁷ Chambers' *Vestiges*, in contrast, sold 21,250 copies within a decade of its publication (Lightman 293), Nordau's *Degeneration* went through seven editions in its first year of publication (Arata 27), the *Strand Magazine* sold 30,000 *extra* copies when *The Hound of the Baskervilles* was published (Stashower 237).

had defended Darwinism was often compromised, which thwarted their quest of popularizing the theory.

The 1880s marked a turning point in the place of Darwinism in the popular mind. The publications of various biographies testifying Charles Darwin's 'sterling character' —his son's three-volume *Life and Letters of Charles Darwin* (1887) as the best example— contributed to the disassociation of Darwinism and immorality (Lightman 302–3). The upturn in appreciation for the father of evolution allowed for the propagation of his theories to a broader audience. In the 1890s, this resulted in an increasing reconciliation between religious and scientific views on the creation of the universe, testified by a strong presence of best-selling non-scientific books on evolution (Lightman 305).

The dissemination of evolution theory, from the biological spheres to popular culture, evidently brought with it a set of changes in the Victorian mind. Among British Protestants, for whom empirical knowledge and Faith had not been mutually exclusive, the scientific disproof of the Scriptures roused confusion of a cultural, political, societal, and epistemological nature (Alexander 259). Darwinism, in its various forms and stages, changed the way Victorians thought of and saw themselves. To some, Darwinism added to the High Victorian ideology of continual Progress, since evolutionary ascent was attested by fossil evidence and by human biological and social complexity. Yet, to others, it “decentered humans, returning them to the status of mere animals” (Glenending 14), thereby distancing man from its privileged relationship with God.⁸ To the former, the numerous scientific findings in palaeontology, archaeology, and cultural anthropology effaced religious dogma to make room for the development of rationalism (Goldsmith 21). To the latter, however, such findings only furthered the belief that the decline of Victorian society was inevitable, for

⁸ The later-nineteenth century saw the emergence of agnosticism, spiritualism, and various alternative lifestyles that sought comfort outside Christian tradition.

great empires and evolutionary complex species had already been extinct over the course of history (Glenending 15). The latter belief proved dominant in late Victorian England.

It should be duly noted that mankind is hardly discussed in *Origin*. Upon the writing of his would-be revolutionary text, Darwin “had been fearful of endangering his general theory of evolution by alarming people in their most tender ideological anxieties”, which led him to mention human beings only in passing (Carroll viii). However, T.H. Huxley in *Man’s Place in Nature* (1863), British geologist Charles Lyell (1797–1875) in *Geological Evidences of the Antiquity of Man* (1863) and Darwin himself in *The Descent of Man* (1871) quickly applied evolutionary framework to human life and destiny (Gilmour 128–129).⁹ The fortuitous and apparently random variations that accounted for the development of simpler systems into more complex ones, and vice versa, were made evident by the evolutionary framework. They were perceived as disconcerting by those who had held belief in continual Progress and were particularly threatening to the conception Victorians had of themselves (Gilmour 129). Increasingly, fear of evolutionary regression and its subsequent frustrations created a chaos in which dualities that were at the base of Western thinking ceased to be binary. The oppositions mind/matter, free will/fate, man/animal, modern/primitive, masculinity/femininity, individual/group, self/other, progress/degeneration, good/evil, life/death, order/chaos (Glenending 15) were no longer as disparate as they had previously been, but were in the Darwinian world of ‘struggle’ relativized to a matter of survival. As Clausen points out,

[n]ot only the order of society but civilization itself was a precarious creation, maintained with immense efforts against continuous threats. The theory of evolution gave to this pervasive fear a form that was at once scientific and iconographic, for the anarchic and bestial appetites that were so inimical to order could now be seen as survivals of primitive life, of the time when man was half an ape. Reason, morality, law, love, art –all the qualities that made civilization possible were late developments in the evolution of the species, and their hold on mankind was as yet so tenuous that the slightest emergency might re-establish the control of older, darker forces. (116)

⁹ From these later contributions emerged Social Darwinism.

This blurred status had the effect of a dissolvent on traditional ideologies and conceptions, thus contributing to an unstable perception of reality and to an increased fear of regression that we may dub “post-Darwinian”.

It must be pointed out that these evolutionary concerns were exploited by the British capitalist middle-classes. Evolutionary ideas of ‘struggle’ for existence and ‘survival of the fittest’ were an apt tool by means of which they could both justify the unequal, economic status quo within England itself and imperial attitudes founded on ideas of biological and racial superiority. The middle class, however, was expanding. This meant that the middle class not only enforced discriminatory means by which they could exclude others, but was increasingly also examining itself, separating its ‘fit’ members from those who threatened the middle class’ evolution.

In conclusion, late Victorian England moved away from the anthropocentric regime of natural theology towards a Darwinian world of uncertainty, constant survival and competition. Victorian interest in the theory of evolution, testified by the large array of scientific publications, eventually found its way out of the merely scientific spheres through mass print culture. Concurrently, social and bodily decay, regression, and fear of both external and internal invasion increasingly permeate the discourses in Late Victorian England. Throughout the second half of the nineteenth century, as we will see, the Darwinian discourse was appropriated, distorted, decontextualized, to justify and articulate emerging social, economic and racial ideologies.

By spreading and popularizing evolutionary theory, Darwinians contributed to its domestication, thus irrevocably shaping Victorian culture in its entirety.

1.2 DEGENERATION: FROM PSYCHIATRY TO IDEOLOGICAL DISCOURSE

The concern with evolutionary regression translated into the development of a concept crucial to understand Late Victorian England, but which, perhaps paradoxically, is not so easily defined. Evolutionary scientists, criminal anthropologists and medical psychiatrists were confronted with “the apparent paradox that civilization, science and economic progress might be the catalyst of, as much as the defence against, physical and social pathology” (Pick 11). This realization spurred French clinical psychiatrist Benedict-Augustin Morel (1809–73) to coin the word *dégénérescence*, that is, ‘degeneration’, in his *Traité des Dégénérescences Physiques, Intellectuelles et Orales De L’espèce Humaine* of 1857.¹⁰ The great difficulty in defining degeneration is due to its protean nature, for the term originated in the psychiatric field, but was appropriated by various biological and anthropological disciplines during the late nineteenth century. Thus, degeneration became a means by which Late Victorians could articulate political, physiological, and psychological concerns about disease and decay. The regression, or devolution, that Darwinism had brought to the force shook the Victorians’ firm belief in progress, which resulted in —and became apparent with— the increase of insanity and criminality rates, imperial anxiety, preoccupation with urbanization, and the proliferation of deviant sexualities. In England, the absence of a founding text on degeneration not only makes it difficult to trace the theorisation of degeneration, which “runs alongside, but also within, the terms of Darwinian evolution” (Pick 176). It also serves to explain how Morel’s definition of degeneration as a “morbid deviation from an original and thus normative type” moved “with often disconcerting fluidity” through an ample array of intellectual disciplines and popular texts (Arata, *Loss* 15).

¹⁰ Showalter reads Dr. Moreau’s name, in H.G. Well’s *The Island of Dr. Moreau* (1895), as an allusion to both Benedict-Augustin Morel and French psychiatrist Jacques-Joseph Moreau (178).

Although it can be argued that the theory of progress has always been accompanied by accounts of “potential inversions, recalcitrant forces, subversive ‘others’” (Pick 20), it seems that the second half of the nineteenth century is particularly rich in medical and scientific writings on social and bodily degeneration. Morel’s *Traité des Dégénérescences* articulated the “pseudo-science of degeneration theory” as a way to theorize social decay (Arata, *Loss* 2). Morel, a specialist in the study of cretinism, paid particular attention to the identification of external and bodily ‘stigmata’ by which the degenerate subject could be identified. Where previous semiotic systems as physiognomy and phrenology had already established a link between outer deformity and inner depravity, degeneration theory demonstrated the “multivalence of bodily signs” which hindered an accurate diagnosis (Arata, *Loss* 20–21).¹¹ Morel hence acknowledged the necessity of identifying not only ‘bodily stigmata’, but also ‘mental stigmata’, or ‘internal differences’. These were invisible and inaccessible “manifestations of an essence which was beyond human sense perception”, locked away in the individual’s psyche (Arata, *Loss* 21).¹² English medical-psychiatrist Henry Maudsley (1835–1918) was, too, on the lookout for “sign-board[s] denoting the rottenness within” in *Body and Mind* (1870) (qtd. in Arata, *Loss* 20). He reconciled a medico-psychiatric theory of degeneration, a Darwinian theory of evolutionary regression, and a positivist theory of criminal inheritance, inscribed in a “wider current of concern about the pathology of the city and modernity” (Pick 203). Italian criminologist Cesare Lombroso (1835–1909), in *L’Uomo Delinquente* (1876), expanded Morel’s notion of degeneration through what he denominated ‘atavistic retrogression’, which elaborated a positivist hypothesis on criminal inheritance. According to Lombroso, the criminal, as Morel’s

¹¹ “The late-Victorian doctor of pathology differs from the phrenologist or physiognomist of mid-century primarily in the institutionally conferred authority he enjoys. Thus, despite the highly visible connections between phrenology and degeneration theory, the two practices can be distinguished on the grounds of the latter’s status as a professional discourse” (Arata 31).

¹² Popular literary works of the time that beautifully exploit this are, of course, *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* by Robert Louis Stevenson (1850–1894) and *A Picture of Dorian Gray* by Oscar Wilde (1854–1900). In Sherlock Holmes, too, bodily stigmata are deceptive and inner depravity can long remain invisible.

degenerate, could be identified by congenital anomalies. However, Lombroso sustained that the habitual criminal's depravity dated from its ape ancestor, which he intended to demonstrate through elaborate measurements and charts (Spencer 204). However, contrary to Morel's theory of degeneration, which sustained that degeneration would expand and aggravate from generation to generation until eventually the degenerate line would be extinguished, Lombroso's taxonomy of criminal stigmata "does not in itself carry any implications of pervasive biological and social decline since, on the contrary, it highlights the anomalous status of the throwback" (Neill 613). Social critic Max Simon Nordau's *Entartung* (1895) concluded that "madness, suicide, crime and pathological literature symptomized modern times" (qtd. in Pick 24), and was not only to be found in the asylum, but also in the commonplace. Nordau's *Entartung*, which translates as 'degeneration', was dedicated to his teacher Cesare Lombroso. The first English edition went through seven editions in the first year of publication, demonstrating not only an avid interest in the topic, but also Nordau's success at interpreting the implications of a clinical pathology as of common interest (Arata 27).

The aforementioned works illustrate how degeneration shifted from psychiatry to criminology to social and literary criticism, or rather, from a medico-psychiatric identification of the individual degenerate to the preoccupation with a (potentially) diseased nation. The assimilation of degeneration into popular culture was extended to cover a wider array of social ills, so that by the 1880s degeneration theory "provide[d] a continuum between biological and social thought that makes nonsense of the usual efforts to distinguish between them, and was so culturally useful that it could explain persuasively all the pathologies from which the nation suffered" (Robert Nye qtd. in Arata, *Loss* 15). By the 1890s, various generations of anthropometrists, psychiatrists, anthropologists and lawyers had subverted the positive take on evolution, thereby creating "that mood of unease with

terms of evolutionary theory and its relation to social progress” by articulating in biological terms that “widening political contradiction between national prosperity and empire on the one hand, and persistent urban poverty, criminal sub-culture and social pathology on the other” (Pick 200).

This shift across the disciplines, however, was not homogeneous. Various questions concerning the body, the nation, and the empire interacted in a plurality of ways with scientific theories and political ideologies. It was also not purely academic, for degeneration theory sturdily moved itself in realms of theoretical speculation and was spread through the medium of mass-market texts and popular fiction. Popular works, like Morel’s, Lombroso’s, Nordau’s or Maudsley’s, “were widely known and cited —yet they were more often disjointed” (Arata, *Loss* 19). Since the technical term had quickly become assimilated into the vernacular it had instigated various questions and social debates on the meaning and consequences of degeneration, which relied heavily on the natural sciences, particularly on evolutionary theory. This discourse, however, lacked a conceptual coherency and a rational methodology, and precisely because it was studied in a large variety of intellectual disciplines it could never be successfully ascertained. Bearing this in mind, Pick argues that degeneration was rather

a shifting term produced, inflected, refined, and re-constituted in the movement between human sciences, fictional narratives and socio-political commentaries [... which served to] anchor meaning, but paradoxically its own could never be fully established indeed was in doubt more than all the others; it explained everything and nothing as it moved back and forth between the clinic, the novel, and the newspaper and the government investigation. (7–8)

Thus, Pick concludes, degeneration became

a fantastic kaleidoscope of concerns and objects through the second half of the [nineteenth] century, from cretinism to alcoholism to syphilis, from peasantry to urban working class, bourgeoisie to aristocracy, madness to theft, individual to crowd, anarchism to feminism, population decline to population increase. (15)

Since degeneration theory fits well within larger traditions of decline and fall, and was in Great Britain only non-scientifically defined, it became an uncritically absorbed ideological,

rather than scientific, discourse. With it, the middle-class could justify their distaste of what it considered departures of the middle-class norm. Thus, degeneration theory was used to enforce middle-class values, thereby ‘othering’ departures “as deviant, criminal, psychotic, defective, simple, hysterical, diseased, primitive, regressive, or just dangerous” (Arata, *Loss* 16–17).

The integration of degeneration theory in the Victorian mind coincides with the conclusive consolidation of a capitalist bourgeoisie. Although both the bourgeoisie’s discourse—as Nordau’s—intends to convince others, and thereby themselves, that the bourgeoisie was far from degenerate, “it covertly expresses the anxieties of a middle class worried about its own present status and future prospects” (Arata, *Loss* 32). Although the middle-classes frequently resorted to discriminating discourse to attack its ‘other’, they were increasingly preoccupied in finding degeneracy within their own class. Class differences were, in the late nineteenth century, blurring, for the aristocracy increasingly adopted middle-class habits and the middle class itself, as a consequence of modernization, was expanding. If degeneration theory relies on the identification of departures from the norm, it also asks the question of what that norm is, or, at least, what that norm should be.

1.3 TOWARDS A NEW IDENTITY

Late Victorian worries with its present and its future expressed itself with an obsession with nomenclature, which has to be read as a need to retrace the boundaries that separated good from evil, civil from savage, and progression from regression. In this period, existing ideologies and identities were re-examined, and new alternatives were sought to quench the thirst for spiritual fulfilment. The late Victorian era therefore saw an increase of interest for other religions, scientific alternatives to religions, agnosticism, spiritualism and the occult. Various types of personalities were (re)invented, as for example the homosexual, the (New) woman, the criminal, and an idiosyncratic version of the aristocrat. Politics became increasingly democratic; socialism and feminism emerged; the middle class grew; the aristocracy degenerated. Literature responded with an interest in non-Western art, the Gothic, fantasy fiction, feminist writing, naturalist fiction, decadence and aestheticism, which emerged as coping mechanisms. Popular literary works such as *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886) dealt with consciousness, homosexuality, and criminal pathology; *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891) explored sexual and moral ambiguities in relation to degeneration; *The Time Machine* (1895) exposed anxieties concerning class division, capitalism, and evolution; and *Dracula* (1897) dramatized fears of reverse colonization, perversity, and moral degeneration.

As late Victorian problems became increasingly Gothicised, so did the late Victorian body and mind. The evolutionary and psycho-medic theories we have so far explored all expected corruption and decay of the body and mind to be simultaneously a response to and the reason for national corruption and decay. They were normally projected as belonging to the 'other', yet reflected a preoccupation with the self. I have already pointed out that Stevenson's and Wilde's oeuvres respond to the anxiety that degeneration evades immediate detection. Additionally, I would like to lead the attention to the fact that the protagonists of

these works enjoyed a respectable social position, as a lawyer and as a member of the aristocracy, respectively. This only added to the fear of the pervasiveness of degeneration, which, as the novels suggested, had already corrupted members of the upper classes. In this light, the creation of a strong figure—that was both a defender of middle class values yet enough of an outsider to be able to regulate without a conflict of interests, who was capable of detecting degenerates, atavists, and threats to the social order, and who did so with authority—was destined to be a welcome solution. This figure was crucial in the eighties and nineties, which constituted a period of transition between the optimism of the Victorian period and Modernism, an age that questioned the validity of that previous optimism. Both the detective and the late Victorian era tried to assimilate and accommodate new connections between body and mind, however, both only provided contradictory and ambiguous explanations.

2. SHERLOCK HOLMES AS A BAROMETER OF LATE-VICTORIAN ENGLAND

“My mind,” he said, “rebels at stagnation. Give me problems, give me work, give me the most abstruse cryptogram or the most intricate analysis, and I am in my own proper atmosphere. I can dispense then with artificial stimulants. But I abhor the dull routine of existence. I crave for mental exaltation. That is why I have chosen my own particular profession, —or rather created it, for I am the only one in the world.”

—SIR ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE, *THE HOUND OF THE BASKERVILLES*

2.1 THE RETURN OF COLONIAL GUILT IN *THE SIGN OF THE FOUR*

As I have been discussing all along, at the turn of the century, Victorian confidence was under pressure. Not only had evolution and degeneration theory made an irrevocable impact on the fin-de-siècle mind, also the state of the Empire was an increasing source of unrest and anxiety. “The decay of British global influence, the loss of overseas markets for British goods, the economic and political rise of Germany and the United States, the increasing unrest in British colonies and possessions, the growing domestic uneasiness over the morality of imperialism”, says Arata, contributed to the disintegration of “Victorian confidence in the inevitability of British progress and hegemony” (“Occidental” 622). James Buzzard states that late-nineteenth century England feared invasion, despite the absence of “actual threats from the outside” (440). The collective fear for invasion was nonetheless “remarkably and lastingly potent in mobilizing the desire for a national oneness” (Ibid.). Popular fiction of the 1880s and 1890s repeatedly express anxieties of invasion, miscegenation, and degeneration (Clarke 527), and a sense that the whole nation, as a race and as a political power, was in irreparable decline. Where High Victorian literature confined troubles and troublesome characters to the colonies —as for example St. John Rivers in *Jane Eyre* (1847) or Pip in *Great Expectations* (1861)— in late Victorian literature problematic figures came from the colonies to disrupt the balance in the metropolis (Arata, *Loss* 107). Late Victorian fiction

often opted for these narratives of “reverse colonization” in which ‘primitive’ forces penetrate and (try to) infect ‘civilized’ society much in the same way the colonizer had overtaken overseas territories (Arata “Occidental”). The ‘returned colonials’ are often portrayed as menacing, and their presence in the metropolis inexorably leads to either crime or tragedy. However, as Yumna Siddiqi points out, “return from the colonies to the metropole was a routine phenomenon, and returned colonials were familiar figures on the metropolitan landscape” (233). Although real-life returned colonials were less a problem than fin-de-siècle fiction suggests, fantasies of reverse colonization articulate factual geopolitical anxieties, and are interpreted by Arata as manifestations of cultural guilt. In the ‘other’ that returns to the metropolis to threaten its social balance, “British culture sees its own imperial practices mirrored back in monstrous form” (Arata, “Occidental” 623).

Although Arata does not include crime fiction in his article, *The Sign of the Four* expresses preoccupations with the possibility of reverse colonization. The returned colonials of this novella are all involved in deceit, violence, or even murder, which in all cases is linked to their sojourn in the colonies. Their return to England endangers the standing social order. Not only because the returned colonials were originally ‘ordinary’ British citizens, thus suggesting that the British identity was less incorruptible than desired, but also because their purposeful voyage from the peripheries to the metropolis suggested a direct attack to British authority.

Conan Doyle, as briefly discussed in the introduction, was a defender rather than a critic of the British Empire. However, as early as the opening lines of *A Study in Scarlet*, as Clarke contends, “Doyle strongly articulates an anxiety about the permeability of national boundaries” (528). While still under the influence of the horrors he experienced during the Second Afghan War, Watson describes London, as “that great cesspool into which all the loungers and idlers of the Empire are irresistibly drained” (*Study* 14). The comparison of the

great capital with a cultural sewage qualifies the metropolis as “a dirty, deregulated space, easily, almost automatically permeable to foreign substances and things [...which] resists the possibility of maintaining control of, or policing, the movement of bodies and things across personal and national boundaries” (Clarke 528). The presence of these “loungers and idlers of the Empire” are thus, in Conan Doyle’s fiction, explicitly linked to the abject condition of the capital of the Empire whose imperial project has opened the gate and let contagion in.

Relying on racist discourses which evolutionary theory had made possible, the colonies were presented by the metropolis as a society of two classes. The colonizers would belong to the ruling class and the natives would form the subordinate, colonized class. However, reality showed that the class differences in the colonies were as pronounced as in bourgeois Europe: “along with its English ‘nabobs,’ colonial European society produced its contingent of paupers, vagrants, orphans, prostitutes, the insane, and criminals” (Siddiqi 239). To the colonial project, these degenerate varieties of paupers and vagrants —the ‘loungers and idlers’ Conan Doyle pens about— undermined the appearance of European racial superiority, and their ‘going native’ brought out the fragility of the European identity. Siddiqi takes this into account and acknowledges two types of English colonial figures “who have fallen through the cracks of the imperial economy and society” (245) in Conan Doyle’s detective fiction. Their return to England as perpetrators of calamity and crime suggests that something is rotten in the Empire. They are the ‘respectable colonial’ and his undesirable double the imperial lumpenproletarian.¹³ The former

returns to England with the wealth he has acquired abroad and invests it in land [he lives by and reproduces the traditional lifestyle of the English gentry; and his “rude strength” and his experiences abroad enable him to reinvigorate the milieu to which he returns [...]. These characters are desirable

¹³ These two types in Conan Doyle’s fiction exclude those “others” who are foreign, lower class, or female, whose characterization is substituted by “an assumption of inferiority”, and therefore only handled in the most stereotypical fashion (Thompson 69). Mary Morstan, John Watson’s future wife, is nothing more than the deliverer of the mystery; Tonga, the Andaman pygmy, never gets to speak; the ‘street Arab’ only serves to guide Sherlock and Watson to the Sholto’s.

because they exercise their wealth, experience, and character not in a revolutionary way, but to resuscitate a traditional order dominated by landed gentry. (Siddiqi 237–38)

The respectable colonial in Conan Doyle's fiction, Siddiqi defends, is an improvement on the current, degenerating aristocracy that he often replaces, yet never a threat to the existing social hierarchy. He is a defender of middle-class ideology. The 'imperial lumpenproletarian', conversely, is the 'poor white' rival of the respectable colonial. His sole mission is, according to Siddiqi, to snatch from the respectable colonial what the Empire had promised could be his own, and thereby not only a reminder that one never can escape one's own repressed, colonial past. He is also the embodiment of the consequences of the Empire's deceit, the face that mirrors colonial practices back to England.

Both returned colonials have, because of their sojourn in the colonies, become uncanny —estranged from their own motherland. Their sojourn overseas has racially coded them as both morally and racially non-Europeans. Infection, although it is always related to overseas' influence, therefore blurs the lines between the 'civilized' European and its savage double, be it an atavistic throwback —as in *Hound*— or a colonial other —as in *Sign*. By letting the respectable colonial in, Conan Doyle rejuvenates the current social order, without disturbing its balance; by allowing the 'imperial lumpenproletarian' to embody factual colonial anxieties, Conan Doyle expresses cultural anxieties about the connection between criminality, race, and contamination.

As is predictable in an age fixed on finding the stigmata that define degeneration, and in a genre that has a fascination with the atavistic, the bodies of the colonials in detective stories physically encode their social position and morality. One either has the body of a strong, male, European adventurer, or a body beaten by foreign disease, injury or poisoning. Typically, the lowest colonials' bodies are disfigured, or bear other atavistic markers. In *Sign*, Jonathan Small's leg was bitten off by a crocodile in the Ganges, and the Andaman islander who helps Small "mirrors the Italian criminologist's attention to facial and cranial anomalies"

(McBrantley 159). In *Hound*, Stapleton is an “interesting instance of a throwback, which appears to be both physical and spiritual” to his evil ancestor (*Hound* 572). Moreover, his physical resemblance to his ancestor helped identify him as the antagonist. Bodily anomalies help identify and categorize adversaries to the Empire’s health. However, *The Sign of the Four* reveals that appearances can be deceiving.

In *The Sign of the Four*, Jonathan Small, the destitute, peg-legged convict of the Andaman Islands, returns from the colonies to England with the purpose of retrieving the Agra treasure Major Sholto had stolen. Major Sholto, in stealing the treasure, had broken his word of dividing the treasure between six. Major Sholto and Captain Morstan, were supposed to get one fifth of the treasure, and the “Sign of the Four” would split the rest. Small had stolen the treasure from an Indian rajah’s trusted servant Achmet, who was transporting the treasure from the rajah’s palace to the Agra fortress, together with Mahomet Singh, Abdullah Khan and Dost Akbar. As a sign of allegiance, they formed the group of “The Sign of the Four”, whose name already indicates that, despite racial differences, its members enjoyed equal status.

“ ‘We [Singh and Khan] only ask you to do that which your countrymen come to this land for. We ask you to be rich’ ” was the argument with which Small was won over, together with the knife that was put to his throat and a realization that

[i]n Worcestershire the life of a man seems a great and a sacred thing; but it is very different when there is fire and blood all round you and you have been used to meeting death at every turn. Whether Achmet the merchant lived or died was a thing as light as air to me, but at the talk about the treasure my heart turned to it, and I thought of what I might do in the old country with it, and how my folk would stare when they saw their ne’er-do-well coming back with his pockets full of gold moidores. I had, therefore, already made up my mind. (*Sign* 358)

Thus, Small’s narrative echoes the popular belief “that imperial location had harmful effects upon European bodies, passions, and intellects” (Siddiqi 241) to the point that European

standards of ‘civilized’ behaviour were no longer valid. Small, who had been promised wealth, realized that wealth alone would ensure a respectable return to England and therefore acceded to participating in private larceny. This fragment also shows that the colonial history and capitalist discourse the Empire promoted made Small its victim. Moreover, his forced estrangement from the Empire’s civilizing influence has contaminated him to the point of reducing him to a savage of the likes of Indian natives. Susan Cannon Harris, however, states that “[c]ontagion, finally, is a product not of imperial policy but of the British failure to support the imperial project” (463), and thereby lays the blame with the Imperial project rather than with this individual. The text supports this claim, for, time and again, the supposedly degenerate ‘imperial lumpenproletarian’ is not depicted as savage—in contrast to his native companion, Tonga—but as a rather respectable human being. He is repeatedly characterized as trustworthy (“ ‘Small is a man of his word. He does not flinch from his friend. I think we may very well trust him’”(Sign 369)), and his words and deeds reveal his loyalty (“ ‘None or all,’ I [Small] answered. ‘We have sworn it. The four of us must always act together.’” (Sign 369); “‘I know now that I cannot have the use of it [the Agra treasure], and I know that they [Mahomet Singh, Abdullah Khan and Dost Akbar] cannot. I have acted all through for them as much as for myself. It’s been the sign of four with us always.’” (Sign 346)). Although Small has lead a life of violence in the colonies, having nearly been eaten by a crocodile and having survived that “perfect hell” that was the Indian Mutiny (Sign 354), he is repelled by violence, as is evident from the disgust he feels when learning that his savage friend has poisoned Bartholomew (“It fairly shook me, sir. I’d have *half* killed Tonga for it if he had not scrambled off” (Sign 338; emphasis added). The only time he did murder a man, “a vile Pathan who had never missed a chance of insulting and injuring me” (Sign 371), he did so with his wooden leg –the Indian substitute provided when a crocodile bit his leg off. The leg was cracked there where he had hit the man, and thus serves as a reminder for his

moral slippage. Siddiqi states that the ‘imperial lumpenproletarian’ would “come back for their share of the [Imperial] loot” [...because he] is not satisfied simply with extortion—he covets the place of the successful colonial” (238). However, Small states that

I lived only for vengeance. [...] It became an overpowering, absorbing passion with me. I cared nothing for the law,—nothing for the gallows. To escape, to track down Sholto, to have my hand upon his throat,—that was my one thought. Even the Agra treasure had come to be a smaller thing in my mind than the slaying of Sholto. (*Sign* 370)

This returned colonial is not after Major Sholto’s social position, although a respectable place in the social order was indeed the reason for his stealing the treasure. He acts out of retribution for the crimes this colonizer, and the Imperial project as a whole, have committed against him. A powerful driving force is the anger he feels towards Major Sholto’s for breaking his word, as the metropolis had done by promising a two-class society. Major Sholto’s theft had left Small in the ‘cracks’ of the Empire, and robbed him of the chance of a new identity. In my view, Small’s trustworthiness is one of his greatest assets, and therefore one of the things that matter most to him. His reproaches echo the dissatisfaction of the period with the promises the imperial project had made yet failed to hold up.

Having established that the ‘imperial lumpenproletarian’, Jonathan Small, turned out to be less corrupt than expected, his integrity stands in stark contrast with the attitudes and actions of other colonials: Major Sholto and Captain Morstan. These apparent law-abiding citizens of the Empire, whose respectability as colonizers is reflected in their titles, turn out to be the betraying thieves their outer appearances would never suggest them to be. Small’s first account of Major Sholto portrays him an addicted gambler and Captain Morstan as Major Sholto’s loyal, unopinionated friend. Both gave their word to Small to free him and the other three members of “The Sign of the Four” in return for a share of the Agra treasure, yet Major Sholto betrayed all others—including his fellow colonizer Captain Morstan. He fled to England where he and his wealth were received with open arms. Fear and guilt, however,

followed him everywhere he went: he had always two prize-fighters, his sons, and his khitmutgar guarding over him, and built “a very high stone wall topped with broken glass” in a house which had “a single iron-clamped door” (*Sign* 260). Despite his efforts to keep Small and his colonial, guilty past out, they eventually found their way in.

It should be duly noted that Major Sholto, the major villain in this story, seems to have passed his delinquent behaviour on to the future generation. The Major has twins: the decadent Thaddeus, who bears striking resemblance to Oscar Wilde, and Bartholomew, who “was himself a little inclined to [his] father’s faults” (*Sign* 257), which suggests Lombroso’s theory of criminal inheritance. Bartholomew dies in the same room as his father, at the hands of the same men. However, whereas the father was killed by fear at the sight of Small and Tonga, Bartholomew is killed by Tonga with a poisonous dart, an exclusively Oriental weapon. As Harris reminds us, “the poisoner and his crime are products of Britain’s imperial expansion and commerce, just as the poison itself is a product of the Indian landscape” (451). The shift in murder ‘weapon’ from fear to an Oriental dart, which both put an end to the criminal Sholto line-of-descent, epitomizes, in my opinion, the affirmation that what were once only fears of reverse colonization have been materialized into a material, terrifying reality. The fact that the poisoned dart was *shot* further emphasizes that “England is protected neither by distance nor by time from the repercussions of imperial crises” (Harris 452).

The dart bears a curious resemblance to the object that opens and closes the text, which, too, is another trespassing of boundaries.

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* 213)

‘The division seems rather unfair,’ I remarked. ‘You have done all the work in this business. I get a wife out of it, [Inspector] Jones gets the credit, pray what remains for you?’ ‘For me,’ said Sherlock

Holmes, 'there still remains the cocaine-bottle.' And he stretched his long white hand up for it. (*Sign* 379)

Sherlock is thus portrayed as a troublesome addict who cannot participate in the heterosexual ritual of domesticity. The puncture marks the hypodermic syringe makes in the great defender of British integrity are similar to those breaches England herself is continually suffering. As he inserts the seven-per-cent solution of cocaine in his veins, threatening contamination to the Empire flows in. Piercing imagery, thus, applies both to Sherlock Holmes degenerating habits, which at the time were already known to be addictive and detrimental, and the Empire's exposure to foreign threats. If Sherlock Holmes, whose punctured body is implicitly equalled to the punctured Empire, willingly and voluntarily injects himself with what is known to be a lethal substance, the Empire, according to this analogy, is, too, willingly contributing to its own on-going degeneration. The benefits of drugs and imperial exploitations offer immediate satisfaction to primal—even bourgeois—needs, yet are, in the long run, as poisonous as Tonga's dart.

The Sign of the Four clearly dramatizes the confrontation between British social order and returned colonials corrupted by the colonies' influence. Jesse Oak Taylor-Ide reads *The Sign of the Four*, and *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, too, as "allegories of the Victorians' battle to affirm their civilization, and by extension their humanity, in the face of dark, regressive influences that threaten to drag them back into a precivilized state" (57). *Sign*, to him, is the "blatant triumph of the British over the foreign", best exemplified when the British service revolver kills Tonga, the Andaman islander, and is put to rest in the "ever-so-British" Thames (67). Jon Thompson adds that the "net result is the demonization of the Orient and the implicit affirmation of "civilized" English norms" (72). Sherlock Holmes, in his most British portrayal yet, according to Taylor-Ide and Thompson, prevents the colonial contagion and ensures middle-class dominance by effectively killing Tonga and capturing

Jonathan Small. Christopher Keep and Don Randall, however, point out that “the text’s efforts to foreclose the colonial infection, however, are not as entirely successful as its critics have suggested” (217). As proof for this statement they refer to Watson’s final reflection on Tonga’s death: “Somewhere in the dark ooze at the bottom of the Thames lie the bones of that strange visitor to our shores” (*Sign* 336). The use of the present-tense verb “emphasizes Tonga’s enduring presence, his insubordinate relation to the over-and-done-with of Conan Doyle’s tale [...because] Tonga’s body never returns to the surface and thus seems stubbornly beyond recuperation” (Keep and Randall 217). As Tonga, the Agra treasure is never found, but is scattered along the Thames: “both remain *submerged* presences, stubbornly inhabiting —indeed, haunting— the detective’s final production of empirical and imperial order” (Keep and Randall 217; emphasis in original). Now part of English soil, Tonga is a “reminder of a strange foreign criminality lying at the edge of the knowable and respectable English community” (McBratney 158) and a confirmation that the process of reverse colonization has effectively started. The hermeneutic solution the detective plot offers —killing Tonga and capturing Small by solving the puzzle— only gives the illusion of a resolution but is insufficient. The story only comes to an end when Small confesses, and thus the narrative provides that what the detective plot cannot account for: clues to the nature of Major Sholto and Captain Morstan’s moral nature. The narrative also clearly reveals Small as a victim of the colonial enterprise, and Major Sholto as a upholder of the morally ambiguous imperial project, thus contributing to the debate of malaise that tainted the new Imperialism of the era. Despite the detective’s solving of the case, deeper questions about the connection between criminality, race and imperialism remain, and although Tonga —the foreign influence— has been killed, his contaminating influence will ooze its way, through the ever-so-British Thames, into London.

2.2 BETWEEN THE SCIENCE OF DEDUCTION AND THE “SINGLE CONNECTED NARRATIVE” IN *THE HOUND OF THE BASKERVILLES*

Critics —as James and John M. Kissane, Stephen Knight, Jon Thompson, and many others— have traditionally considered *The Hound of the Baskervilles* a classic of the detective genre, “a classic embodiment of the abstract form of the detective story [...that] dramatize[s] a struggle of scientific reason against superstition and irrationality” (Kissane 353–55), which features Sherlock Holmes as “the quintessential empiricist” (Thompson 66). According to Kissane and Kissanne, the detective story is a child of nineteenth-century ‘scientism’, and *Hound* the best example of its “richest artistic realization” (355). The Sherlock Holmes’ stories’ function, in this line of reasoning, is “to dispel magic and mystery, to make everything explicit, accountable, subject to scientific analysis [...and thus] reflect the widespread optimism characteristic of their period concerning the comprehensive power of positivist science” (Catherine Belsey qtd. in Clausson, “Gothic” 62). Even when the mystery proves a challenge to the Great Detective’s ability, as Sherlock himself often expresses in the novella, logic integral to the detective story never permits the reader to doubt the outcome. Thus, the detective story celebrates the comforting drama of reason. Lawrence Frank claims that “[t]he popularity of the Holmes stories suggests the satisfaction of other desires that Doyle shared with his readers, including a need the rendering in detective fiction of a coherent vision of the universe in a post-Darwinian moment” (“Hound” 337). To the latter, John Watson’s narratives represent a naturalistic, secular worldview —that which was still in process of consolidating itself in late Victorian Britain. He establishes Watson as the personification of the unsettling religious scepticism and philosophical materialism of the age. However, he warns that his worldview neither adopts a single position, nor is it coherent.

It is this last point —a lack of coherence— that this section will focus on by examining the contradictions between the theorist of the ‘science of deduction’ and his

methods in *The Hound of the Baskervilles*. This approach will argue that the worldview *Hound* actually represents is not as reassuring as these critics argue. To this end, I will consider the initial characterization of Sherlock Holmes in *A Study in Scarlet*, which I will complement with details from *The Sign of the Four* and other short stories. This approach will help elucidate the maxims of the science of deduction, which will serve as a base line.

“You have been in Afghanistan, I perceive.” With this striking ‘deduction’—the first of many memorable lines of the Canon—*A Study in Scarlet* begins with the exploration of Sherlock Holmes’ methods of detection.¹⁴ During this very first encounter with Sherlock Holmes in the chemical laboratory of a hospital in the opening chapters, just after his discovery of a reagent to haemoglobin stains, the myth of the scientific detective is born (Clausson, “Gothic” 61). When he shakes hands with John Watson and almost telepathically deduces the soldier’s past, this scientific detective seems endowed with quasi-supernatural powers, which only the second chapter, “The Science of Deduction”, will prove to have a scientific foundation. Sherlock’s “The Book of Life”, which Watson reads and sceptically comments on, is an article intended to demonstrate how an observant man could deduce meaning through “accurate and systemic examination of all that came in his way” (*Study* 39). The article explains that the science of deduction starts—as the Darwinian method—with the careful observation of all that is in plain sight—from a man’s nails, his coat-sleeve, boots, knees, or callosities—and “teaches one where to look and what to look for” (*Study* 40). This method is supplemented by his knowledge of the history of crime, for “if you have all the details of a thousand and one [misdeeds] at your finger end, it is odd if you can’t

¹⁴ The first contradiction in Sherlock Holmes’ method is its very label. Although Sherlock Holmes calls it the science of deduction, he rather used the logical process known as abduction. Where the former draws a logically certain conclusion based on the assumption that its premises are true, the latter bases itself on inference from observation and therefore a conclusion is not necessarily true. Induction therefore relies on the likelihood of the truthfulness of a hypothesis based on an observation by finding the simplest and most likely explanation: “We balance probabilities and choose the most likely. It is the scientific use of the imagination” (*Hound* 436).

unravel the thousand and first” and “a kind of *intuition*” (*Study* 41; emphasis added). The science of deduction, to Sherlock, is the analysis through observation of apparently unrelated but certain links, as to reason backwards towards a hypothesis that is probable. It relies on finding anomalies as a means of identification each and every type of personality.

The workings of Holmes’ methods are for the first time at full display when he is summoned to the crime scene of J.B. Drebber’s murder, and displays many of the purposeful motifs for which the detective is remembered, which nevertheless border mystic imagination.

As he spoke, his nimble fingers were flying here, there, and everywhere, feeling, pressing, unbuttoning, examining, while his eyes wore the same *far-away expression* which I have already remarked upon. [...] He whipped a *tape measure* and a large round *magnifying glass* from his pocket. With these two implements he trotted noiselessly about the room, sometimes stopping, occasionally kneeling, and once lying flat upon his face. So engrossed was he with his occupation that he appeared to have forgotten our presence, for he chattered away to himself under his breath the whole time, keeping up a running fire of exclamations, groans, whistles, and little cries suggestive of encouragement and of hope. As I watched him I was irresistibly reminded of a *pure-blooded well-trained foxhound* [...] For twenty minutes or more he continued his researches, measuring with the most *exact* care the distance between marks which were entirely *invisible to me*, and occasionally applying his tape to the walls in an equally *incomprehensible* manner. [...] Sherlock Holmes’ smallest actions were all directed towards some *definite and practical end*. (*Study* 57–63; emphases added)

Sherlock thus deduced that the murderer was a six-foot tall man; had small feet dressed in square-toed boots; smoked a Trichinopoly cigar; came to the site with his victim in a four-wheeled cab; and had murdered his victim with poison. “You have brought detection as near an exact science as it ever will be brought in this world”, is the only conclusion Watson is capable of reaching (*Study* 69).

The apparently exact yet incomprehensible ‘scientific’ method at work here is what most Sherlockians and critics —as those mentioned in the opening paragraph— remember and celebrate. Conan Doyle accentuates this eccentric scientism in his next novella. During the opening chapter of *The Sign of the Four*, which significantly bears the same title of the second chapter in *Study*, the detective accusingly declares that “[d]etection is, or ought to be,

an exact science, and should be treated in the same cold and unemotional manner”(*Sign* 217). This is a curious statement from the bohemian who has but seconds before substituted detective work by injecting a seven-per-cent solution of cocaine (Clausson, “Gothic” 61). Watson noticed this contradiction between the empirical science that Sherlock defends and his hedonistic tendencies. He, also, as early as in “The Five Orange Pips”, states that

[s]ome [cases], too, have baffled his analytical skill, and would be, as narratives, beginnings without an ending, while others have been but partially cleared up, and have their explanations founded rather upon conjecture and surmise than on that absolute logical proof which was so dear to him. (*Adventures* 91).

Watson, as well as the average reader, is at this point aware that the detective’s method lack ‘that absolute logical proof’ Sherlock claims he stands for, and that it is more the ‘intuition’ that is the reason behind his success. As Slavoj Žižek points out, for the logic of the detective story to be gratifying, the omniscience of the detective must be the result of a careful balance of scientific rationalism and quasi-supernatural powers inherited from the romantic clairvoyant (107). Although Sherlock’s methods echo the step-by-step Baconian method, it is, indeed, the skilful combination of scientific reasoning and imagination that crime are, until this point, resolved.

Watson is, as is the reader, time and again amazed at the conclusions the detective is capable of reaching, but even more so at the way he presents them: “ ‘You reasoned it out beautifully,’ I [Watson] exclaimed in unfeigned admiration. ‘It is so long a chain, and yet every link rings true’” (“The Red Headed League”, *Adventures* 48).¹⁵ Sherlock’s reasoning, although not strictly scientific, is still a desirable solution; and the certainty that Sherlock will get to the solution, one way or another, is precisely the kind of reassertion the Victorian audience needed.

¹⁵ This concept of ‘chain’ is referred to in many of the Sherlock Holmes stories. It is a direct allusion to Charles Darwin’s image of a ‘chain of affinities’. As Sherlock’s hypotheses, it retraced apparently unrelated links back to a common source. In Darwinism, it lead back to a few common ancestors, in Sherlock’s stories, it traces back to the original crime and criminal.

At the end of *The Hound of the Baskervilles* Sherlock states that his efforts were guided towards “[putting] into a single connected narrative one of the most singular and sensational crimes of modern times” (*Hound* 579), which is bound to satisfy Watson’s need for a beautifully reasoned account. Narration in this novella, however, is all but connected, for there are at least eight narratives embedded in Watson’s frame-narrative.¹⁶ The frame narrative begins and ends in the domestic sanctuary of Baker Street 221B, in the locus of British civilized splendour, London. In the opening chapter, as is the tradition in the Sherlock Holmes stories, Holmes’ science of deduction is displayed and the initially sceptic Watson is again convinced by his friend’s ratiocinate power. Then, Dr. Mortimer, the physician and dear friend of the recently diseased Sir Charles Baskerville, presents the mystery of the curse of the Baskervilles to him. According to the legend, the Baskerville family has been plagued by a curse ever since the English Civil War, when Sir Charles’ forefather Sir Hugo Baskerville traded his soul to the devil for help in abducting a woman, but was killed by a giant, spectral hound before he could get to her. The hound has been said to have tormented the Baskerville family ever since. As the man of science he believes himself to be, Sherlock rejects the supernatural element of this story (“I have hitherto confined my investigations to this world” (*Hound* 419)) and is baffled that Dr. Mortimer—a fellow scientist—would be inclined towards a supernatural explanation. With haughty commentaries and the solving of a series of small mysteries—as the deduction of Dr. Mortimer’s history through the observation of his walking stick, or the deduction as to the state of mind of the anonymous sender of a warning letter—the story invoke the illusion of rationality as a promising answer to the mystery. It is most probably these displays of the science of deduction that critics bear

¹⁶ “The manuscript containing the Baskerville legend, composed in 1742 and read to Watson and Holmes by Dr. Mortimer; the account of Sir Charles’s death as reported in the Devon County Chronicle [...]; Dr. Mortimer’s own account of Sir Charles’s death, including his observations on the murder scene; reproductions of entries from the diary that Watson kept while staying at Baskerville Hall; Watson’s reports to Holmes [...]; Mrs Barrymore’s account of her brother, Selden the convict; Mrs Laura Lyons’ account of her relationship with Sir Charles, and finally Holmes’s own ‘Retrospective’” (Clausson, “Gothic” 69)

in mind when classifying the novella as the biggest example of ratiocinate detective stories. However, these chapters also advance an innovation to Holmes' science of deduction. When Dr. Mortimer states that Sherlock's deductions must have been guesswork, the detective swiftly rebukes that he was rather going "into the region where we balance probabilities and choose the most likely. It is the scientific use of the imagination" (*Hound* 436). However, Sherlock had already stated in *The Sign of the Four* that " 'No, no: I never guess. It is a shocking habit, —destructive to the logical faculty'" (224). It is not the time in this novella that the theorist of the science of deduction contradicts his own premises.

The final chapter of the novella, "Retrospective", is a verbatim account of Holmes' characteristic *après-coup* rational explanation intended to elucidate the details of the mystery that he has just unveiled. He substitutes the supernatural explanation of a family curse by one that is rationally comprehensible in the age of growing capitalism: self-interest. Although Stapleton —the atavistic intellect behind the recreation of the Baskerville legend, who intended to claim his inheritance by frightening the other heirs to the Baskerville fortune to death— has said nothing on the matter, Sherlock concludes that it must have been his greed that led him to desire to eliminate the two heirs that stood between him and the Baskerville estate. Additionally, he concludes that Sir Charles' irrational belief in the supernatural legend was the rational cause for his demise. This explanation, inherent to the ideology of the detective plot, ridicules those who had hitherto believed in the supernatural explanation, but does, however, not account for the bizarre extremes to which Stapleton has gone to assure his ambitions. It also does not account for his macabre tendency towards terrorizing his victims to death, or for his brutal behaviour (Clausson, "Gothic" 69). When Sherlock unveils the manner in which he 'deduced' it was Stapleton who was behind the scheme, he says that

[t]he scent [of the warning letter Mrs Stapleton sent] suggested the presence of a lady, and already my thoughts began to turn towards the Stapletons. Thus I had made certain of the hound [by imagining that

Sir Henry's stolen boots were meant to be smelled by a hound], and had *guessed* at the criminal before we ever went to the west country. (*Hound* 609; emphasis added)

Sherlock admits that he had merely guessed who the criminal was and that going to the west country served only to reconstruct the crime he thought to have solved. This procedure undermines his own science of deduction, for he abandons abductive reasoning and he theorizes without having sufficient proof.¹⁷ Moreover, by guessing who the murderer was and trying to fit the evidence in his prediction he is, in his own words, adopting a habit that is destructive to the logical faculty. His method in this novella is gathering testimonies—from Dr. Mortimer, the taxi driver, Watson, Laura Lyons, and most importantly from Stapleton's wife Beryl—which he later intends to arrange chronologically and explain in the characteristic step-by-step manner. It is by the “advantage of two conversations with Mrs Stapleton” which leaves the case “so entirely cleared up that I [Sherlock] am not aware that there is anything which has remained a secret to us” (*Hound* 602) It is, therefore, not science that leads Sherlock to a conclusion, but a Dupin-like realization that what appeared to be a complex case was but “simple and direct”. Instead of observing apparently unrelated links as to reason backwards to a hypothesis that is probable, he—before leaving London—is intent on restaging, like a theatre director, the crime (Clausson, “Belgian Masters”). Sherlock has abandoned the looking glass and the measuring tape for a spot in the coulisses.

For most of the long middle section of the novella Sherlock and his cold, empirical account of events are not present. Believing that his presence in Dartmoor would put Stapleton on the fence, he lies, claiming that he will remain in London working on another case. Instead, he lets Watson accompany Sir Henry to the estate.

It was my [Sherlock's] game to *watch* Stapleton. It was evident, however, that I could not do this if I were with you [Watson], since he would be keenly on his guard. I deceived everybody, therefore, yourself included, and I came down secretly [to Dartmoor] when I was supposed to be in London. (*Hound* 609; emphasis added)

¹⁷ In the last of the twelve “Adventures”, Sherlock would still say: “‘Data! data! data!’ he cried impatiently. ‘I can't make bricks without clay.’” (*Adventures* 257).

Instead of remaining in London, however, he would install himself on the moors of Dartmoor to observe the development in the staging of Sir Henry's death.

The train ride from London to Baskerville Hall in Dartmoor, as Marlow's voyage up the Congo river or Jonathan Harker's drive to Transylvania, "is represented as a regressive journey into the primitive: the journey through space is also a journey backward through time" (Clausson, "Gothic" 72). As Africa and Transylvania, Dartmoor is located far out of reach of modern scientism, and is a place characterized by darkness, regression, and primeval danger that rural England here represents. Although it is tempting to analyse the shift in mood—from rational to fantastic—in spatial terms, since London is traditionally associated to civilization and the countryside to barbarism, I would rather suggest that it is the change of focalization, and thereby of genre, that changes the narrative mood. In the absence of Sherlock, it is Watson who takes over as principal detective. Although the latter has—after years of observation—adopted the same inquisitive intuition for detection as his master, his diction is much less detached or callous. The language of this middle section is filled horror and degeneration imagery. Lawrence Frank collaborates that the setting of this middle section, the Grimpen Mire and the prehistoric stone huts of the Dartmoor countryside, suggest "the world of *Origin of Species*, governed by a struggle for survival and haunted by the threat of extinction" ("Hound" 360). The change from London to this landscape makes the two primary oppositions on which *Hound* is based explicit: namely, those between the civilized present and the primitive past, and between progress (or evolution) and degeneration (or reversion) (Clausson, "Gothic" 67). This opposition is most evident in the figure of Stapleton, Sherlock's evil—atavistic—double, whose criminality and viciousness is exaggerated to the point of reminding the reader of Stevenson's Mr Hyde. The opposition becomes even more apparent—and more connected to the fin-the-siècle mood—through the dominating presence and influence of the terrifying moor: "Life has become like that great

Grimpen Mire, with little green patches everywhere into which one may sink and with no guide to point the track” (*Hound* 486).¹⁸ The Gothic plot, rejecting the detective’s suggestion that the motive was self-interest, explains Stapleton’s crimes as an inevitable outcome of his degeneration. Stapleton’s degeneracy is not only inherent to the Gothic genre but also strongly inscribed in the explanation of crime as offered by contemporary pseudo-science of anthropological criminology (Clausson, “Gothic” 70).¹⁹

Taking notice of these two essentially different parts of the novella —the ratiocinate detective story that frames the Gothic middle-section— Nils Clausson analyses *The Hound of the Baskervilles* as both a fin-de-siècle Gothic tale and a detective story. Critics have traditionally opposed these two genres, assuming that the former is an account of the triumph of reason, logic and science, while the latter is, according to Judith Wilt, a ‘counter attack’ against these same tenets of modernity that both questions the power of late-nineteenth century positivist science and adopts much of the discourse of —atavistic— degeneration. Clausson, however, argues that both the fin-de-siècle detective story and the fin-de-siècle Gothic tale “operate both to create mystery and then to give the illusion —but only the illusion- of solving it” (“Gothic” 78). The detective story “in which the mystery is rationally explained (or rather explained away)” that frames Watson’s Gothic tale “suppresses, and thereby protects the reader from, the unacceptable conclusions that the Gothic plot inescapably implies” (“Gothic” 78). While the detective plot does give answer to some of the more straightforward questions —as the answer to whom killed Sir Charles Baskervilles and how— the Gothic plot raises questions that the detective plot cannot answer. Dr. Mortimer, is author of “Some Freaks of Atavism” —which anticipates the figures of Stapleton and Selden the criminal— and “Do we Progress?”. These two articles, mentioned in the opening

¹⁸ Stapleton, Selden, and Sherlock move easily throughout the moor, suggesting, perhaps, that they are most in touch with humanity’s prehistoric, atavistic past.

¹⁹ Stapleton, as the end of the novella will reveal, had been born and raised in South America. As was the case with Jonathan Small in *The Sign of the Four*, the degenerate antagonist is foreign, and his foreignness is implicitly linked with his savagery.

chapters, already anticipate the question the novel really asks: where degeneration ultimately comes from or whether progress is still a possibility in the fin-de-siècle in which ‘freaks of atavism’ still roam.

By opposing these genres, which take opposing ideological stances, Conan Doyle does not “dramatize the struggle of scientific reason against superstition and irrationality”, as the Kissanes had stated, but rather Conan Doyle’s —and his fellow Victorians’— struggle to fit scientism in the post-Darwinian world. This approach solves the contradictions that emerge from the analysis of the novella. In this view, the novella is representative of the age it was written in, in which it was still unsure whether scientism would be able to answer all Victorian fears. Clausson concludes that the Gothic plot questions the capability of the issues it poses to be solved by scientism, and that it thus undermines the detective story’s and Holmes’

[c]onfident endorsement of science and reason, but also the late-Victorian confidence that biological evolution necessarily entails social and moral progress, that modern, progressive English civilization, with Holmes as its defender, is self-evident proof that evolution inevitably leads upwards. (Clausson, “Gothic” 65)

Science in *The Hound of the Baskervilles* is but a red herring, for Sherlock solves the murder mystery by adopting “not the investigative method of the scientist but the contemplative stance of art connoisseur and aesthete” (Clausson “Belgian Masters” 37). Holmes’ purpose of fabricating a connected narrative does not focus on the solving of the mystery —for he claims to have known that the hound was real and who was the murderer since the beginning. Instead of quasi-scientifically inspecting the crime scene as he did in *Study* and *Sign*, he is intent on turning the Gothic sensationalism of the legend into a narrative of analytic reasoning. Thereto, he first pursues three threads in London. He firsts sends a telegram intended to find out whether the butler —an archetypal suspect in detective fiction— was in London or not. Then, he sends a Baker Street Irregular to find clippings of a newspaper. And

as a last resort, he interrogates Stapleton's taxi driver. All these 'threads' prove to be dead ends, and with them, pretensions at implementing a scientific methodology end. Sherlock then resolves to hide on the Grimpen Mire, the loci of degeneration in the novella, and it is by impregnating himself in it that he achieves insight into the criminal mind.

He must live in the ancient dwellings, meditating on the roots that connect civilized humanity to its darker origins. He must breathe the air tainted by the Grimpen Mire, and listen to the call of the hound. He must, in short, pass through a ritual transformation and *become* the spirit of the moor. (Taylor-Ide 62–63; emphasis in original)

It is from the moor, that Sherlock passively re-enacts the “paralyzing spectacle” (*Hound* 610) of the mystery he tries to elucidate: “This [the Grimpen Mire] then, is the *stage* upon which a *tragedy* has been *played*, and upon which we may help to *play it again*” (*Hound* 427; emphasis added). Holmes' purpose is not so much to investigate as to replay the Gothic horror. The play he re-enacts is intended to paralyze its audience; it is staged as to exploit fin-de-siècle fears.

In this novella, we do not see the energetic and observant examination of the crime scene that we saw in *Study*, or the energetic pursuit of criminals Small and Tonga in *Sign*. We also do not see the measuring tape or the looking glass he first used in *Study*, nor the ichnology as displayed in *Sign*. Detection in *Hound* is associated to stasis. What we do have, however, is a detective imbued with authority—which he ‘earned’ throughout his early stories—intent on providing a “single connected narrative”. To this end, he resorts to “reason [used] in a manner magical and adventurous, rather than in the purely instrumental fashion that many contemporaries feared was the stultifying characteristic of the age” (Saler 604).²⁰

Through the scientific use of the imagination, Sherlock expanded the narrow and pessimistic

²⁰ When the idea for *The Hound of the Baskervilles* came to Conan Doyle, Sherlock Holmes did not figure as its protagonist. Conan Doyle, however, “realized he would need a strong central figure to hold the plot together. ‘Why should I invent such a character,’ he is supposed to have said, ‘when I have him already in the form of Holmes?’” (Stashower 236). Otherwise said, Conan Doyle took advantage of the authority Sherlock Holmes had acquired to dramatize this particular story, which could be a partial explanation to the differences between this novella and the previous ones.

scope of the scientism of the late Victorian period.²¹ He allowed the imagination to be included in his methodology, and thus, “[h]e made reason magical, the prosaic poetic. [...] Holmes, and the conventions of the mystery genre he stood for, could assuage the modern craving for the magical without ever reverting to the supernatural” (Saler 614). The shift from a method that was more obviously scientific to Hound’s use of theatrical imagination can be attributed to Conan Doyle’s own increasing dissatisfaction with Sherlock’s initial rationalism as a means to re-enchant modernity—which had lead him to kill the detective off almost a decade before—and his flirtation with explanations outside the narrow scope of scientism. In its rejection of scientism as the sole answer to Modern problems, Conan Doyle echoes the contemporary spirit of disenchantment. His quasi-magical approach to solving modern mysteries, however, proved an effective way to re-enchant the modern world. His rational readers were allowed “to become immersed in these fantastic worlds, while at the same time maintaining an ironic distance—to remain rational and enchanted simultaneously” (Saler 618). Thus, the Sherlock Holmes stories, as other works of mass literature, allowed readers to hold on to the sense of wonder, yet never denied the central tenets of modernity.

²¹ He is of course, not alone in this, for other writers such as Edgar Allan Poe and Jules Verne had also celebrated the romance of reason, as to provide an alternative to the pervasive rationality of the era.

3. CONCLUSION

“He was a concoction, a myth, an isolated strand from my bundle of personalities. I used him and he is gone.”

—SIR ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE, “HIS LAST BOW”

In 1892, Conan Doyle said in an interview that he resolved to create a figure he described as “utterly inhuman, no heart, but with a beautifully logical intellect” (qtd. in Blathwayt 50). Newly trained as a doctor and still a firm believer in science, Conan Doyle’s adoption and reworking of the detective genre fabricated the now-exemplary model of the eccentric, genius detective proficient at calming cultural pessimism. Sherlock’s apparent inhumanity dissociated him from social hierarchy, rendering him capable of protecting its balance from individual degenerates. He, accordingly, reinforces the conservative belief that things should remain as they were. Thus, the tales of the two crime-fighting brothers not only reflected middle-class ideology, but also helped produce a comforting narrative for a society that craved riddance of the increasing sense of degeneration.

This comforting narrative, as the analyses have shown, was both ideological and counter-ideological. The detective defends empiricism, rationality and scientism as the exemplary *modus operandi*, yet the text betrays their increasing insufficiency. Sherlock Holmes identifies returned colonials as the source of degenerating contamination, yet the text suggests that this contamination is ultimately the result of England’s imperial greed. The detecting duo defends middle class values, yet the degenerates are often members of the middle class. However, although Sherlock Holmes is not as scientific as the first texts advocates, he does promote the concept of instrumental rationality. Although his stories portray colonial others as victims of the imperial system, they still purge a community’s cultural guilt through the condemnation of the individual. And although Sherlock Holmes’

aesthetic bohemianism gravitated outside the boundaries of middle-class, ‘normative’ ideology, his eccentricities are pardoned for they were part of his crime-solving potential.

Even if the detective plot is capable of assigning blame to the individual degenerate, thereby absolving the guilt of a group, it is still incapable of answering the deeper question of a society that feared degeneration and regression. In *The Sign of the Four*, Jonathan Small’s identification and detention does satisfy the more immediate question of ‘whodunit’, but proves that Small’s mangled physique is not —contrary to what degeneration discourses of the epoch claimed— a signifier of innate degeneracy. In *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, the insufficiency of the detective plot’s answers is more explicit, for the explanation of greed as main motif for Stapleton’s actions did not explain the brutal dimensions of his atavism. However, if the novellas were successful at assuaging contemporary anxieties it was because they produced the “single connected narrative” that under the guise of analytic reasoning provided a rational explanation to seemingly incomprehensible matters. As pointed out, *Sign* could only reach closure with Jonathan Small’s confession of accounts. In *Hound*, the closing chapter “Retrospection” takes place several weeks after Sherlock Holmes solved the crime. It thus highlights that the detective story could only come to an end when the detective had provided a single, unambiguous narration which reduced all particularities of the supernatural case to self-evident links. Both these *après coup* chronicles constitute necessary, not from a narrative, but mostly a social point of view. Also, by reducing crimes that affected the middle class in such terrifying ways to puzzles capable of solving by applying —apparent— logic, the detective stories made the fin-de-siècle seem less troubled, less fearsome. However, despite these efforts, both novellas ultimately underline that degeneration is already contaminating the heart of civilization. In *Sign*, it is the body of Tonga that will forever pollute the ‘ever-so-British’ Thames; in *Hound* Stapleton has eluded arrest and is loose on the great Grimpen Mire.

The aim of this essay was demonstrate that the Sherlock Holmes adventures, although designed to assuage the fin-the-siècle angst, only offered partial solutions. Analysis has shown that Sherlock Holmes appropriated the discourse and methods promoted by Baconian step-by-step analysis and responded to collective anxieties of degeneration. Holmes and his methods provided a means which taught Victorians to connect the apparently unrelated links in the commonplace to understand themselves, their neighbours, the past, and, if possible, the future. However, analysis has also shown that the detective's methods not only provided insufficient answers to the deeper questions that these discourses posed, but was also contradictory. As a conclusion I can only say that the detective logic of the stories provided an answer to bourgeois, capitalistic anxieties concerning the maintenance of social order, based on class division and racial superiority. Sherlock Holmes' method of deduction was excellent at tracing anomalies in the Victorian body and mind, and thus served to categorize individuals. This method complied with the Victorian obsession with nomenclature as a means of controlling the chaotic multiplication of identities. However, Sherlock Holmes' method repressed other cultural anxieties, notably those caused by degeneration, for the detective plot always failed to comprehend the nature of degeneracy. Moreover, Holmes' refusal to changing social order implies surrendering to the continuation of the infection that has started in that same hierarchy. Despite all, Holmes was an effective means by which the bourgeoisie felt justified in their discriminating witch-hunt for its 'other', thus distracting the attention from degeneration in its self.

The greatest difficulty upon the writing of this essay was the disentanglement of the contradictory character of Sherlock Holmes' portrayal and function, both within the Canon as within the literature that comments on it. Textual examination proves an extensive rewriting of the character along its many adventures, which seems to echo changing ideological

perspectives of both its author and the society both belonged to. Academic writers as well as Sherlockians, however, give contradictory interpretations on the Great Detective, something which is only more exaggerated in cinematographic adaptations. Although many commentators admit that Sherlock is all but unambiguous, and often attribute it to the eccentricity needed to perform the role of national healer, little attention is given to explain his changing attitudes towards the detective's character and methods from story to story. I have assumed as a possible explanation that the man behind the myth, Conan Doyle, was still making up his mind, deciding where he stood in the post-Darwinian universe. In light of this apparent gap, I would therefore propose as a future line of investigation to look at the *rewriting* of Sherlock Holmes. This would include a juxtaposition between his first stories — *Study*, *Sign*, *Adventures* and *Memoirs*— to the adventures that took place after the Great Hiatus, that is, the period between Sherlock Holmes' demise in *The Final Problem* (1893) and his comeback in *Hound*. More specifically, I would propose an analysis that takes into account the undeniable influence of Oscar Wilde upon the re-characterization(s) of Sherlock Holmes. I have established that Conan Doyle and Wilde met during a soiree from which *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and *The Sign of the Four* ensued, which both show intertextual references. *Sign* added to the ratiocinate detective of *Study* a distinctive aesthete manner for which Holmes is still remembered, which Stashower and others attribute to the Wilde's outspoken personality. Critics have argued that Sebastian Moran, Sherlock's second greatest antagonist, who appears from 1903 onwards, was, too, a direct reference to Wilde. Finally, as late as "The Last Bow" (1917), it is revealed that Sherlock was born in the same year as Wilde. An analysis of the evolution of Wildean influence in the portrayal of the Great Detective would serve as a barometer of acceptance and desirability of homo-social relations in both the pre- and post-Wilde trials period, in an age that needed to uphold masculine, unambiguous values.

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