



# **Sherlock Holmes and Conan Doyle Multi-Media Afterlives**

**Edited by Sabine Vanacker  
and Catherine Wynne**



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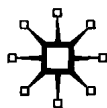
Edited by

**Sabine Vanacker and Catherine Wynne**

*University of Hull, UK*



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# Contributors

**Clive Bloom** is Emeritus Professor of English and American Studies at Middlesex University, a best-selling author and publisher. When Bloom isn't writing and researching he divides his time between New York University and the University of Notre Dame. In 2011, he was the historical consultant to the BBC and a number of national and international newspapers on the summer riots in Britain. He is an occasional feature writer for *The Financial Times*, *The Times*, *The Guardian*, *The Independent*, *The Irish Times* and the *London Evening Standard*. He regularly appears on television and radio, and is quoted in the *Columbia Book of World Quotations*. He recently featured on the Australian version of 'Desert Island Discs'. His numerous books include *Violent London: 2000 Years of Riots, Rebels and Revolts* (2003) and *Riot City* (2012).

**Claudia Capancioni** is Lecturer in English at Bishop Grosseteste University College Lincoln, UK. Her research is on nineteenth- and twentieth-century literature, with a focus on women's writing. Her most recent publications include chapters in *Translating Gender* (2011) and *Il viaggio e i viaggiatori in età moderna: gli inglesi in Italia e le avventure dei viaggiatori italiani* (2009).

**Amanda J. Field** was an advertising and promotions manager at IBM UK until she left to pursue academic study, gaining an MA and a PhD in Film Studies from the University of Southampton. Her book, *England's Secret Weapon – The Wartime Films of Sherlock Holmes* was published in 2009 and drew extensively (as does her chapter in this volume) on material in the Arthur Conan Doyle Collection at Portsmouth Museum, where she worked for five years as a volunteer.

**Andrew Lycett** is the biographer of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. He has also written lives of Ian Fleming, Dylan Thomas and Rudyard Kipling. He is currently working on a book about Wilkie Collins. He is a fellow of the Royal Society of Literature.

**Neil McCaw** is Reader in Literature and Culture at the University of Winchester, where he teaches Victorian Fiction and Detective and Crime Narratives. His publications include *George Eliot and Victorian Historiography* (2000), *Writing Irishness in Nineteenth-Century British*

*Culture* (2004), *How to Read Texts* (2008) and *Adapting Detective Fiction: Crime, Englishness and the TV Detectives* (2010), in addition to numerous articles and chapters on aspects of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

**Souvik Mukherjee** has been researching videogames as an emerging storytelling medium since 2002 and completed a PhD on this subject from Nottingham Trent University (2009). His research also examines how videogames inform and challenge current conceptions of technicity, identity and culture. Souvik is a long-time Sherlock Holmes enthusiast.

**Bran Nicol** is Reader in Modern and Contemporary Literature at the University of Portsmouth, UK, where he is also Director of the Centre for Studies in Literature. His publications include *Stalking* (2006), *The Cambridge Introduction to Postmodern Fiction* (2009) and the co-edited volume *Crime Culture: Figuring Criminality in Fiction and Film* (2010).

**Harvey O'Brien** lectures in Film Studies at University College Dublin and is former editor of the journal *Film and Film Culture*. He is the author of *Action Movies: The Cinema of Striking Back* (2012) and *The Real Ireland: The Evolution of Ireland in Documentary Film* (2004).

**Jennifer S. Palmer** is a retired teacher and an independent scholar. She gained her PhD at Delaware University, USA. Her interest in crime fiction has been lifelong: she lectures to adults on 'Famous Historical Mysteries' and reviews crime fiction.

**Patricia Pulham** is Reader in Victorian Literature at the University of Portsmouth, and the author of *Art and the Transitional Object in Vernon Lee's Supernatural Tales* (2008). Recent publications include two co-edited collections: *Haunting and Spectrality in Neo-Victorian Fiction: Possessing the Past* (2010) and *Crime Culture: Figuring Criminality in Fiction and Film* (2011).

**Terry Scarborough** is Professor in the Department of English at Okanagan College, Kelowna Canada, where he has taught literature and composition since 2006. His research interests include Gothic fiction, the ghost story, Dickens studies and narratives of urban exploration. He has presented and published articles and chapters on Dickens, Doyle, the Victorian city, Sherlock Holmes and M. R. James. He has twice been keynote speaker at Okanagan College's *Dracula* symposium. Currently, he teaches composition, popular narrative and surveys of British literature and is a fellow of the Institute for Learning and Teaching.

**Sabine Vanacker** lectures at the University of Hull. Her research and teaching interests centre on twentieth-century literature, focusing on crime fiction, women's writing and migrant writing. With Professor Marion Shaw, she has published *Reflecting on Miss Marple* (1991) and has written about Sara Paretsky, Patricia Cornwall, John le Carré and Janwillem van de Wetering. She is currently preparing *The Crime Fiction of P.D. James: Death and the Melancholic Detective*.

**Catherine Wynne** is Senior Lecturer in Victorian Literature at the University of Hull. Her publications include *The Colonial Conan Doyle: British Imperialism, Irish Nationalism, and the Gothic* (2002); an edition of Doyle's *The Parasite* and Stoker's *The Watter's Mou* (2009); and a collection of essays (co-edited with Martin Willis), *Victorian Literary Mesmerism* (2006). She received the Derrick Murdoch Award from the Sherlock Holmes Society of Canada for the best essay published in *Canadian Holmes* in 2011.

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# Introduction: From Baker Street to Undershaw and Beyond

Catherine Wynne

## A tale of two homes: from 221b to Undershaw

The Sherlock Holmes Museum at 221b Baker Street in London is well worth a visit. Alighting from the tube on a cold winter's evening, imaginatively inclined Holmesians can transport themselves to a world of yellow fogs and hansom cabs, and during a visit to the house – its sitting-room is considerably smaller than the ones presented in numerous film adaptations – can immerse themselves in cosy Victoriana.<sup>1</sup> The museum website invitingly notes that visitors 'can sit by Holmes's fire-side' but 'must bring' their own 'pipe[s] to smoke'. The enthusiast can even try on Sherlock Holmes's deerstalker, perched on a nearby table.

But this hat is, as we know, a creation not of the Arthur Conan Doyle stories but of the Sidney Paget illustrations for *The Strand Magazine*. The deerstalker made its first appearance in 'The Boscombe Valley Mystery' (October 1891).<sup>2</sup> Subsequent incarnations of Holmes on stage and screen commonly, as Amanda J. Field argues in *England's Secret Weapon*, 'adopted the look and style of the illustrations' and 'each new interpretation of Holmes was therefore both the Victorian creation of Doyle and the "man of the moment"' (2009: 3, 4). Indeed, Holmes was neo-Victorian long before the term attained academic and popular vogue.<sup>3</sup> Christine L. Krueger reminds us that we are 'in many respects post-Victorians' (2002: xi). Indeed, our obsession with Holmes confirms this. The detective has always been at the forefront of popular consciousness, and the early twenty-first century's accelerated attention to him can, at least in part, be attributed to the rise of neo-Victorianism over the last two and a half decades.<sup>4</sup>

Holmes, however, also challenges neo-Victorian categorisation (ironically Doyle's Holmes is a figure obsessed with classification) with claims,

almost since his inception, to both lived reality and cultural immortality. The Baker Street museum promulgates the notion of Holmes as a person who actually existed, with the promotional material recording that, 'Sherlock Holmes and Doctor Watson lived at 221b Baker Street between 1881–1904, according to the stories written by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. The famous 1st floor study overlooking Baker Street is still faithfully maintained as it was kept in Victorian Times.' While attributing the stories to Doyle, the website simultaneously cultivates a response to Holmes as both real person and as fictional character. It questions: 'What are the attributes which combine to make a *person* [emphasis mine] a world-famous legend? His achievements must surely be unforgettable and remarkable. He must be a brilliant and credible *character* [emphasis mine] whom people can believe in. He must be ageless in so far as dates of birth and death become irrelevant. He must enjoy everlasting fame.'<sup>5</sup>

This tendency to see Holmes and Watson as real people is long established, and is supported by the publications of the various Sherlock Holmes societies. 'Was Watson an Uncle?' ponders Dana Martin Batory, for instance, in *The Baker Street Journal* in 1988. Founded in 1946, *The Baker Street Journal*, like its counterpart *Canadian Holmes*, combines serious, scholarly essays with playful imaginings that Holmes, Watson and Mrs Hudson exist.<sup>6</sup> And what of Dr Watson? Was his first name James or John? And where exactly did he receive that bullet wound: in the shoulder or in the leg? (Steven Moffat and Mark Gatiss's *Sherlock* (2010) has opted for 'John' and the leg, respectively). In 1985 Richard Lancelyn Green published *Letters to Sherlock Holmes*, a compilation of the global 'correspondence' to the great detective which had arrived at the Abbey National Bank which, at that time, occupied the building at 221 Baker Street,<sup>7</sup> and the detective has been the subject of spoof biographies; William S. Baring-Gould's *Sherlock Holmes of Baker Street* (1962) 'take[s] to its extreme the Sherlockian game of treating Holmes as an historical figure' (Redmond, 2009: 45).<sup>8</sup> Holmes's world exerts a powerful and enduring cachet.

This 'embodiment' of Sherlock Holmes has its *fin-de-siècle* precedents. The first serialised Holmes story, 'A Scandal in Bohemia' (July 1891), appeared in George Newnes's *The Strand Magazine*. This was not the first published Holmes story; *A Study in Scarlet* appeared in *Beeton's Christmas Annual* in November 1887 and *The Sign of Four* was published in *Lippincott's Monthly Magazine* in February 1890. However, it was through the serialisation of the stories in *The Strand* that Holmes achieved immense popularity. The cultivation of the myth of the

detective as a real person was allegedly derived from the notion that Paget modelled Holmes on his brother Walter, thus endowing the character with, as Doyle describes in his autobiography *Memories and Adventures* (1924), a 'handsome' physicality which 'took the place of the powerful but uglier Sherlock' which had been Doyle's initial 'conception' of the character.<sup>9</sup> Holmes's further embodiment rapidly followed in William Gillette's stage adaptations, with *Sherlock Holmes* opening in New York in 1899. In *Memories and Adventures*, Doyle remarks that 'the impression that Holmes was a real person of flesh and blood may have been intensified by his frequent appearance on the stage' (1989: 101).

Early twentieth-century screen representations, such as those of Eille Norwood and Basil Rathbone, compounded Holmes's popularity. Doyle comments on Norwood's conception of the character in the films made by the Stoll Film Company between 1921 and 1923: '[Norwood] has that rare quality which can only be described as glamour, which compels you to watch an actor eagerly even when he is doing nothing. He has the brooding eye which excites expectation and he has also a quite unrivalled power of disguise. My only criticism of the films is that they introduce telephones, motor cars and other luxuries of which the Victorian Holmes never dreamed' (1989: 106).

Other factors contributed to Holmes's iconicity. Uniquely, the Victorian *fin-de-siècle* produced a panoply of sensational fictional creations: Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde, She, Dorian Gray and Dracula, to name but a few. Less well-known, perhaps, are the figures of contemporaneous detective stories, which Hugh Greene depicts as the 'rivals of Sherlock Holmes' (1971: 9).<sup>10</sup> Emerging from the recesses of a late-Victorian psyche infused with social theories of scientific progress and moral degeneration, such literary figures were unleashed in a period of rapid expansion in both the publishing industry and the reading public. Lippincott's, for instance, commissioned both *Dorian Gray* (1890) and *The Sign of Four* and invited Wilde and Doyle to lunch, an event recorded by Doyle in *Memories and Adventures* (1989: 78–80).

In the late twentieth century the titillating possibility of conjoining two of the period's most iconic fictional characters, Holmes and Dracula, emerged in the pastiche *Sherlock Holmes vs. Dracula: or, the Adventure of the Sanguinary Count* (1978), narrated by John H. Watson.<sup>11</sup> More recently, a muscular and square-jawed Holmes, far removed from Paget's fine-featured figure, appears in the graphic novel, *Sherlock Holmes vs. Dracula*. Set in a post-Apocalyptic city (a preoccupation of twenty-first century literary and visual production)<sup>12</sup>, here a Victorian London ravaged by revenants, Holmes defeats Dr Jekyll, a 'cognitive

cadaver' (2011: 30), before doing battle with the Transylvanian Count in an encounter that requires more Holmesian brawn than brains.

Holmes policed the Victorian psyche: 'no ghosts need apply' ('The Adventure of the Sussex Vampire', January 1924); allowed the reader to traverse the London underworld of opium dens ('The Man with the Twisted Lip', December 1891); absorbed the criminal 'other' ('The Final Problem', December 1893), both indigenous and foreign; and safeguarded the bourgeois home and nation by expunging it of its threats ('The Adventure of the Copper Beeches', June 1892 and 'The Adventure of the Bruce-Partington Plans', December 1908). The detective, as Slavoj Žižek argues, demonstrates how "everything is possible" including the impossible: 'The very presence of the detective guarantees in advance the transformation of the lawless sequence [of events] into a lawful sequence; in other words the reestablishment of "normality"' (1992: 58).

Holmes abides by the same moral code as the conventional law enforcers, Inspectors Lestrade and Athelney Jones but he is not defined by it. He breaks and enters ('The Adventure of the Naval Treaty', October–November 1893) and allows the perpetrators of murder to go free if their cause is justified ('The Adventure of the Devil's Foot', December 1910). Each case is weighed on its own merits and Holmes becomes the final arbiter of justice ('The Five Orange Pips', November 1891). Some variation is allowed in his character: the drug-taking Holmes of the early stories dissipates and the later published adventures show an increased sympathy with human foibles ('The Adventure of the Veiled Lodger', February 1927). Holmes – fixed and flexible (where the law is concerned), stable and eccentric, English and foreign (of French descent), celibate protector of women and homosocial – restored domestic sureties threatened by rogue stepfathers ('The Adventure of the Speckled Band', February 1892), English and continental spies ('His Last Bow', September 1917), secret societies, and wayward colonials ('The Adventure of the Dancing Men', December 1903; 'The Adventure of the Solitary Cyclist', January 1904) from the intellectual powerhouse of 221b Baker Street. That he continues to do so throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries in literary and visual pastiches and adaptations is the principal subject of this collection of critical essays, with chapters ranging from the use of Holmes in advertising (Amanda J. Field) to video games (Souvik Mukherjee).

Doyle even anticipated the Baker Street museum: in 'The Empty House', in which Holmes is resurrected after his apparent demise at the Reichenbach Falls, the sleuth places a wax dummy of himself in his sitting-room window to lure a Moriarty acolyte, Colonel Sebastian

Moran, to the empty house opposite, and when Moran pops a bullet at the figure he is trapped by Holmes and Watson. Indeed, the wax dummy represents an immortality of sorts as the detective, Watson and the reader observe Holmes's simulation lure a criminal to justice. Further prefiguring the stories' filmic afterlife, one of Paget's illustrations depicts Holmes and Watson, like spectators at a movie, looking out of the window of the empty house at the detective's fake silhouette, framed by the Baker Street casement.

Holmes's house, furthermore, reminds us of another: Doyle's former residence, Undershaw, at Hindhead in Sussex. In 1890, Doyle's first wife Louise was diagnosed with tuberculosis, for which, at that time, there was no medical cure. Recuperative stays in Egypt and Switzerland helped to alleviate Louise's symptoms. However, Grant Allen, who also suffered from the disease, told Doyle that 'he had found his salvation in the soil and air of Hindhead in Surrey' (*Memories and Adventures*: 126). Doyle immediately purchased a plot of land, and the house was completed in 1897. It was here that Doyle wrote, amongst other works, the most famous of all the Holmes's stories, *The Hound of the Baskervilles* (1901–2).

Undershaw was described by Bram Stoker, who interviewed Doyle at the house in 1907, as an 'almost fairy pleasure' filled with 'things got together for their interesting association with the author's life and adventures'. It imparted a 'sense of "home" which is so delightful to occupant and stranger alike' (Stoker 2009: 154), and Stoker noted that the drawing-room and adjacent rooms were filled with Charles Doyle's (Arthur's father) fairy pictures, described as 'delicate fancies and weird flights of imagination' (155).<sup>13</sup> For Stoker, the house and its verdant setting was one of 'idyllic beauty' (154).

Ironically, in light of the celebration of the 'home' of the great sleuth, the literary home of his creator is under threat and a campaign by Doylean scholars is presently attempting to save Undershaw for cultural posterity.<sup>14</sup> Indeed, the 'home' of the fictional detective is supporting the campaign to save the writer's residence as the Baker Street museum's website provides a link to the 'Save Undershaw' campaign. Doyle's fame as an author still remains in inverse proportion to that of his creation, and this is underscored by the status of the two homes: Undershaw and 221b Baker Street.

## Arthur Conan Holmes

*The Hound of the Baskervilles*, written during Doyle's Undershaw years and serialised from August 1901 in *The Strand Magazine*, six months

after the death of Queen Victoria on 22 January 1901, provides an interesting point of departure for an examination of both Doyle and Holmes in their post- and neo-Victorian contexts. *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, set in the 1880s, is published after the supposed death of Holmes at the Reichenbach Falls and presented as an early Holmesian exploit by Watson. For the Edwardian reader Holmes is dead but resurrected from the past, before his proper emergence from the Reichenbach Falls in 'The Adventure of the Empty House'. Like the hound, an entity from an earlier time that terrifies the Victorian Baskervilles, Holmes's ghostly Victorian form haunted *The Strand's* readers in 1901. Doyle, the spiritualist, would spend the latter part of his life attempting to bring ghostly forms into materiality. Of course, the hound turns out to be real in the detective fiction, but in the legend that shapes the narrative its ghostly form cannot be laid to rest. Holmes and Doyle variously embrace the ghostly, the fictional, the real and the immortal.

Doyle attempted to produce an account of his own life for posterity with his autobiography, published six years before his death in 1930. *Memories and Adventures* (the title, consciously or unconsciously, embracing his collected volumes of Holmes stories, *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* and *The Memoirs of Sherlock Holmes*) follows a conventional, chronological path from family history, education, adventures as a ship's doctor to a whaler and passenger ship respectively, early medical practice in Southsea, literary endeavours and successes (with a chapter dedicated to Holmes), the Anglo-Boer War, political and legal campaigns (his Liberal Unionist candidature, George Edalji, Oscar Slater, the Congo Reform Association, Roger Casement), sporting interests, and a lengthy discussion of the First World War (Doyle visited the frontlines to inspire troop morale). The autobiography ends with a chapter on the spiritualism which would preoccupy the final years of his life. Doyle's autobiography adheres to the conventional Victorian 'telling' of 'great lives' as it begins with the decline of family fortunes and details the triumph over personal adversity to success and fame.

As a Victorian 'Renaissance' man, Doyle provides an apparently endless source of interest for biographers, and increasingly for neo-Victorian novelists. In *The Observer* on 14 November 2010, Vanessa Thorpe explored how Doyle occupies a position alongside Hitler, Churchill, Dickens and the Brontës as the most desired subjects for publishers of biographies.<sup>15</sup> Indeed, the apparent disjunction in Doyle's life as both the creator of *the* ratiocinative detective and a convert to spiritualism and fairy belief is a continuing source of fascination to both biographers and novelists, as we see in the chapter by Doyle's leading biographer

Andrew Lycett, in Patricia Pulham's chapter on Julian Barnes's *Arthur & George*, and in Jennifer S. Palmer's critical survey of Doyle in contemporary neo-Victorian detective novels. Our cultural preoccupation with the Victorians, reborn and reframed in the neo-Victorian novel, is multifaceted, as Cora Kaplan argues, ranging from nostalgia to the reimagining of history (2007: 3). In Britain the Victorian past is omnipresent: physically through the remnants of its cities' architecture, artwork, and literature, and psychologically through its representation of loss (Empire, global significance, industry). The Victorians continue to haunt the contemporary psyche, and Doyle and Holmes are fitting figures for such a role: the detective writer who pursued ghostly forms and spirits, and the detective who never died. In his Victorian 'life' Sherlock Holmes was a colossus, and in his afterlife he continues to dominate cultural forms; long after his death, his creator continues to inspire biographies and is reshaped in fiction.<sup>16</sup>

The biographical form, of course, engages in acts of interpretation. Interpretations of Doyle's life commenced shortly after his death with John Lamond's 1931 spiritualist biography, *Arthur Conan Doyle: A Memoir*, authorised by the Doyle family and with an epilogue by Doyle's second wife, Jean (Leckie) Conan Doyle. A selection of subsequent biographies is worth considering. Pierre Nordon's biography, first published in French in 1965, demonstrates Doyle's appeal beyond the Anglophone world. Translated into English in 1966, Nordon's *Conan Doyle* separates Doyle into the man and the writer. Doyle, the man, is presented as a patriot, lover of justice and prophet, and Holmes occupies half of the section devoted to Doyle the writer. Like Dickson Carr's biography (1949), Nordon benefited from access to archival materials closed to biographers in the late twentieth century. He presents Doyle the man as a 'knight-errant' (1966: 342): 'Conan Doyle was essentially a fighter, a man of action, stimulated and even enriched by opposition. And spiritualism gave him an adventurous view of the next world, as well as the feeling of fulfilment and pride in the face of death that prompted his very last words: "The Lord is on my side. I will not fear what man doeth unto me"' (1966: 167). In 1983, Sherlock Holmes preoccupied Owen Dudley Edwards as he pursued the creation of the detective through an examination of Doyle's early life. *The Quest for Sherlock Holmes: A Biographical Study of Arthur Conan Doyle* is coterminous with the Granada *Sherlock Holmes* starring Jeremy Brett, the definitive screen depiction of Holmes in the late twentieth century and the subject of Neil McCaw's chapter in this collection. Meanwhile, within the broader field of Doyle scholarship, Richard Lancelyn Green and John Michael Gibson recovered the



'unknown' Doyle by publishing his forgotten short stories (*Uncollected Stories*, 1982), his *Essays on Photography* (1982) and *Letters to the Press* (1986).<sup>17</sup>

Two more significant biographies of Doyle emerged in the 1990s and, although they take different paths in their approaches to him, both Martin Booth and Daniel Stashower acknowledge in their respective prefaces the established perception of Doyle in the late twentieth century. Booth recalls that 'all I really knew of him was his creation of Sherlock Holmes and his conversion to spiritualism' (ix) and *The Doctor, the Detective and Arthur Conan Doyle* (1997) presents Doyle within his medical context.<sup>18</sup> In the preface to his 1999 biography, Stashower recalls that when he admitted an interest in Doyle the response was invariably "Sherlock Holmes was brilliant, but Doyle went a bit potty at the end, didn't he? Fairies, ghosts, and that" (1999: xii). Stashower acknowledges that "Fairies, ghosts, and that" have been the millstone of Doyle's reputation for the better part of a century' (xii), but he presents a sympathetic and humane 'teller of tales'. In 1997 Doyle's interest in fairies received the Hollywood treatment with *FairyTale: A True Story* (dir. Charles Sturridge), a children's film – and, indeed, a decidedly juvenile one – drawing inspiration from the notorious Cottingley fairy incident which had embroiled Doyle in 1920. This otherworldly Doyle occupied popular consciousness in the 1990s.<sup>19</sup>

In the twentieth-first century biographical interest in Doyle shows no sign of abating. In 2007 Stashower, Jon Lellenberg and Charles Foley published Doyle's previously unpublished letters, which considerably enhance an understanding of Doyle's family relations, the arduous path of his early medical practice, his incipient writing career and his preoccupation with income. For instance, in September 1897 he writes to his mother that he has 'serious thoughts of a Sherlock Holmes play' and if it 'came off' he could pay for Undershaw 'at one stroke' (2007: 389). Indeed, he describes Undershaw in this letter: 'Everyone falls in love with it who approaches it' (389). In 2007 Lycett produced the definitive biography of Doyle. Benefiting from extensive archival research, Lycett presents Doyle as a figure who crossed lines: an 'Irishman, born in Scotland' with 'English values' (2007: 434), deeply imbued by a sense of justice, and a public figure and campaigner, deeply immersed in and shaped by the scientific thinking of his age, 'straddling the fault line in the British psyche between rationality and superstition' (2007: 434).

Doyle exists as the penumbral figure behind Sherlock Holmes whom biographers seek to explore. Meanwhile the acclaimed BBC's *Murder Rooms* (2000–1) foregrounds a fictional Doyle – though based in some