Make Yourself at Holmes: Victorian Culture, Sherlock Holmes and the Vicissitudes of Identity

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Submitted in accordance with the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

The University of Leeds

School of Fine Art, History of Art and Cultural Studies

March 2015

The candidate confirms that the work submitted is her own and that appropriate credit has been given where reference has been made to the work of others.

❧ Acknowledgments ❦

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my supervisors, Dr Barbara Engh and Dr Eric Prenowitz, without whose unswerving intellectual and emotional support, kindness and patience this project would never come to fruition. Their careful reading, encouragement and guidance sustain and illuminate the thesis. I am indebted to them in ways too numerous to list.

Many thanks to Dr Ashley Thompson and Dr Eric Prenowitz for providing me with my own desk space 'far from the madding crowd', where it was possible to think, read and write. (Not necessarily in that order).

I would also like to thank my fellow postgraduate students in the School of Fine Art, History of Art and Cultural Studies for intellectual stimulation and friendship, especially the *parallax* team (X) – Fiona Allen, Simon Constantine, James Lavender and Swen Steinhäuser – who understand the joys of academic proofreading more than anyone else.

I am eternally grateful to my family and friends for always believing, despite signs to the contrary, that the project will one day be completed; and to Miłosz, for everything.

Finally, thank you to Arthur Conan Doyle, P.G. Wodehouse and Edmund Crispin for unparalleled beauty of language.

❧ Abstract ❦

This thesis joins a lively field of Victorian cultural studies to examine the construction and re-presentation of personal and national identity in Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes stories, concentrating on three tales: 'The Man with the Twisted Lip', 'The Adventure of the Creeping Man' and *The Sign of Four*. Employing Mikhail Bakhtin's concepts of dialogism and heteroglossia, it argues against the view of detective fiction as literature which merely confirms and reflects the normative middle-class values, positing instead that the effects of excessive textuality at work in the Holmes stories exceed the task of simple hegemonic reinforcement. It proposes a new method for reading Doyle's narratives, termed 'syndromatic', which understands the stories in a reciprocal and dynamic intertextual relationship with the historical, socio-cultural and literary milieu of their emergence. This approach supposes an irreducible density of 'textual' weave on either side of the traditional text/context divide, and allows us to trace the conflictual and polyvocal interplay across it. Rooted in and inspired by a particular genre and an inimitable, if much imitated, author, the thesis none the less makes an oblique argument for a renewed urgency of literary-cultural analysis in general. Working with the formalistic as well as content requirements of detective fiction and actively engaging The Great Game of Sherlockian scholarship alongside a theoretical study, this research negotiates the intellectual and the emotional involvement with its object to explore, as participant-observer, the addictive joys of reading detective fiction.

❧ Table of Contents ❧

❧ List of illustrations ❧

❧ Introduction ❧

Traces of Textuality: Detective Fiction, Victorian Culture and Sherlock Holmes

How do you know? I saw their traces.[1]

To give your life, or any significant part of it, to the study of Sherlock Holmes is to defy reason.[2]

I want to start, in contravention of all genre rules, by making a confession: I am addicted to detective fiction. W.H. Auden's eloquent explication on the nature of this habit efficiently summarises both the intensity of the craving – 'if I have any work to do, I must be careful not to get hold of a detective story for, once I begin one, I cannot work or sleep till I have finished it' – and the specificity of its location – 'the story must conform to certain formulas (I find it very difficult, for example, to read one that is not set in rural England).'[3] To suffer from a case of what Wilkie Collins' Gabriel Betteredge identifies in *The Moonstone* as 'detective fever' seems a common malady, as universal as it is selective.[4] (I could repeat after Auden that my addiction is truly fuelled by stories located in a quintessentially British setting and preferably no later than 1950, while the American hard-boiled tradition has a positively curative effect

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[1] Arthur Conan Doyle, 'The Resident Patient' in *The New Annotated Sherlock Holmes,* vol.I*,* ed. by Leslie S. Klinger (New York and London: W. W. Norton and Company, 2005), p.627
[2] Clive James, *First Reactions: Critical Essays 1968-1979* (New York: Knopf, 1980), p.189
[3] W.H. Auden, 'The Guilty Vicarage: Notes on the Detective Story, by an Addict', *Harper's Magazine* (May 1948), p.406
[4] Wilkie Collins, *The Moonstone* (New York: The Century Co, 1906), p.334

on my affliction). Indeed, compulsion has been a pervasive metaphor in commentary on the relationship between the genre and its readers, often drawing on a similarity with drug addiction. Philip Van Doren Stern, complaining about crime aficionados, writes that 'around each one of the many rental libraries scattered across the country is a small but determined group of readers – most of them men – who devour almost every mystery story published. They take their daily dose of murder with the frenzied enthusiasm of a drug addict.'[5] Answering the question 'why do we write detective stories?', Nicholas Blake explains that it is 'because the drug addict (and nearly every detection-writer is an omnivorous reader of crime fiction) always wants to introduce other people to the habit'[6], whilst Edmund Wilson, ever dismissive of detective stories, likens the increasingly growing extent of their appeal to 'the opium smoker [who] tells the novice not to mind if the first pipe makes him sick', adding that 'the addict reads not to find anything out but merely to get mild simulation.'[7]

It shouldn't perhaps be surprising that the fanatical personality of the reader runs parallel with the addictive character of the fictional detective who is also frequently driven by a compulsion beyond any reasonable control. Agatha Christie's Hercule Poirot suffers from a fixation with orderliness that demands geometric precision in all aspects of daily life, Rex Stout's Nero Wolfe is a hedonistic gourmand, Ian Fleming's James Bond – together with a multitude of other police detectives, investigators and crime-solvers –

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[5] Philip Van Doren Stern, 'The Case of the Corpse in the Blind Alley' in *The Art of the Mystery Story: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. by Howard Haycraft (New York: Carroll & Graf, 1974), pp.531-532

[6] Nicholas Blake, 'The Detective Story – Why?' in *The Art of the Mystery Story: A Collection of Critical Essays*, op.cit., p.398

[7] Edmund Wilson, 'Who Cares Who Killed Roger Ackroyd?' in *The Art of the Mystery Story: A Collection of Critical Essays*, op.cit., p.396

grapples with a dependence on alcohol, while Sherlock Holmes – the topic of this study – is famous for his cocaine injections. The case of Holmes is a rather atypical one, however, in that whereas for many sleuths the daily battle with debilitating habits forms a necessary part of their personality, often influencing the outcome of the investigation (Ian Rankin's Inspector Rebus and Jo Nesbø's Harry Hole are exemplary here), Holmes' drug use does not, by comparison, follow a pattern of addiction. Rather, as will be explicated in chapters 1 and 3, it is merely a substitute for work, the dependence on the mental stimulation of a case forming the bases of Holmes' real obsession. The nature of Holmes' affliction thus mirrors perhaps most closely that of an avid reader of detective fiction, insofar as, for both, the end of the story, naturally coinciding with the end of the case, leads to a period of tedium and ennui, alleviated only by a new, albeit familiar, beginning. The moment of closure supposedly effected by detective fiction does not thus, paradoxically, lead to peaceful recuperation but rather to an all too brief release whose very temporality engenders almost instant dissatisfaction. In a drug-related parlance we could say that the 'fix' of detection vanishes with the fixing of the case. Viewed in this way, there is a greater affinity between the reader and the figure of the aloof Holmes than, as is usually theorised, that of Watson – they are both at a mercy of never-ending compulsion to repeat, to engage ceaselessly with the intellectual puzzle, the solution of which, however necessary, is a victory followed by a profound sense of loss. The importance of this replication, especially in relation to the formulae of detective literature will bear further scrutiny; for the moment let us concentrate on the essential issue of how is detective fiction able to exercise such a powerful hold on its

readers' imagination. The question, whilst deceptively simple, nonetheless eludes easy explanation, since the purportedly schematic nature of the genre, compounded by the aforementioned desire on the part of the reader to engage only with a story erected on a very selective foundation, would naturally seem to indicate a rapid dawning of ennui rather than rapture. As Stern observes, the readers 'know all the tricks: they have followed all the detectives [...] they are familiar with all the ways a human being can be put to death [...] there is nothing new to them under the sun [...].'[8] In a similar manner, ingeniously linking the feared decline of the detective story with a growing number of critical studies in which the genre was scrutinised – 'things are not analysed until they are dead' – Dorothy L. Sayers explains that the prophecies of inevitable collapse stemmed from a firm belief that 'all the possible combinations and permutations would shortly be exhausted.'[9] Yet, it seems that compulsion to repeat is precisely what drives the readers of detective fiction, for 'heaven help the writer who tries to give them anything but the old familiar brand.'[10] Geraldine Penderson-Krag attempts to account for this paradox through psychoanalytical interpretation, arguing that detective stories allow us to actively allay and master the disquieting curiosity aroused by observation of the primal scene. In an engagement with the textual trauma of the crime – a symbolic depiction of the parental intercourse – presented always as 'more satisfying and less painful', the reader, in a controlled environment of the story, 'gratifies his infantile curiosity with impunity, redressing completely the helpless inadequacy and anxious guilt

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[8] Philip Van Doren Stern, op.cit., p.532
[9] Dorothy L. Sayers (ed.) Introduction to *Great Short Stories of Detection, Mystery and Horror*, second series (London: Victor Gollancz, 1948), p.12
[10] Philip Van Doren Stern, op.cit., p.532

unconsciously remembered from childhood.'[11] The pleasure thus afforded is intensely voyeuristic, and the observer:

> Is never entirely satisfied with his peeping which he has the compulsion endlessly to repeat like the detective story addict who rereads the same basic mystery tale without tedium. In the gradual revelation of clues that make up the bulk of the narrative, the reader is presented with one significant detail after another, a protracted visual forepleasure.[12]

It is perhaps worth briefly highlighting here the analogies which have been drawn habitually between detective fiction and psychoanalysis, whereby, as Patrick ffrench explicates, 'there is an evident structural parallel between the activity of the psychoanalyst and that of the detective. Both analyse a texture of manifest clues or symptoms in order to find the hidden or latent truth that lies behind this surface.'[13] Freud and Doyle thus share not only a historical moment but also a mode of reading for clues which utilises the veiled significance of things:

> Psychoanalysis seems to have become a hidden or acknowledged subtext to the detective, who is now not so much in search of the truth of the crime he or she is investigating, as in search of the truth or trauma of a past, often his or her own past. The detective, like the analyst, must engage in transference with the criminal or the patient, must identify with the criminal in order to trace the past back to the original trauma.[14]

It is noteworthy that Charles Rycroft, enlarging upon Penderson-Krag's hypothesis, argues to the contrary, putting forward that 'reading detective

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[11] Geraldine Penderson-Krag, 'Detective Stories and the Primal Scene' in *The Poetics of Murder: Detective Fiction and Literary Theory*, ed. by Glenn W. Most and William W. Stowe (San Diego and London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1983), p.20
[12] Ibid., pp.18-19
[13] Patrick ffrench, 'Open Letter to Detectives and Psychoanalysts' in *The Art of Detective Fiction*, ed. by Warren Chernaik, Martin Swales and Robert Vilain (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2000), p.222
[14] Ibid., p.225

stories is in a way the opposite of having psychoanalytical treatment', since it logically follows that if the victim personifies the parent for whom the reader harbours negative feelings, the reader must identify as much with the detective as with the criminal – an identification which the story works to suppress. Consequently, 'the detective story writer connives with the reader's need to deny his guilt by providing him with ready-made fantasies in which the compulsive question "whodunit?" is always answered by a self-exonerating "Not I".' The pleasure thus derived is based not on a cathartic release but rather on a feeling of omnipotent control whereby the reading of a detective story is a means of 'manic defence'.[15] We could put forward therefore that the gratification such a reading affords is first and foremost of an *intellectual* nature, that is to say, it is bound to the feeling of superiority, however erroneous, engendered by the proven ability to solve the case. In this way, the suppression of guilt takes on the appearance of merely following the apotheosised logic of detection which illuminates, with relentless insistence, the shadowy complexities of the narrative to establish once and for all the identity of the culprit ("not I"). To isolate this 'light of pure reason' is a dictum forcibly associated with Holmes, a project which, in the field of literary criticism, often posits detective fiction as a consequence of Victorian positivism whose function is merely to construct a tangible and interpretable world that submits fully to empirical reasoning, granting enjoyment which Christine Ann Evans aptly terms 'consolatory'.[16] Using Roland Barthes' classification, particularly useful here, we could argue that detective fiction

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[15] Charles Rycroft, *Imagination and Reality: Psychoanalytical Essays 1951-1961* (London: Maresfield Library, 1987), pp.114-115, 116

[16] Christine Ann Evans, 'On the Valuation of Detective Fiction: A Study in the Ethics of Consolation', *The Journal of Popular Culture*, vol.28, issue 2 (1994), p.159. See, for example, Rosemary Jann, *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes: Detecting Social Order.*

has been persistently envisaged and theorised as an example of *the text of pleasure*: 'the established text that contents, fills, grants euphoria; the text that comes from culture and does not break with it, is linked to a comfortable practice of reading.'[17] But if the detective story indeed rests upon consistent rationality its telos is nonetheless not identical to it, since it can never fully dispense with the sensational aspects of the narrative. 'It is upon logic rather than upon the crime that you should dwell'[18], Holmes opines, objecting to Watson's writing style, yet it is precisely the suspense element which engenders a more immediately textual type of reading, centred on:

> the palpable somatic effect of shock, confusion, surprise, confirmation, jubilation and craving for more produced when one reads the detective story as most of its faithful readers do (as opposed to what Barthes calls the "pensive" effects one enjoys in reading realistic novels). Detective fiction yields not only purely abstract knowledge, but something like carnal knowledge as well. It can be thought of, then, as enacting not only a logic but also an erotics.[19]

This *erotic* pleasure of detective fiction needn't necessarily be antithetical to intellectual gratification and Caroline Levine convincingly argues against the proscribed view of suspense which positions sensational literature as politically and socially submissive, proposing instead that it should be considered as an arena of 'epistemological training, a way to foster energetic scepticism.'[20] However, unlike the puzzle-solving element which relies on a gradual reduction of available clues and a firm separation of relevant and

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[17] Roland Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*, trans. by Richard Miller (New York: Hill and Wang, 1975), p.14
[18] Arthur Conan Doyle, 'The Adventure of the Copper Beeches' in *The New Annotated Sherlock Holmes*, vol.I, op.cit., p.352
[19] Lawrence Rothfield, *Vital Signs: Medical Realism in Nineteenth-Century Fiction* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992), p.131
[20] Caroline Levine, *The Serious Pleasures of Suspense: Victorian Realism and Narrative Doubt* (London and Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2003), p.2

superfluous signifiers, it is contingent instead upon excessive proliferation, since the very function of detection necessitates 'the involvement of the reader in a wealth – or morass – of contradictory detail'.[21] Here, as David Miller observes, a certain paradoxical economy of the detective story comes to the fore: 'though [it] postulates a world in which everything might have a meaningful bearing on the solution of the crime, it concludes with an extensive repudiation of meanings that simply "drop out".' In other words, its function is not to unify and totalise but rather to restrict and localise, 'to guarantee large areas of irrelevance.'[22] While such an explication is no doubt plausible, what Miller doesn't seem to recognise is that the textual overindulgence generated by the tension between logic and suspense is not simply erased but always lingers in the story as a trace of a different solution ("it is I"). Since, as will be more fully explicated in Chapter 3, Holmes' method is abductive rather than deductive, this possibility seems inherently written into the text, rendering the narrative drive for closure to be an exercise in perpetual impossibility – always moving towards but never quite arriving at a final resolution. Albert Hutter's claim that ' we must experience confusion of observation and of report until we can decipher the language of the text, probe its ambiguities and contradictions and symbolism in order to fully understand the crime itself'[23] is therefore only partially true, for the experience of crime, which always exists as an unresolvable tension between vicarious excitement which would see it eternally repeated and dismayed repulsion which insists on suppression, does not grant easy comprehension. Rather,

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[21] Albert D. Hutter, 'Dreams, Transformations and Literature: The Implications of Detective Fiction', *Victorian Studies*, vol.19, no.2 (December 1995), pp.193-194
[22] David A. Miller, 'From Roman Policier to Roman-Police: Willkie Collins' *The Moonstone*', *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction*, vol.13, no.2 (Winter 1980), pp.153, 154
[23] Albert D. Hutter, op.cit., pp.193-194

the unresolvable internal tensions serve only to illuminate the innately excessive nature of detective fiction that makes central 'the subtle interaction with, and interpretation of, language.'[24] To return to the previously employed Barthesian terminology, we could argue that to concentrate on the conflictual play of language, while not trying to deny the validity of positioning the narratives as texts of pleasure, opens the possibility that the Holmes stories can be read instead, or rather simultaneously, as *the text of bliss*: 'the text that imposes a state of loss, the text that discomforts (perhaps to the point of a certain boredom), unsettles the reader's historical, cultural, psychological assumptions, the consistency of his tastes, values, memories, brings to a crisis his relation with language.'[25] To claim that detective fiction, a genre whose literary pretensions have consistently been denied – 'in order to possess its true narcotic quality, the detective story should be fluently written, but no more'[26] – should be studied, *sensu lato*, through a linguistic or philological lens might of course seem superfluous. However, to pay mind to the verbal or lingual aspect of the Holmes narratives is, I feel, despite – or perhaps because of – its placement within the field of popular fiction which 'actively discourages certain forms of attention'[27], as necessary as it is fruitful, not least because, as Peter Ackroyd observes in a rare instance of linguistic consideration given to the Holmes stories, the quality of Doyle's idiom has seldom been remarked on.[28] My intention, therefore, is to follow the natural

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[24] Ibid., p.194
[25] Roland Barthes, op.cit.,p.14
[26] 'The Function of Detective Stories', *Pall Mall Gazette*, issue 7338 (22 September 1888), p.3
[27] Stephen Arata, *Fictions of Loss in the Victorian Fin de Siècle* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p.133
[28] Peter Ackroyd, Introduction in *The Sign of Four* by Arthur Conan Doyle (London: Penguin 2001), p.xi

curve of the Holmesian language with a view 'not to devour, to gobble, but to graze, to browse scrupulously, to rediscover'.[29]

Diana Barsham, in a welcome critique of the Foucauldian paradigm which would see the Holmes stories primarily as a textual articulation of the panoptical machine of power and surveillance, remarks on a singular linguistic property of Doyle's writing style which passes almost entirely undetected in the many analyses of his literary career.[30] The author of Sherlock Holmes stories, she observes, writes 'under the eye of the 'Comic Spirit' and owes more to the comedic theories of his literary mentor, George Meredith, than to nineteenth-century prison technology.'[31] Indeed, easy wit, detached irony and penchant for Wildean epigram seem to permeate the canon, adding a subtle level of mischievous playfulness to a genre often considered to be stylistically limited. Doyle often employs satire, grotesquely incongruous imagery or parody, breaking, as it were, through the surface of the text, both in terms of form and content. One such remarkable instance will be shown in the reading of *The Sign of Four* in Chapter 3, in which story a substantial part of the otherwise sombre and gruesome novella is devoted to an absurdly comic and unbefitting dog chase. Similarly, in *The Valley of Fear*, Holmes nonchalantly remarks, in a manner which seems to satirise his own deductive methods, that 'when water is near and a weight is missing, it is not a very far-fetched supposition that something has been sunk in the water.'[32] In 'A Case of Identity', Holmes gently mocks Watson's description of a client,

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[29] Roland Barthes, op.cit*., p.13
[30] A noteworthy exception is to be found in Barry Hayne's 'The Comic in the Canon: What's Funny About Sherlock Holmes', although he concentrates primarily on the comic qualities arising from a type of implied marital tension between Holmes and Watson.
[31] Diana Barsham, *Arthur Conan Doyle and the Meaning of Masculinity* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000), p.2
[32] Arthur Conan Doyle, *The Valley of Fear* (New York: A. L. Burt, 1914), p.143

observing: 'Upon my word, Watson, you are coming along wonderfully. You have really done very well indeed. It is true that you have missed everything of importance, but you have hit upon the method, and you have a quick eye for colour'[33], while in 'The Adventure of the Devil's Foot' we are presented with the following dialogue, one of many such stichomythic exchanges:

"How do you know that?"

"I followed you."

"I saw no one."

"That is what you may expect to see when I follow you."[34]

The humour of the stories extended also to the scholarship and an ever growing number of devotees, inspired by a seminal article penned by Ronald Knox, made it their mission to resolve textual anomalies and many contradictions of the tales and shed light on implied details about Holmes and Watson's lives to arrive at a coherent, if somewhat unlikely, chronology. Knox's thesis, advanced through the lips of an imaginary Professor Sauwosch, postulated, based on textual evidence alone, that the stories comprising *The Return of Sherlock Holmes* 'are the lucubration of [Watson's] own unaided invention.'[35] Intended as a satire upon the 'higher criticism' of the Bible, the article, insisting that Holmes was a real person, traced minutiae of Watson's narration, illuminating instances where, for example, inconsistencies as to the exact colour of Holmes' dressing-gown can be seen. Doyle read the essay with great 'amusement – and also amazement', adding

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[33] Arthur Conan Doyle, 'A Case of Identity' in *The New Annotated Sherlock Holmes,* vol.I*,* op.cit.,p.90

[34] Arthur Conan Doyle, 'The Adventure of the Devil's Foot' in *The New Annotated Sherlock Holmes,* vol.II*,* op.cit., p.1417-1418. One should also mention the countless parodies and pastiches written about Holmes, including Hemlock Shomes, Picklock Holes or Sherlock Bones, the Japanese dog detective.

[35] Ronald Knox, 'Studies in the Literature of Sherlock Holmes', *New Blackfriars*, vol.1, issue 3 (1920), p.159

in a reply that Knox seemed to know 'a great deal more about it than I do, for the stories have been written in a disconnected (and careless) way.'[36] Nonetheless, the article sparked an interest in what has come to be known as *The Great Game*, or simply *The Game*, of Sherlockian scholarship, a pastime as diverse as it is prolific (Leslie S. Klinger's *Sherlock Holmes Reference Library* comprises ten volumes). Paradoxically, if, as Anna Faktorovich remarks, 'some literary critics still place Conan Doyle outside of the top literary canons because these inconsistencies are too hack-like and beneath the standards necessary to merit an outstanding literary achievement'[37], for the players of The Game they are precisely what makes the stories worth reading, extending the involvement with the tales beyond the boundaries of the text. Whilst a number of studies are devoted to the tracing of historical or social aspects of the narratives, concentrating on finding real-life equivalents of the places, people and events described in the canon, a more fanciful branch of study engages in constructing exhaustive biographies of Holmes and Watson, seemingly in a direct opposition to Dorothy L. Sayer's pronouncement that The Game 'must be played as solemnly as a county cricket match at Lord's; the slightest touch of extravagance or burlesque ruins the atmosphere.'[38] Consequently, we are presented with a number of studies in which from a smallest facet of the text an elaborate and detailed chain of reasoning is constructed to show that, to list but a few choice examples, Holmes was Dracula's nephew, Professor Moriarty escaped death at

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[36] Arthur Conan Doyle, cited in Penelope Fitzgerald, *The Knox Brothers: Edmund ('Evoe) 1881-1971, Dilwyn 1883-1943, Wilfred 1886-1950,Ronald 1888-1957* (Newton Abbot: Readers Union, 1978), p.106
[37] Anna Faktorovich, *The Formulas of Popular Fiction: Elements of Fantasy, Science Fiction, Romance, Religious and Mystery Novels* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Co, 2014), p.178
[38] Dorothy L. Sayers, *Unpopular Opinions* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1946), p.7

Reichenbach Falls to become J. Edgar Hoover, or that Watson had a twin brother who murdered and impersonated him, undetected by Holmes.

Such an approach, while certainly novel, attracted a great deal of controversy and some critics blame, at least partially, the lack of 'serious' analytical engagement with the canon and 'a tradition of scholarly disdain' for the Holmes stories on the supposed triviality of The Game.[39] Christopher Clausen bitterly remarks that the Holmes stories have been subjected to 'most tedious pseudo-scholarship in the history of letters, most of it premised on the facetious assumption that Holmes was a historical character', that has 'driven everyone else away' from a critical discussion of the canon.[40] In even stronger terms, Kim Herzinger bluntly dismisses both the stories and the scholarship, designating them to be 'a kind of inspired imbecility', adding rather uncharitably that

> for the most part, the Holmes stories are made from materials bought at a kind of nineteenth-century K-Mart, and without the wondrous appeal of the character of Holmes our estimation of Conan Doyle's talent as a writer would be that he was a sort of *Boy's Life* Marie Corelli, who combined the moral insight of Queen Victoria with the historical precision of Sir Walter Scott.[41]

Despite so strongly articulated qualms academic commitment need not preclude a reading which, I would argue, in its meticulous and compulsive involvement stems from love for the text that gives voice to, in no uncertain terms, the addictive spell of detective fiction articulated so fluently by Auden.

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[39] Christopher Redmond, *Sherlock Holmes Handbook*, 2nd edition (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 2009), p.311 It is ironic that Redmond blames the lack of engagement with detective fiction in academic circles on the innate 'snobbery' of literary scholars, while at the same time dismissing the contributions made by the players of The Game as irrelevant.

[40] Christopher Clausen, 'Sherlock Holmes, Order and the Late-Victorian Mind', *Georgia Review*, vol.38 (Spring 1984), p.105

[41] Kim Herzinger, 'Inside and Outside Sherlock Holmes: A Rhapsody' in *Critical Essays on Sir Arthur Conan Doyle*, ed. by Harold Orel (New York: Macmillan, 1992), pp.105, 104

Moreover, I want to posit that The Great Game promotes a type of reading which allows us to study the Holmesian canon in a way attuned not only to the fabular but also typological nuances of the detective genre in which 'nothing is wasted [...] since anything may be significant.'[42] It is also a type of engagement which, in its textual literalisation of Holmes' dictum that 'there is nothing so unnatural as the commonplace'[43], provokes a certain reverence for the seemingly inconsequential aspects of the script which could be described, using George Perec's term, as *infra-ordinary*:

> How should we take account of, question, describe what happens every day and recurs every day: the banal, the quotidian, the obvious, the common, the ordinary, the infra-ordinary, the background noise, the habitual? To question the habitual. But that's just it, we're habituated to it. We don't question it, it doesn't question us, it doesn't seem to pose a problem [...].[44]

Perec's term is especially apt for theorising detective fiction, since it insists on viewing the everyday, banal occurrences and objects with an attention at once systematic and excessive which responds, in turn, to the economy of detection whereby 'everything might count: every character might be the culprit, and every action or speech might be belying its apparent banality or literalism by making surreptitious reference to an incriminating Truth. [...] Everything might have a meaningful bearing on the solution of the crime.'[45] Or, to put it differently, it is a reading 'always in a dialogue between taking the

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[42] Christopher Pittard, *Purity and Contamination in Late Victorian Detective Fiction* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), p.12
[43] Arthur Conan Doyle, 'A Case of Identity', in *The New Annotated Sherlock Holmes*, vol.I, op.cit., p.75
[44] George Perec, 'Approaches to What?' in *Species of Spaces and Other Pieces*, ed. and trans. by John Sturrock (London: Penguin, 1999), p.204
[45] David A. Miller, op.cit., p.153

side of things and having respect for words'[46], paying attention to the logical

and lexical semantic connections formed both within and without the text. My

own writing, therefore, in its engagement with the minutiaee of philological

and etymological registers of the stories, while laying itself open to the charge

of incongruity, is in part an act of obeisance to the Great Game, a homage

paid to the infra-ordinary details forming the extra-ordinary narratives of the

canon. This methodology is greatly informed by Samuel Rosenberg, a

Sherlockian scholar who, in his fascinating (if oft derided) book, *Naked Is the*

Best Disguise, puts forward that Conan Doyle's oeuvre is characterised by an

insistent repetition of 'compulsively linked images, ideas, persons, objects,

and actions', the presence of which constitutes an allegorical matrix of

meaning functioning as a syndrome.[47] Although it could perhaps be argued

that Rosenberg's insistence on subsuming every instance of repetition in the

Holmes stories under the rubric of compulsive pattern creation is somewhat

reductive, omitting to account for the formalist requirements of the genre and

that, conversely, his fixation on author's intentions fails to take into account

the contextual placement of the work, the conclusion to which his painstaking

research leads is nonetheless striking. The Conan Doyle syndrome,

according to Rosenberg, can be traced, first and foremost, in the compulsive

affiliation of sexuality and writing in the Sherlockian canon:

> My accumulated notes and analysis revealed that in almost every story
> I'd dissected, the mention of the printed or written word in any form –
> books as objects, book titles, quotations from or references to any

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[46] Claude Burgelin and Joseph Mai, 'Georges Perec, or the Spirit of Beginnings, *Yale French Studies*, no.105 (2004), p.12

[47] Samuel Rosenberg, *Naked Is the Best Disguise: The Death and Resurrection of Sherlock Holmes* (London: Arlington Books, 1975), p.68 Rosenberg frequently, and with much apparent glee, uses the term 'sin-drome' in the place of 'syndrome,' in reference to the importance of illicit sexuality in the Holmes stories.

> literary work, magazine articles, newspaper items, "agony columns",
> signs, advertisements, diaries (especially "lust diaries"), letters,
> manuscripts, words scribbled on paper or upon the wall (even in blood),
> "read" in the dust of floors, or even in the expression of faces – was
> usually accompanied by a compulsive or automatic allusion to some
> form of forbidden sexual expression, either heterosexual or homosexual,
> or both.[48]

Following Rosenberg's lead, I want to argue that particular attention should be paid to the linguistic register of the Holmes stories, to the complex semantic connections formed at the level of verbal expression which, when read in conjunction with historical, socio-cultural and formal registers forming and, conversely, formed by the narratives, allow for a type of engagement with the text which, to use Bakhtin's term, becomes *dialogic*, that is to say, contingent on and striving towards and beyond a dynamic and relational inter- and intra-textuality. I propose to term this engagement 'syndromatic reading', in reference both to Rosenberg's advance and the etymological signification of syndrome (from Greek *syndromos*, meaning 'a place where several roads meet') and symptom (from Greek *symptoma*, meaning 'to happen, coincide') which provides an aptly philological link to the trope of dialogue. Such an approach is also, perhaps paradoxically, at once deeply historical and avant-garde, since in evoking the etymological signification of words it simultaneously references the past, present and future chronology of usage. It is a reading which follows Bakhtin's pronouncement that a study of utterances, and so by extension literature, 'must overcome the divorce between an abstract "formal" approach and an equally abstract "ideological"

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[48] Ibid.

approach.'[49] Instead, emphasis should be placed on the interconnectedness of the two methods, linked as they are in a necessary reciprocity, especially in relation to detective fiction, a genre which strongly articulates both positions. To read syndromatically, therefore, is to pay close attention to the text, at the same time moving beyond its borders and locating it within a wider system of textual production based on a complex classificatory structure of intertextual connections. This intertextuality must simultaneously be extended further, moving, as Douglas Kellner neatly summarises, 'from text to its context'[50], that is to say, the social, cultural and historical frameworks of its production and consumption. Although it might seem like an already established tradition of theorising cultural artefacts, it is often realised in a manner which doesn't do justice to the intricacies of the relationship between the textual and the cultural, treating them as disparately self-contained objects, rather than activities or processes that need to be studied *dynamically*. This is especially true in relation to detective fiction, owing to, in some measure – on the one hand – the strong influence of the formalist or structuralist school of reading which concentrates primarily on the intricacies of genre conventions, omitting often to reference the socio-cultural conditions and – on the other – the Gramscian/Althusserian or, more recently, Foucauldian denomination, that habitually analyses works of literature through an ideological lens, as if the two were in a relation of correspondence in which the former simply articulates the latter. What I hope to emphasise instead is that there is a conflicted reciprocity of reading at stake in the triad

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[49] Mikhail Bakhtin, 'Discourse in the Novel', in *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, trans. Michael Holquist and Caryl Emerson, ed. Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), p.269
[50] Douglas Kellner, *Media Culture: Cultural Studies, Identity and Politics Between the Modern and the Postmodern* (London: Routledge, 1995), p.28

of textual, intertextual and contextual engagement and that, in a dialogic manner, their relationship 'concerns the developing form of internal contradiction.'[51] What might be construed as seemingly supplementary parts of my research dealing with cultural history or literary influences are not, therefore, mere preambles leading to the 'proper' subject of a literary reading of Sherlock Holmes but form a vital component of what I hope to be a dialogic engagement of discourses, voices and texts. In brief, my commitment is as much with the questions of Victorian history, long nineteenth century culture or literary genre development as it is with the Holmes stories. It is also worth mentioning that such a reading must necessarily be inter- and intra-disciplinary in its approach to do justice to the heteroglot nature of the endeavour. My aim, therefore, was to engage with a wide and diverse number of sources, overcoming spatial and temporal boundaries, traversing literary, medical, historical, legislative, political and criminal discourses and making use of literary criticism, popular fiction, letters, newspapers and magazines as well as social investigations, government reports, medical journals and scientific papers. Each chapter is structured in a similar fashion; the three parts – comprising elucidation on socio-cultural history, literary influences and textual analysis of selected Holmes stories – are positioned in a relation of symbiotic mutuality, each forming an essential part of a heteroglot whole. Their placement also, following the trajectory of a dialogic discourse, engenders a reading which allows for movement between the various subsections and chapters, where each part equally responds to and

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[51] Etienne Balibar and Pierre Macherey, 'On Literature as an Ideological Form' in *Untying the Text: A Post-structuralist Reader*, ed. by Robert Young (Boston and London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981), p.83

anticipates the others. It is not, therefore, merely a matter of influence or linear explication of ideas, but rather of an engagement which stimulates change, since the dialogue extends both back and forth.

Perhaps a brief explanation is in order as to the exact typology of the Holmes stories. I have chosen the term 'detective fiction' to emphasise the centrality of the figure of Holmes in the narratives and the method he uses, as well as to distinguish it from countless other emanations of the genre, such as crime fiction, murder mystery or police drama. That is not to say, of course, that any typological purity can or indeed should be maintained – in the canon we are frequently confronted with events which do not, strictly speaking, fall under the purview of detection – but rather, conversely, to highlight the wide variety of plots which the term encompasses and the impossibility of formulaic containment. Edgar Allan Poe's 'The Murders in the Rue Morgue' is often taken to be the starting point for Victorian detective fiction and certainly a precursor to and influence on Doyle's Holmes stories. It is pleasingly ironic that in an unforeseen twist the first criminal of modern detective narrative turns out not to be a human being but an Orang-utan – a trope to some extent reworked by Doyle in CREE[52] – for it positions detective fiction as contingent upon and responding to a whole history of writing that has perhaps more in common with gothic mystery novels and humorous grotesques than the gruesome crime tales of the *Newgate Calendar* or the sternly serious police reports. To take note of these varied literary antecedents is of import here, since it allows us to expand the needlessly limiting parameters of study, locating detective fiction, and so Doyle's writing,

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[52] The abbreviated titles of all the Holmes stories are given in the Appendix and follow an officially established rule for referencing the canon which takes the first four letters of the title, omitting words such as 'adventure' or 'case'.

not only within the boundaries demarcated by, for example, the rise of the metropolitan police force (cf. Albert D. Hutter) or the luridly graphic real-crime accounts (cf. Heather Worthington), but also in a much broader context of literary and textual production.

Thus, when considered formalistically or from a structural point of view, the three stories I chose to read offer three different models, or sub-genres, of detective fiction. In CREE, no crime of any kind has been committed and we are made aware of the fact early on in the story. Rather, the narrative presents a pure puzzle, an intellectual challenge shrouded in costumes of gothic mystery. In TWIS, there is no crime *sensu stricto* but we are led to believe that murder most foul took place. The story deals with familial disorder and, through association with the opium den, wider social corruption. Finally, in SIGN, there is a proliferation of crimes, including theft and murder, in the perhaps most classic example of a 'whodunit' filtered through an adventure story. Although we are told who the culprit is relatively early on in the narrative, the underlying causes of the crime are not revealed until the final confession. In terms of content, all the three stories deal with and are oriented around a structuring set of binaries, that the narratives at once reinforce, query and dismantle. To provide a summary we could posit, in a simplified manner, that in CREE, it is the human/animal, in TWIS, the interior/exterior or public/private and in SIGN, national/other or Britain/empire dyad. All the terms of the binaries respond in some way to the question of identity formation and the stories, therefore, are involved in a complex staging of what it means, and how does one become, a subject. The title of the thesis is thus a somewhat paradoxical play on the position afforded to

detective fiction – to make oneself at Holmes is to recognise the role

attributed to literature, especially of the popular kind, in the formation and

mirroring of the Victorian middle-class who, as Stephen Knight usefully

reminds us, needed constant confirmation that it has really 'made itself'.[53]

This comfortable familiarity is however undermined, firstly, by the persistently

repetitive quality of the endeavour and, perhaps even more forcibly, by the

unbreachable semantic gap implied by the idiom. The invitation to 'make

yourself at home/Holmes' always suggests a degree of pretence, a spurious

feeling of ease, since it can only be acted upon when one is *away* from

home. Any comfort thus afforded must necessarily be of a meretricious

nature, highlighting rather than assuaging the anxiety of self-knowledge. The

emphasis on the *active* nature of this development – becoming rather than

being – is of import here, since it relates to the idea explicated by Peter

Thoms, that the narrative of detective fiction is 'primarily concerned with what

is *made* and that process of construction becomes the very subject of these

works'.[54] All the three stories also in some way utilise and are structured

around, rather aptly for a genre which has been termed an addiction, the

question of drug use. The placement of the tales in the canon is deliberately

diverse – TWIS published in 1891, is one of the first Holmes stories to appear

in print, CREE, published in 1923, one of the last, whereas SIGN is the

second of the only four full-length Holmes novellas ever penned. This wide

inter-genre and temporal variety affords us space to respond not only to the

demands of plot and content but also to a more controlled set of formalistic

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[53] Stephen Knight, *Form and Ideology in Crime Fiction* (London: Macmillan, 1980), p.92
[54] Peter Thoms, *Detection and Its Designs: Narrative and Power in Nineteenth Century Detective Fiction* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1998), p.1

requirements, actively engaging the structural alongside the ideological,

historical and literary, allowing us to posit the genre of detective fiction in

general and the Holmes stories more specifically as potentially open to a way

of reading which would not need to *a priori* assume and presuppose their

complicity in perpetuating and maintaining, be it consciously or

unconsciously, the hegemonic *status quo* of bourgeois ideology – the very

nature of which must also come under scrutiny. Although attempts have

certainly been made at theorising the figure of Holmes as internally

conflicted, complex and perhaps even defying the sweeping logic of

character unification, they usually stop at the analysis of the stories'

characterological devices – that is to say, the peculiarities of behaviour and

personal quirks with which the great detective has been endowed. Moreover,

the insistent fixation on Holmes, while no doubt a testament to the power of

Doyle's writing, creates an analytical imbalance whereby other *dramatis*

personae receive only perfunctory attention. While I do not dispute that such

an exploration is also necessary and fruitful, it seems to me that it could

perhaps be useful to examine Conan Doyle's writing from a different angle

and concentrate on a reading which would magnify not only its descriptive but

also *textual* aspects. I take this textuality to signify a dialogic nature of the

script, an openness that resists any simple attempts at achieving closure – a

heteroglot 'representing the co-existence of socio-ideological contradictions

of both present and past.'[55] From such a vantage point, the Holmes stories

would appear 'novelistic', following Bakhtinian nomenclature, that is, actively

engaged in the struggle between the official, centralising and the unofficial,

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[55] Mikhail Bakhtin, 'Discourse in the Novel', op.cit., p.291

stratifying ideology. Far from being merely vehicles for the advancement of monologic dogma, the Sherlockian narratives can thus be approached through a reading tuned into their generative dynamics of opposition. It is crucial to note here that for Bakhtin this struggle is not, and can never be, dialectical. Heteroglossia does not follow the Hegelian logic; it does not culminate in the satisfying unity of synthesis. Rather, it is a violent interaction, a clash of voices which can produce only moments of illuminating fragmentation inside the text. To examine those fissures within the textual fabric of the Holmes stories is to allow for, and always be aware of, a polyphonic perception of language constantly at work within even the seemingly most rigid of ideological structures. There are instances in Conan Doyle's writing, I want to argue, which open up a possibility of a reading which would allow us to question both the existence of a self-same, dominant socio-political discourse and the easy placement of the Holmesian narratives as part of such an ideology.

As much as the prospect of a multivocal, revolutionary reading seems exciting and alluring I feel it is necessary to proceed with caution here, for it is all too easy to lose one's critical bearings in the midst of Bakhtin's free-flowing, passionate prose. In order to avoid producing a text which, in its eagerness to fulfil the obligations of true discovery, arrives only at a moment of internal completeness, it is essential to pay singular attention to those instances when, suddenly, the inscribing becomes too comfortable, too familiar. That is not to say, of course, that one should strive to achieve a textual mastery in which every manifestation carries equal weight and every utterance is echoed by its counterpart. Such a project would, *ex definitione*,

remain purely passive and reactive. Rather, the aim is to allow for creative

interaction among the different expressions, a dialogic relationship among

readings and writings that would avoid the monologic force of 'the last word.'

This is particularly important in light of Bakhtin's understanding of the unique

position of literature within the ideological environment and the emphasis

placed on the double nature of literary work:

> Literature is one of the independent parts of the surrounding ideological reality, occupying a special place in it in the form of definite, organised philological works which have their own specific structures. The literary structure, like every ideological structure, refracts the generating socioeconomic reality, and does so in its own way. But at the same time, in its 'content', literature reflects and refracts the reflections and refractions of other ideological sphere (ethics, epistemology, political doctrines, religion, etc.). That is, in its 'content' literature reflects the whole of the ideological horizon of which it is part.[56]

Literature, therefore, functions in a state of dialogic interaction between its

own, ideologically situated, content and the ideological discourses outside of

its immediate purview. Since this relationship is based on constant generative

development it is possible to claim, as Bakhtin does, that writing is in a

position not only to comment on the present *status quo* but also to anticipate

– *in statu nascendi* – future advances in various ideologemes. In order to do

justice to this multifaceted process of refraction it is crucial to resist any

attempts at imposing a finite, authoritative reading – a reading which would

monologise the future-oriented heteroglot structure of writing, bearing in

mind, as Pam Morris usefully surmises, that 'every utterance is also a

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[56] Mikhail Bakhtin and Pavel Nikolayeich Medvedev, *The Formal Method in Literary Scholarship: A Critical Introduction to Sociological Poetics*, in *The Bakhtin Reader: Selected Writings of Bakhtin, Medvedev, Voloshinov*, ed. by Pam Morris (London: Edward Arnold, 1994), p.128

responsive link in the continuous chain of other utterances'[57] It should be noted that the term 'chain' which Morris uses to contextualise Bakhtin's theory seems to conjure up an image of linearity that goes against the supposed openness and reciprocity of linguistic communication. Perhaps the theory of dialogism would be better served by reference to a textual weave – the various strands of utterances interlaced and intertwined into an open pattern with multiple vantage and connection points (we are reminded here of the etymology of 'syndrome'). Such a methodology will, hopefully, help to engender a deeply productive and dynamic analysis, allowing for an engagement with the text which goes beyond either reiteration or reversal of familiar discourses, while at the same time remaining if perhaps not fully aware then at least partially conscious of its own investment.

As a parenthetical aside, let us briefly mention the peculiarities of authorship which link the Holmes stories with the writings of Bakhtin, albeit in a seemingly reversed reflection. The assertion that it is academically adequate to treat the majority of texts on which Bakhtin's name features as that of one of the co-authors – or, even more astoundingly, which are signed only by Medvedev and Voloshinov – as penned solely by Bakhtin has been largely accepted in the West, not least due to the influential scholarly biography of Bakhtin by Michael Holquist and Katerina Clarke.[58] There is no incontrovertible evidence to support this claim, however, nor is there any concrete way of establishing the source of writings believed to have originated from within the Bakhtin circle and which either do not bear the

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[57] Pam Morris (ed.), *The Bakhtin Reader: Selected Writings of Bakhtin, Medvedev, Voloshinov* (London: Edward Arnold, 1994), p.5
[58] Katerina Clark and Michael Holquist, *Mikhail Bakhtin* (Cambridge, MA and London: Belknap Press, 1984). The argument was first put forward by a Russian linguist Vyacheslav Vsevolodovich Ivanov during a conference in 1971.

author's name at all or, conversely, are signed with the names of a number of scholars.[59] It is felicitously ironic that Bakhtin's attempts at undermining the rigid fixation on the proper name have been perversely appropriated by the scholars of his thought precisely for the benefit of erasing not only any uncertainty over authorship but also, in a sweeping gesture of ascribed mastery, obliterating the other's name while, at the same time, positing Bakhtin as the ultimate, absolute referent. At the other end of the spectrum, a powerful strand of Sherlockian research is predicated on the notion that Watson should be considered the rightful author of the Holmes stories, with Conan Doyle a mere fictional nom de plume. Here, it is the 'proper' creator's name that is expunged, with the startling substitution of Watson – a textual fantasy – for the 'real' Conan Doyle. It is possible to argue that such a method opens up an opportunity for an engagement with the text which will allow us to bypass the simplifying insistence on the authorial/authoritarian intentions and orientations and lead to a truly text-oriented reading. To concentrate on such an approach, however satisfying it might seem, is to gloss over the logic of unification at work here. Could it not equally be said that a piece of writing which claims to be created by one of its chief characters appears to aspire to self-containment so complete as to preclude any exchange with all that lays outside it? If the authorial mastery is eschewed here another type of ascendancy, albeit textual, seems to reassert itself in its place, undermining any easy claims of seditiousness or its inherent subversive nature.

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[59] One way of resisting such sweeping generalisation is perhaps to foreground the mutual influence of writers connected to the Bakhtin circle and adhere to a format of including *all* the names of the authors to whom the text is imputed – an arrangement followed, for example, by Pam Morris in *The Bakhtin Reader*.

This little vignette, I believe, aptly illustrates my emphatic insistence on the importance of the dialogic approach. To uncritically follow only one of the positions delineated above, to mould the text to conform to one's preconceptions only to prove a theoretical point would be neither justified nor academically rigorous. Any recourse to simple synthesis will not, however, produce a solution, for – at a flip of a conjectural coin – what seems like the obverse side can just as easily turn into the reverse, replicating rhetorical sophistry *ad infinitum*. Rather, the writing needs to be traced across its *movements* to allow for all the linguistic, narrative and textual intricacies to emerge; or – to follow the pecuniary metaphor further – the reading needs to be positioned at an angle, askance, in such a way that both sides of the coin, in a seemingly impossible gesture, are visible at the same time. Let us reiterate that the aim here is neither the achievement of closure nor the production of a detached, 'scientific' account, but rather an attempt at an engagement with the text which will *detect* – in a truly Sherlockian sense – the residues left by the work of dialogic textuality.

Viewed in this way, far from being a simple exercise in formulaic repetition with no literary pretensions which can be produced effortlessly merely by following the steps of genre conventions, detective fiction can be studied as a complex literary genus marked by profound internal struggle. What can be extracted from the formalistic and structural analysis of the genre is that, on the one hand, its very nature dictates that it is imperative for a detective story to respond to a set blueprint – that is to say, it needs to be formulaic or at the very least not greatly challenging for the reader in terms of structure and composition. It must, in short, provide the reader with a sense of familiarity

that will allow both for relaxation (I can follow the detective's adventures safe in the knowledge that there will be resolution) and mental stimulation (Can I follow the detective's reasoning?). On the other hand, however, although formal conventions should be observed for the story to be straightforwardly recognisable as detective fiction, the very manner of its configuration necessitates a drive towards narrative novelty which will provide the required suspense and sustain interest. The mystery element must constantly startle and surprise, since, in brief, if the proverbial butler does it every time there isn't anything to detect. Detective fiction thus exists in a constant state of internal contradiction, oscillating between formulaic repetition of structure and innovative originality of content.

Despite this complexity, much ink has been spilled to designate classic detective fiction to be a rather simplistic and formulaic genre without much literary merit and such a position on the topic is certainly not without precedent, for it is possible to trace a development, or rather an enduring presence, of a school of thought which elects to view the nineteenth century detective story as a particularly conservative incarnation of the genre. To consult a late Victorian source, *The Times* suggests, equating detective story writing with cheap trickery, that a skilled author of such fiction is merely 'a literary species of thimble-rigger.'[60] Similarly, an article in the *Punch* entitled 'Literary Recipes' helpfully provides a formula for an aspiring writer of detective stories: 'Take one part of Gaboriau and fifty parts of water. Add a lady of title, a comic official from Scotland Yard, and a diamond bracelet. Strain a mixture into twelve equal parts and serve up monthly in a

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[60] 'Although the man who can write a good...', *The Times*, issue 32375 (2 May 1888), p.15

magazine.'[61] In the first half of the twentieth century this view seems to endure in the minds of literary critics – Edmund Wilson, in a *New Yorker* review, confesses himself baffled by the popularity of the genre which, 'as a department of imaginative writing looks to me completely dead.' Although he concedes that Holmes is a superior example of its class, it is a superiority which can dazzle only the young and immature – '[I was] beginning to feel, at the age of twelve, that I was outgrowing that form of literature.'[62] In a 1930 edition of *The Times*, although it is acknowledged that the 'tide of detective stories is still rising' and the despair of critics faced with repetitive and formulaic plot and characterisation does nothing to assuage the outpouring of new volumes, the popularity 'is a strange phenomenon in a mental life of a nation.' Detective stories, the article professes, are a-literary, 'here today gone tomorrow. They lay no claim to a permanent home on our bookshelves. Once read, they are content to be banished to the spare bedroom [...].'[63] A comparison between the classical detective novel and the so called 'hard boiled' American detective fiction, often oversimplifying the former and valorising the latter, forms the bases of many contemporary critiques of the genre, starting perhaps with Raymond Chandler's seminal essay 'The Simple Art of Murder.' True to his role as the father of the hard-boiled whodunit, Chandler posits the classical English detective story as a unified genre, solidified in its conservatism – both of content and structure – whose limited and absurd conventions are challenged by the progressive American tradition. 'The English', he muses, 'may not always be the best writers in the

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[61] 'Literary Recipes', *Punch*, (12 June 1897), p.277
[62] Edmund Wilson, 'Why Do People Read Detective Stories?', *The New Yorker* (14 October 1944)
[63] 'Detective Stories', *The Times*, issue 45684 (1 December 1930), p.15

world, but they are incomparably the best dull writers.' The nineteenth century stories 'do not really come off intellectually as problems, and they do not come off artistically as fiction. They are too contrived, and too little aware of what goes on in the world. They try to be honest, but honesty is an art.'[64] The supposed radical politics of the hard-boiled story and their counterpart in the shape of classic detective narratives are juxtaposed by Ernest Mandel, who argues, employing a Marxist analysis, that British detective fiction is an exercise in reification that wilfully ignores the social and historical context of both crime and detection, merely reflecting and never questioning the stability of the bourgeois order. As 'the detective story is the realm of the happy ending', it is also essentially 'soothing, socially integrating literature, despite its concern with crime, violence and murder.'[65] In a similar fashion, John Cawelti sees the highly formalised world of detective fiction as something that 'transformed an increasingly serious moral and social problem into an entertaining pastime', bringing it 'completely under control.'[66] Rosemary Jann argues vehemently that the Holmes stories in particular are an exercise in conformist unification, whereby the complex insecurities of the Victorian period are assuaged by employing 'the unified, fully intelligible self of realism by insisting that people remain totally predictable, or that [...] the desire that could undermine logic and predictability would be self policing.'[67] Synthesising the viewpoint of Althusserian critics, Charles Rzepka explains

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[64] Raymond Chandler, 'The Simple Art of Murder', *Atlantic Monthly*, vol.174 (December 1944), p.56
[65] Ernest Mandel, *Delightful Murder: A Social History of the Crime Story* (London: Pluto Press, 1984), p.48
[66] John G. Cawelti, *Adventure, Mystery, and Romance: Formula Stories as Art and Popular Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976), p.105
[67] Rosemary Jann, 'Sherlock Holmes Codes the Social Body', *ELH*, vol.57, no.3 (Autumn 1990), p.705

that detective fiction, as part of mass entertainment, 'helps to interpolate its readers into conformity with the hegemony of white, male, middle-class values in Western society.[68] Even the latest scholarship on the topic seems to follow the same path – as Christopher Booker explains, the difference between 'great literature' dealing with crime and murder, such as Shakespeare or Dostoevsky, and a simple 'whodunit' is

> that the latter is not concerned with [...] complex issues. It derives its entire appeal from the simple trick of initially hiding the identity of the culprit and then at the end revealing it. We are not really concerned with the finer points of morality involved, or with the other characters acting out a story. They are primarily there just to present us with the basic materials for yet another demonstration of the hero-detective's extraordinary mental powers. [...] In following the story, we can invariably rest in the comfortable certainty that it will be someone other than the person we are identifying with on whom the guilt will eventually be pinned.[69]

Similarly, Srdjan Smajic authoritatively declares that:

> It is indisputable [...] that detective fiction, at least in the nineteenth century, is profoundly invested in a fantasy of state omniscience and a disciplinary ideology – it is centrally concerned with crime because it is centrally concerned with social regulation. In its favouring of the status quo over social change, the genre is by and large diagnostic, prescriptive, and corrective: all transgressions of the law are predictably followed by the restitution of social order.[70]

The view that in classic detective fiction 'the criminal is always caught. Justice is always done. Crime never pays'[71] seems unreflectively replicated by a number of scholars, despite its reductive absurdity. One needs only to

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[68] Charles J. Rzepka, *Detective Fiction* (Cambridge and Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2005), p.21

[69] Christopher Booker, *The Seven Basic Plots: Why We Tell Stories* (London: Continuum, 2004), p.512

[70] Srdjan Smajic, *Ghost-Seers, Detectives, and Spiritualists: Theories of Vision in Victorian Literature and Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), p.71

[71] Ernest Mandel, op.cit., p.47

consult the Holmesian canon to realise that, according to a useful summary

provided by Martin Priestman, in no less than fifteen out of sixty cases no

crime of any kind has been committed, in at least seven the culprit goes free,

while in another nine Holmes decides to let the wrong-doer off, actively

circumventing the justice system.[72] While it is of course possible to argue that

those instances are mere insignificant aberrations, worked into an otherwise

conservatively unified system merely to provide some fabular novelty,

nonetheless their recurring emergence challenges the claim that detective

fiction is a fully consolidated realm of conformism, advancing the dogma of

dominant ideology. Clare Clark's postulation that a number of neglected

mystery stories from the late Victorian period 'showcases the formal diversity

and thematic ambiguity' of detective fiction, pointing to their 'often overlooked

capacity for narrative and moral complexity', could also, I want to argue,

successfully be applied to the canonical Holmesian narratives.[73] Even if we

agree that nineteenth century culture was dominated by hegemonic

paradigms prescribing and regulating infinite minutiae of behaviour, the fact

that they needed to be restated and urged so tirelessly through literary

means at least implies, as Matthew Sweet observes, that they were not

unquestionably and universally obeyed.[74] Indeed, the affinity between

detective fiction and the Victorian middle-classes for whom it was penned is

certainly striking, since if both, in the sheer volume of textual artefacts they

produced, seem to 'suit the hermeneutic requirements of almost any form of

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[72] Martin Priestman, *Detective Fiction and Literature: The Figure on the Carpet* (London: MacMillan, 1990), p.75
[73] Clare Clark, *Late Victorian Crime Fiction in the Shadows of Sherlock Holmes* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), pp.2, 9
[74] Matthew Sweet, *Inventing the Victorians* (London: Faber and Faber, 2001), p.181

theoretical enquiry'[75], they are also often theorised as monolithic and unified entities, formulaic in nature and thus easily deciphered and classified. Pam Morris, writing about approaches to Charles Dickens' *Bleak House* – one of the novels widely considered to be a precursor of police detective fiction – postulates that over-reliance on Foucauldian models of reading in relation to Victorian literature tends to produce 'a totalising account of the narrative in which all aspects are understood as elements of the carceral order.'[76] While discursive elaboration on the role of textual production in the dissemination of punitive modes of control and supervision can be fruitful, such an approach often leads to excessive homogenisation, whence inter-class divisions take precedent over *intra*-class contradictions. Lauren Goodlad similarly contends that although important work has been done in relation to various strands of identity formation in Victorian culture, an 'insufficiently expansive model of Victorian middle-class identity continues to impair critical elaborations.'[77] Linda Shires critiques scholars 'too easily seduced by what appears as the homogenization of culture and middle-class hegemony', pointing out that 'many of us who study the nineteenth century still overemphasise the fixity of the ideological.'[78] Making a passionate case for a 'liberation' of the Victorians, Sweet postulates that our view of the period is a mixture of unjustified and false stereotypes and misconceptions commonly accepted as truths and that a lot of what we think we know about the Victorians is in fact pure invention,

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[75] David Trotter, 'Theory and Detective Fiction', *Critical Quarterly*, vol.33, no.2 (June 1991), p.66

[76] Pam Morris, '*Bleak House* and the Struggle for the State Domain', *ELH*, vol.68, no.3 (Fall 2001), p.679

[77] Lauren M. E. Goodlad, '"A Middle Class Cut Into Two": Historiography and Victorian National Character', *ELH*, vol.67, no.1 (Spring 2000), p.143

[78] Linda M. Shires (ed.), 'Afterword: Ideology and the Subject as Agent' in *Rewriting the Victorians: Theory, History and the Politics of Gender* (New York and London: Routledge, 1992), pp.185, 184

ossified through mindless repetition. It is important, he argues, 'to question

the validity of texts that we have decided typify nineteenth-century attitudes'

and which, in their apparent canonicity, 'have been assumed to be reflective

of the real lives and attitudes of Victorian people.'[79] If we can simply accept

that certain literary works afford us 'keys to the nineteenth-century mindset' it

is not implausible to suppose that future generations of historians and critics

will use

> *Men Are From Mars, Women Are from Venus* (1992) or *The Surrendered Wife* (2001) to explain the complexities of our own. [...] Just imagine what future academics, pursuing the arguments of the twenty-first century through the textual detritus of the twentieth, could do with editorials from middlebrow tabloids and selective quotes from Mary Whitehouse, Enoch Powell, Paul Johnson and Laura Doyle. Imagine what they might make of the period of British history that produced factory farms, football hooliganism and the Moors murderers.[80]

Although his argument is persuasive, what Sweet seems to forget is that

such a reading would be, to a certain extent at least, given the available

archive of written materials, perfectly justified in its assumptions. In

unequivocally dismissing as unimportant a certain number of sources that

seem to present a reductive viewpoint, or – to put it even more strongly – one

abhorrent to the political sensibilities of the author, is to replicate the gesture

of which scholars of the Victorian period stand accused. To put it differently, if

all textual production, as Mary Poovey reminds us, is a part of 'complex

cultural economies' and if 'every text participates in a complex social activity'

then certain assumptions as to the nature of cultural, social and historical

milieu of their production can be drawn from even seemingly the most

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[79] Matthew Sweet, op.cit., pp.xx, xxi
[80] Ibid., pp.xxi, 230

marginal or limited sources, since every utterance participates in the dialogic whole.[81] What is crucial, however – and here the strength of Sweet's argument lies – is a reminder that to extrapolate a unified and overarching theory from singular instances runs a risk of – to return to the Bakhtinian vocabulary – hearing only the *official* language of the established Weltanschauung. Although I do not wish to dispute that it is possible to distinguish, at any given moment, a powerful strand of thought which could, in its apparent naturalness, be termed hegemonic, it is nonetheless worth repeating that the power of cultural authority, in its mythic status, is by no means heterogeneous, nor inevitably all-pervading. I want to argue, following Linda Shires, that the Victorian period is characterised by and actively foregrounds representational instability and that examples of productive struggle can be observed not only *between* what came to be perceived as dominant ideology of the period and a number of opposing viewpoints but also *within* the established cultural dogma. One does not have to, therefore – in a gesture which has become almost de rigueur – turn to 'marginal figures to demonstrate the force of resistance to prevailing ideology.'[82] As the analysis of historical sources dealing with the Indian Mutiny put forward in Chapter 3 hopefully demonstrates, even the most dogmatic texts commonly theorised within the parameters of jingoistic imperialism are rife with internal contradictions, constructing meaning in excess of the writer's explicit design. What emerges in a striking fashion from the Sherlockian canon is the realisation that Doyle as much queries as reinforces the dominant norms of

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[81] Mary Poovey, *Uneven Developments: The Ideological Work of Gender in Mid-Victorian England* (London: Virago, 1989), pp.19, 17
[82] Linda M. Shires, op.cit., p.185

the Victorian period which, far from being unified and monolithic, appear as a site of struggle and productive interrogation.

It is necessary to mention the immense popularity of detective fiction in the late Victorian period, reaching its zenith in the 1880s and 1890s, in which the Holmes stories played a major part, not least in the manner in which they revolutionised the very nature of a magazine serial story. Departing from the previously used model of serialising novels, with all the parts of the story linked by an overarching plot development, Conan Doyle pioneered a method where, although connected through characterisation, each tale formed a discrete unit:

> It had long seemed to me that the ordinary serial might be an impediment rather than a help to a magazine, since, sooner or later one missed one number and afterwards it had lost all interest. Clearly the ideal compromise was a character which carried through, and yet instalments which were each complete in themselves, so that the purchaser was always sure that he could relish the whole contents of the magazine. I believe that I was the first to realise this and "The Strand Magazine" the first to put it into practice.[83]

In what was probably one of the first articles on the new genre, *The Saturday Review* of 1886 remarked that 'if the abundance of supply affords any accurate test, the demand for detective novel is great and increasing. Novels of this class must surely be counted among the greatest successes of the day.'[84] Indeed, *The Strand's* sales figures after the Holmes stories began to appear reached a staggering 500 000 copies per issue.[85] (By comparison,

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[83] Arthur Conan Doyle, *Memories and Adventures* [1924] (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp.95-96
[84] 'Detective Fiction', *The Saturday Review*, vol.62 (4 December 1886), p.749
[85] 'Strand Magazine (1891-1950)', Laurel Brake and Marysa Demoor (eds.) *Dictionary of Nineteenth Century Journalism in Great Britain and Ireland* (Gent: Academia Press, 2009), p.604

Glamour, the best-selling monthly magazine in the UK, reached circulation figures of 300 000 in 2014).[86] It is worth remarking here on the symbiotic relationship between detective fiction, as it appeared in the magazines and periodicals of the era, and the steady growth of middle-class rail commuters, venturing into the city from their suburban dwellings, who, quite naturally, formed the better part of the genre's reading audience. The clerk for 'Messrs. W.H. Smith & Son's' bookstall, interviewed by a journalist from *The Speaker* during a prolonged period awaiting the train at an 'important station', authoritatively declared that 'he would not undertake to prophesy the success of any book outside the limits of detective fiction. Any detective story, whatever its merits might be, he could sell from morning till night.'[87] Reginald Pound, one of the *Strand's* editors, attributes this popularity to the ideological structure of the magazine:

> Certainly the middle-classes of England never cast a clearer image of themselves in print than they did in the *Strand Magazine*. Confirming their preference for mental as well as physical comfort, for more than half a century it faithfully mirrored their tastes, prejudices, and intellectual limitations. From them it drew a large and loyal readership that was the envy of the publishing world.[88]

The nature of this popularity is, however, paradoxical, for despite immense success – both in terms of readership figures and economic remuneration (bored with Holmes, Conan Doyle requested a princely sum of 50 pounds per story from the *Strand* which, to his amazement, was accepted) – writers of detective fiction seem to have considered their literary output as inferior.

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[86]ABC August 2014 statistics, http://www.betterretailing.com/retailer-resources/top-100-magazines/
[87] 'A Literary Causerie', *The Speaker: The Liberal Review*, vol.8 (7 October 1893), p.383
[88] Reginald Pound, *The Strand Magazine 1891-1950* (London: Heinemann, 1966), p.7

Christopher Pittard argues that nineteenth century practitioners of the art

'carried an unshakable suspicion that the genre was itself a waste product, a

commodity for consumption and disposal', a substandard literary output 'to be

consumed and then thrown away, without lasting value.'[89] As an article in the

Pall Mall Gazette makes clear:

> Under the spell of a detective story [...] "the great fly-wheels of
> intelligence revolve idly, grinding no grist." [...] Our aesthetic faculties
> are kept in total abeyance. [...] In order to possess its true narcotic
> quality, the detective story should be fluently written, but no more. [...] In
> the five minutes' interval between closing the book and forgetting it, we
> should say to ourselves 'That's a good story', or 'A first rate story', or 'An
> A1 story', according to our mood and our vocabulary; if any more
> particular or exhaustive criticism suggests itself, the book is not a perfect
> specimen of its class.[90]

(Parenthetically, it is of import to note that this perspective is by no means

a product of a by-gone era – despite, or perhaps because of, the fact that

crime and thriller fiction sales account for a lion's share of the publishing

market's profit [36 per cent of book sales volume in 2013][91], John Sutherland,

a Booker Prize judge, declared that for a crime novel to be submitted for the

prestigious award might seem 'like putting a donkey into the Grand

National.'[92])

This is perhaps the first intimation of a peculiar status of detective fiction, a

genre, it is worth restating, profoundly marked by internal contradictions. The

inherent duality which guides the very structure of the detective story has

been remarked on by Tzvetan Todorov, who puts forwards that a whodunit

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[89] Christopher Pittard, op.cit., pp.12, 20
[90] 'The Function of Detective Stories', op.cit., p.3
[91] 'Genre distribution of adult fiction book sales volume in the United Kingdom (UK) in 2012 and 2013', Statista: the Statistics Portal, http://www.statista.com/statistics/329143/adult-fiction-sales-volume-by-genre-uk/
[92] Alison Flood, 'Could Miles Franklin Turn the Booker Prize to Crime?', *The Guardian* (25 June 2010) http://www.theguardian.com/books/2010/jun/25/miles-franklin-booker-prize-crime

'contains not one but two stories: the story of the crime and the story of the investigation. In their purest form, these two stories have no point in common.'[93] This formalistic divergence is, importantly, predicated on narrative, or better still, literary, doubleness, since the dichotomy between the two stories Todorov expounds is essentially one of avowing and disavowing its own textuality:

> It is no accident that [the second story] is often told by a friend of the detective, who explicitly acknowledges that he is writing a book; the second story consists, in fact, in explaining how this very book came to be written. The first story ignores the book completely, that is, it never confesses its literary nature. [...] On the other hand, the second story is not supposed to take the reality of the book into account, but it is precisely the story of that very book.[94]

To explain how the two stories can, in their schism, coexist as complementary aspects of one work, Todorov submits that the first, the story of crime, 'is in fact the story of an *absence*: its most accurate characteristic is that it cannot be immediately present in the book.'[95] In its enactment of the relationship between presence/absence the very structure of detective fiction thus follows, we could argue, the Freudian game of *fort-da*, which, as Terry Eagleton observes, provides 'a first glimmering of narrative. *Fort-da* is perhaps the shortest story we can imagine: an object is lost, and then recovered.'[96] Detective fiction therefore 'grapples with the issue of storytelling itself', exposing the construction of its own emergence.[97] But the dyad of pleasure/fear evoked by the *fort-da* game also implies an absent third term

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[93] Tzvetan Todorov, 'The Typology of Detective Fiction', trans. by Richard Howard in *Modern Criticism and Theory: A Reader*, ed. by David Lodge (London: Longman, 1988), p.159
[94] Ibid., p.160
[95] Ibid.
[96] Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1983), p.185
[97] Peter Thoms, op.cit., p.8

that antedates both, since the moment of lack is never simply an absence but an absence *of* a presence: *da-fort-da*. In detective narrative, as Alison Young explicates, this triangulation allows for enjoyment to be derived from terror because it is predicated on an 'essential state of *crimelessness*, a period or place where crime is unknown or irrelevant'.[98] This claim, while undoubtedly credible, is rendered problematic by the fact that in a number of stories Watson hints, not very subtly, at an existence of a vast archive of Holmes' cases that, for various reasons, never made it into print. The regularity with which unreported adventures surface in the canon is startling and suggestive, for it expands the narrative beyond the boundary of the text, adding additional – and never to be solved – mystery to the one already at hand. Those textual traces of other, untold stories suggest the impossibility of knowledge to achieve closure, going against the supposed task of detective fiction which is commonly presented as one of completion and restoration. We could argue, therefore, that those seemingly insignificant instances where the text extends out to the undisclosed networks of knowledge beyond our reach signify that the real task of detection is not to illuminate but to conceal, or at the very least to undermine intellectual complacency through a vivid yet subtle reminder that full access to the systems of information can never be granted. It is also yet another example of the inherently excessive nature of detective fiction, recalling the tensions put into play through constant friction between rationality and suspense. Following a Derridean line of thought we could posit that the reference to this extra-textual material, in its necessary supplementarity, responds to the logic of the pharmakon and, further, that it

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[98] Alison Young, *Imagining Crime* (London: Sage, 1996), p.91

puts into question the assumed role of the pharmakos – the rite of purification, since it denies the cathartic cleansing of complete expulsion. Auden submits that 'the interest in the detective story is the dialectic of innocence and guilt' and that the narrative tirelessly works towards 'being restored to the Garden of Eden, to a state of innocence.'[99] Through the ritual of detection guilt is thus affixed onto an individual who is exiled from the community, now rendered blameless through the enactment of scapegoating and the initial problematic admixture of innocence and culpability is purged of all ambiguity ('not I'). The lingering traces of a different, unresolved narrative prohibit the completion of this fantasy of absolute closure, serving as a reminder that the dialectic of detection, just like the *fort-da* game, depends on an absent third term ('I/not I/I').

This excessive economy gains special significance in the figure of Holmes, arguably the most instantly recognisable character ever to be produced by British, or indeed world, literature, not least because the stories have been translated into virtually every language, while stage plays, films, television series, comic books and even operas dedicated to the Great Detective abound. He is also, as the title of the latest exhibition at the Museum of London epigrammatically suggests, 'the man who never lived and will never die'. Yet, paradoxically, I want to argue, this enduring popularity is precisely what 'killed' Sherlock Holmes, in an acute case of – to borrow Samantha Walton's apt phrase – 'death-by-adaptation', for it would be fair to generalise that most people, although well acquainted with the figure of Holmes, are not

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[99] W.H. Auden, op.cit., pp.406, 412

familiar with and have never read, the original stories.[100] Despite this

unfamiliarity, Holmes exists, perhaps more than any other fictional character,

in a state of hyperreal admixture of myth and (literary) reality which allows for

a certain projection from the simulacral qualities – the fact that he is best

known for a phrase he never uttered, the famous deerstalker hat which exists

only in illustrations – back onto the text and, further, onto the historical reality

of the Victorian period, inviting artificial familiarity ('make yourself at Holmes').

Put simply, in an actualisation of the Wildean epigram that 'Life imitates Art

far more than Art imitates Life'[101], the stories anti-mimetically created a milieu

so powerful in its appeal that 'later generations would comprehend the era in

which these tales were written *through* the medium of the tales

themselves.'[102] Thus, perhaps through the force – and sheer volume – of,

primarily, filmic versions of the canon, Holmes inhabits popular imagination in

the form of a sign, or symbol, functioning as a synecdochical emblem for a

host of stereotypes associated, in their nostalgic sentimentality, with Victorian

London – becloaked gentlemen, swirling fog, gas lamps, hansom cabs. The

almost ritualistic visuality of those tropes points towards what John Kucich

and Diane Sadoff identify as postmodernism's drive, altogether consumerist

in nature, that 'uses the Victorian past to aestheticise contemporary reality.'[103]

We could argue, therefore, that the popularity of the countless modern, or

modernised, adaptations of the Holmesian canon is in fact granted by an

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[100] Samantha Walton, *Guilty but Insane: Mind and Law in Golden Age Detective Fiction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), p.1
[101] Oscar Wilde, 'The Decay of Lying' in *Intentions* (Portland: Thomas B. Mosher, 1904), p.29
[102] Clive Bloom, 'Capitalising on Poe's Detective: the Dollars and Sense of Nineteenth-Century Detective Fiction', in *Nineteenth Century Suspense: From Poe to Conan Doyle*, ed. by Clive Bloom et al (London: Macmillan, 1988), p.14
[103] John Kucich and Diane F. Sadoff (eds.) *Victorian Afterlife: Postmodern Culture Rewrites the Nineteenth Century* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), p.xii

evocation, however oblique, of the stories' Victorian heritage, since it allows us to construct 'the Victorian period as the site of historical emergence through which postmodernism attempts to think its own cultural identity.'[104] According to Sweet, the temporal and cultural proximity of the Victorian era not only necessitates that we situate ourselves in stark opposition to the Victorians but also serves to explain the longevity of unfavourable beliefs about the period:

> The Victorians are the people against whom we define ourselves. We are who we are because we are not the Victorians. If we concede that they moulded our culture, defined our sensibilities, built a world for us to live in – rather than being the figures against whom we rebelled in order to create those things for ourselves – then we undermine one of the founding myths of modernity. [...] If the Victorians are caricatured as cruel, hypocritical, repressive, intolerant, prudish and cheerless, then it makes all post-Victorian wife-beating, child abuse, social injustice and personal dullness more easy to cope with.[105]

Since such an approach unavoidably renders the nineteenth century 'static in comparison with a dynamic postmodernism', my reading of the Holmes stories could in some respects be seen as an attempt at a return to the (con)text which will illuminate both the narratives and the nineteenth century not as sites of mythical origin or fossilised remnants of a by-gone era but in the very *process* of emergence. This 'return', it is important to add, is not synonymous with linear influence – rather, it highlights the syndromatic nature of both text and context, where all parts, while given equal value in the relation, nonetheless resist the force of unanimity. My aim, in short, is to avoid creating 'yet another retrospectively idealized narrative of the past,

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[104] Ibid., p.xxv
[105] Mathew Sweet, op.cit., pp.231, 232

fabricated in light of present needs'[106], tracing instead the movements of

dialogic tension which will allow us to study both detective fiction and the late

Victorian period as active participants of culture.

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[106] John Kucich and Diane F. Sadoff (eds.), op.cit., pp.xiv-xv

❧ Chapter 1 ❦

Spaces of Dupli*city*: Professional Identity, Labour and Confession in 'The Man with the Twisted Lip'

Fig.1.1. Sidney Paget, The Unmasking of Neville St. Clair from 'The Man with the Twisted Lip', illustration from *The Strand Magazine*, 1891.

Story Synopsis:

Watson is visited by a wife of an opium addict friend and charged with the task of bringing him safely home from the dens of the East End. On entering one such abode, the doctor, to his amazement, finds Holmes inside and learns that the great detective is working on a case of a mysterious disappearance. Neville St. Clair, a gentleman from Kent, was last seen by his wife who, on an unexpected errand in London, saw him in the window of an opium den. Rushing inside, she was not able to locate him, however, the room being inhabited only by a wretched looking beggar, known in the city as Hugh Boone. After a thorough search of the room performed by the police Neville St. Clair's clothing is discovered, together with some traces of blood, and Boone is arrested on suspicion of murder. Holmes and Watson drive to the St. Clairs' suburban villa where Mrs St. Clair presents them with a letter, apparently written by St. Clair himself, which puts the murder theory into question. After smoking several pipes, Holmes arrives at the solution and, accompanied by Watson, makes his way to Boone's cell, where, after theatrically washing the sleeping prisoner's face with a sponge, he reveals Neville St. Clair underneath the disguise. It transpires that St. Clair and Boone are one and the same person, the gentleman using the beggar's garb to earn large sums of money in the City. As no crime (safe for mendicancy) has been committed, St. Clair escapes with a stern warning and a solemn promise to lay Boone to rest.

'Isa Whitney, brother of the late Elias Whitney, D.D., Principal of the Theological College of St. George's, was much addicted to opium', runs the opening line of 'The Man with the Twisted Lip'.[1] Viewed in comparison to other Holmesian stories it is certainly an unusual beginning, for it deviates from the more familiar narrative pattern, whereby Holmes and Watson are visited by a client in their Baker Street rooms. Indeed, this detailed portrayal of Isa, a minor and swiftly discarded character, seems extraneous to the development of the story and presents, as Paula Reiter observes, a somewhat laborious way of bringing about Holmes and Watson's meeting and the introduction of the matter under investigation – the disappearance of Neville St. Clair.[2] However, this apparent superfluousness is deceptive, for the opening paragraph is in fact, I want to argue, pivotal in establishing the themes and issues with which the story is concerned, both explicitly and obliquely. The figure of Isa Whitney, therefore, despite – or perhaps because of – the brief nature of his involvement in the text, allows us to delineate certain thematic interests in the tale and provides a typological imprint according to which other characters will be measured. The exhaustive enumeration of Isa's brother's academic credentials, the fact that he read *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater* while at college and Watson's assertion that he was 'a noble man' immediately position Whitney as a paragon of gentlemanly, upper class virtue, marking the slavishness of his opium habit as contrary to his 'inherent' nature and upbringing, while, at the same time, pointing to the ready availability of opium and the apparent ease

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[1] Arthur Conan Doyle, 'The Man with the Twisted Lip' in *The New Annotated Sherlock Holmes, vol.1*, ed. by Leslie S. Klinger (New York: W.W. Norton, 2005), p.159
[2] Paula J. Reiter, 'Doctors, Detectives, and the Professional Ideal: The Trial of Thomas Neill Cream and the Mastery of Sherlock Holmes', *College Literature*, vol.35, no.3 (Summer 2008), pp.74-75

of its acquisition: 'he had drenched his tobacco with laudanum […and] found, as so many more have done, that the practice is easier to attain than to get rid of.'[3] It is perhaps not accidental that Isa's brother is, rather exhaustively, described as a Doctor of Divination and a Principal of the Theological College of St. George's – it would not be implausible to suppose that as a high-ranking official connected to the church he would play an active role in the anti-opium movement.[4] Let us also note here the gratifying linguistic playfulness of Conan Doyle – the name Isa is derived from Arabic '*Īsā* ', and corresponds to English 'Jesus' – linking, in one etymological swoop, the oriental, the religious and the domestic. The specific use of opium and opium addiction is thus not fortuitous, for it institutes and puts into play, especially through a seemingly cursory reference to De Quincey, the problematic questions of identity, labour and confession around which the narrative is structured, at the same time indicating the socio-historical and cultural milieu of the story. With this in mind, I feel that understanding of the role opium was accorded in the Victorian imagination is vital, for it will allow us to read 'The Man with the Twisted Lip' not only as a piece of popular detective fiction but also as an important marker of cultural and social attitudes to the questions of identity in the late Victorian period, delineating their complex and conflicting nature and, most importantly, opening the story to a more heteroglot reading

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[3] Arthur Conan Doyle, 'The Man with the Twisted Lip', op.cit., p.159
[4] On the role of the religious societies in the British anti-opium movement see, for example, H.G. Gelber, *Opium, Soldiers and Evangelicals: England's 1840-42 War With China and Its Aftermath*.

– that is to say, 'one which denies the absolutism of a single and unitary language'.[5]

Socio-Cultural History: Opium

The history of the nineteenth-century opium trade and Opium Wars between Britain and China is well known and documented and it would therefore be redundant to try and recapitulate it here in any detail. However, a brief sketch is certainly necessary, for it will allow us to outline the multi-stranded genealogy of opium re-presentation and perception in Victorian Britain, which was at least partially contingent upon English imperial economic policy and the anti-opium movements which arose in response to it. Although the origins of the Western trade in opium with China can be traced back to seventeenth century, the zenith of British involvement coincides with the colonisation of India's major opium-producing regions and the establishment of monopoly over production and distribution of opium by the East India Company. While the sale and smoking of the drug was banned in China, the smuggling of opium from Bengal to Canton was seen as a way to offset Britain's increasing – and increasingly expensive – purchases of tea, thus trading, in a rather ironic twist, one habit for another. It is useful to mention that the income generated by the illegal sale of opium was essential to the finances of the British administration in India, amounting to, on

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[5] Mikhail Bakhtin, 'Discourse in the Novel' in *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, ed. by Michael Holquist, trans. by Michael Holquist and Caryl Emerson (Austin and London: University of Texas Press, 1981), p.366

average, 15% of the total revenue[6] and constituting, therefore, '*probably the largest commerce of the time in any single commodity.*'[7] The prolonged and progressively growing export of opium, aggressively enforced by the British, meant that 'the Chinese opium culture changed into pathology.'[8] This sentiment was true in both a literal and a figurative sense – the cultivation of cheaper domestic opium and the growing demand for the drug among the poor led to inferior and adulterated blends being used, with the effect that 'the elites smoked good opium, the paupers smoked the dregs.'[9] But also, perhaps more importantly, it created a great sense of unease about the role British economic policy played in bringing about the 'degeneration' of the Chinese and the difficulty in reconciling the empire's imagined noble task of spreading civilization and enlightenment with the realities of profiteering from what was seen as human suffering, especially given 'the impetus that the success of Wilberforce's anti-slavery movement had given to the notion of empire as a Christian duty.'[10] Not surprisingly, the most persistent and significant cause of resistance was the voice of the missionaries who, especially if they also possessed medical training, quickly gained credibility as a reliable source of knowledge about drug-taking practices in China. Although the anti-opium movement was most active from the 1870s onwards, the beginnings of opposition can be traced back to the first half of the nineteenth century and what is of particular importance in these accounts is

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[6] John F. Richards, 'The Opium Industry in British India', *Indian Economic & Social History Review*, vol.39 (2002), pp.154-157

[7] Michael Greenberg, *British Trade and the Opening of China,1800-1842* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1951), p.104 [emphasis in the original]

[8] Krzysztof Mroziewicz, 'Opium Nie Tylko Dla Ludu', *Polityka*, no.3, issue 2790 (15 January, 2011), p.61 [my own translation]

[9] Ibid. [my own translation]

[10] H.G. Gelber, *Opium, Soldiers and Evangelicals: England's 1840-42 War With China and Its Aftermath* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), p.207

the close alliance of moral opposition with medical justification, forging a link between the two discourses which would later also come to inform domestic approaches to opium. In 1842 *The Lancet* published an article 'On Opium Smoking Among the Chinese', which, in addition to more descriptive accounts as to the nature of opium preparation and statistical information regarding the extent of the practice, attempted to explain the acquisition of the habit among the various classes of Chinese society. Thus the rich, who 'smoke privately in their own homes', attain the 'dreadful habit' primarily because of their 'remarkably social and luxurious disposition' and their 'curiosity and politeness'. Parents give opium to their children 'to prevent them from running into other vices still more detestable, and to which the Chinese are more prone than, perhaps, any people on earth.' For young men, opium is a means of 'prolonging venereal pleasures', whereas the Malays 'are confident that opium-smoking inspires them with preternatural courage and bodily strength.' With protracted use, treated as *a priori* given, 'the physical constitution and the moral character of the individual are deteriorated and destroyed, especially among the lower classes.' An exceptional individual, belonging to – what goes without saying – the upper class, can, however, conquer the habit by 'resolution of the mind' and – as was the case with the Emperor of China – 'great moral courage and perseverance.'[11]

Such descriptions grew in number as the anti-opium movement gained momentum and the constant stream of missionaries bringing with them first-hand accounts of the situation in China deeply influenced not only social

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[11] G.H. Smith, 'On Opium Smoking Among the Chinese', *The Lancet*, vol.37, issue 964 (19 February 1842), pp.708, 709

attitudes but also political and parliamentary debates. The success of the

anti-opium argument can no doubt be attributed to the sheer number of

religious societies of all denominations involved in the cause – in 1840s

Britain clergy was perhaps the most numerous single profession – and the

involvement of high-ranking and highly respected individuals, both from

religious and political circles, including archbishops, lords and members of

parliament.[12] It was largely, however, the abundant use of written materials

which guaranteed the ubiquitous circulation of the message:

> Anti-opium propaganda material was produced in profusion. The Society
> [for the Suppression of Opium] had its own series of tracts. There were
> publications in book form […]. The Society had its own journal, the
> Friend of China […]. This published articles on the course of the
> agitation, extracts from newspapers, both foreign and British, notes of
> meetings and analyses of every aspect of opium cultivation, trade and
> revenue. […] The controversy spilled over into the public journals. The
> missionary magazines were of course full of the matter; but anti-opium
> views were also publicized among educated middle-class society as a
> whole.[13]

The language used in those publications is certainly instructive, for it

emphasises the aforementioned association of medical and moral discourses

in the discussions of opium, adding the economic and imperial into the

equation. An 1882 pamphlet entitled 'The Truth About Opium-Smoking' – an

account of a conference meeting organised by the anti-opium movement – is

symptomatic in this regard, offering a long list of dignitaries involved in the

debate – including missionaries, British and Chinese officials, bishops and

members of parliament – who 'are all tried and trusted men, whose sincerity

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[12] H.G. Gelber, op.cit., p.209
[13] Virginia Berridge, *Opium and the People: Opiate Use and Drug Control Policy in Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Century England* (London: Free Association Books, 1999), p.181

and truthfulness are above question.'[14] The long list of testimonies given by 'a number of men who, by their long residence in China, and personal contact with the people, and some of them by extensive travel in that country, were qualified to speak upon the effects of opium-smoking in China' presents a unanimous condemnation of the opium trade, 'with an authority and a fullness of knowledge, compared with which the opinions of these apologists for opium smoking were but as the small dust in the balance.'[15] Similarly, the authoritatively titled 'Questions on Opium Answered' of 1892, penned by James L. Maxwell – a doctor and a missionary in Taiwan, speaking therefore as an expert on both medical and cultural matters – presents an exhaustive list of questions – without, however, elucidating who the questions are asked by – covering issues of medical ('Is not opium exceedingly useful in place of quinine as a preventive of fever?'), economic ('In what way is the deficit in the Indian revenue to be made up?'), political ('Is this in any degree a question of party politics?') and moral ('Are not the evils of opium smoking greatly exaggerated?') nature. The answers – which, according to Maxwell, are final and definite – present a rather alarming spectacle of the dangers of an opium habit, all the more striking for its placement among the dry statistical and economic data. Even if taken medicinally, opium use will almost inevitably grow into a habit, where 'the remedy has become worse than the disease.' Further still, when ingested with 'the deliberate purpose of intoxication', opium 'involves so tyrannous a bondage that any delay in satisfying the craving at the regular hours means a degree of misery, physical and mental, which renders the man helpless.' The inescapable effect of the indulgence is

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[14] Benjamin Broomhall, *The Truth About Opium-Smoking* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1882), p.11

[15] Ibid., p.7

'loss of flesh, weakened appetite for ordinary food, weakened power to digest food, diminished nervous power, loss of will power, loss of power for skilled work, and, above all, loss of moral power.'[16] Let us also briefly note the lexical similarity between the literature of the anti-opium movement and, on the other hand, the proponents of the opium trade. 'The Medical Aspects of the Opium Question', published in 1882 in *The British Medical Journal* and arguing for the relative harmlessness of opium, also places great weight on the importance of *professional* opinion on the topic, emphasising first-hand experience of the realities of Chinese opium-smoking:

> Until recently, much of our knowledge of the subject was obtained from non-medical writers […]. The whole weight of trustworthy evidence – and professional evidence is alone trustworthy in such matters – is in favour of the moderate use of opium by the inhabitants of tropical climates, particularly by those who live in malarial districts, and whose diets consist chiefly of vegetables. […] Dr. Eatwell [sic], who was for some years resident in China, states as the result of personal experience, that the effects of the abuse of the drug rarely come under observation […]. [The Malay] gold traders, who consume it in enormous quantities, are an active, steady, and laborious class, and are amongst the most healthy and vigorous on the island, rarely suffering in any way.[17]

The connection between opium and labour established in both papers, albeit with opposing assumptions, is particularly noteworthy here, for it indicates an aspect of the growing unease about drug-taking which had direct influence on how the issue was represented in relation to domestic uses of opium. The preoccupation with the dangers of drug-taking which formed the basis of the colonial discourse was for a long time conspicuously absent from

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[16] James L. Maxwell, 'Questions on Opium Answered', *LSE Selected Pamphlets*, (1892), pp.3-4

[17] 'The Medical Aspects of the Opium Question', *The British Medical Journal*, vol.1, no.1100 (28 January 1882), p.123

the domestic accounts of the practice and the ubiquitous availability of opium meant that the idea of a 'drug problem' or addiction 'would not have been understood by the Victorians.'[18] A decisive shift in attitudes towards opiate use can, however, be traced, leading to progressive medicalization of the practice and increasingly forceful expression of the need for regulation and control. This viewpoint alteration is as multifaceted as it is complex and it goes without saying that the scope of this chapter is not sufficient to fully do it justice. It is nonetheless possible to contend that it was contingent on the wider matrix of changes which shaped the nineteenth century's socio-cultural landscape and as such needs to be positioned in relation to the broadly understood issues of urbanization and industrialization, with all the entailed questions of class, gender and identity, and not simply – as Elisabeth Lomax suggests – within the framework of public health debates and humanitarian reforms.[19] The approaches to working-class opium use are particularly instructive here, since they allow us to delineate, however tentatively, the relationship between class, identity and labour which will also inform my reading of 'The Man with the Twisted Lip.'

The rising interest in lower-class opium eating can perhaps in part be attributed to the growing reliance on statistical evidence in the cause of public health. A sudden welter of information, including growing import and consumption figures of the 1830s, coupled with the collation of data on opiate-related deaths, especially those of infants, meant that questions began to be asked about the extent of the habit and its 'proper' application – which

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[18] Toby Seddon, *A History of Drugs: Drugs and Freedom in the Liberal Age* (London: Routledge-Cavendish, 2010), p.35
[19] Elisabeth Lomax, 'The Uses and Abuses of Opiates in Nineteenth-Century England', *Bulletin of the History of Medicine*, vol.47, issue 2 (1973)

came to be viewed as strictly medicinal.[20] Placing opium within the wider

temperance debates – and adding a distinct moral judgement – working-class

use was represented as 'stimulant', that is to say, used in addition to, or in

the place of, alcohol consumption and at a remove from genuine medical

necessity. The ready acceptance of this notion – both in professional and

public circles – needs to be understood in relation to the emergence of

theories about racial and social degeneration which amalgamated the

'savage' and animalistic traits of the colonial 'other' and translated the

resulting representations onto the bodies of the urban poor. A comprehensive

analysis of this development will be offered in Chapter 2; here let it suffice to

say that bodily degeneration was equated with ethical and spiritual decline,

creating a circular causality between the two. Thus, it is not surprising that

the medical view of working-class opium use was concerned not only with the

detrimental effects it had on health but also, or perhaps primarily, with its

moral, social and communal implications. As Berridge explains:

> Moral values were inserted into this apparently 'natural' and
> 'autonomous' disease entity. Addiction, clearly not simply a physical
> disease entity, was a 'disease of the will'. It was disease *and* vice. The
> moral weakness of the patient was an important element in causation;
> the disease was defined in terms of 'moral bankruptcy', 'a form of moral
> insanity', terms deriving from similar formulations in insanity. […] It was
> not the physical or even the mental dimensions of disease which were
> stressed, but the personal defects of the addict. […] Opium eating was
> medicalized; but failure to achieve cure was a failure of personal
> responsibility, not medical science.[21]

That such a view was generally accepted can be attested by the fact that

the entry on opium in the 1888 edition of *Encyclopaedia Britannica*

authoritatively declared that 'when carried to excess it becomes an inveterate

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[20] Virginia Berridge, 'Victorian Opium Eating: Responses to Opiate Use in Nineteenth-Century England', *Victorian Studies*, vol.21, no.4 (Summer 1978), pp.442-443
[21] Virginia Berridge, *Opium and the People,* op.cit., pp.155-156

habit; but this happens chiefly in individuals of weak will-power, who would just as easily become the victim of intoxicating drinks, and who are practically moral imbeciles, often addicted also to other forms of depravity.'[22] The medicalization of opium use, coupled with the view of difference between classes founded on *biological* as well as social bases, meant that although the failure to break the habit, consistently ascribed to lack of moral power, and the physical and mental ruin which inevitably followed prolonged addiction to some extent transcended class divisions, the explanations and reasons for drug-taking among the 'higher' and the 'lower' strata of society differed considerably. In the former, it was a question of constitution, heightened sensibility and the demands of modern life, while lower-class opiate use came to be perceived as a mixture of tautological attribution, both natural and acquired – it was yet another vice, akin to drink, that the poor indulged in because they lacked inherent moral structure and, at the same time, opium made them even more deprived – both in body and spirit – adding to the supposedly natural degenerate traits they possessed. Such descriptions, it is important to assert, were not simply objective medical observations but rather representations used to both confirm and justify a certain socio-cultural typology. In 1834, Factory Commissioners' inquiries about the 'luxurious' use of opium among factory workers were met with a univocal denial of any such custom taking place from no fewer than 25 different medical professionals practising in industrial districts.[23] Yet there was a proliferation of written accounts attesting to the fact that 'the consumption of opium was increasing among the working classes to a

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[22] 'Opium', *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, vol.17 (1888), p.794
[23] House of Commons Parliamentary Papers, Factory Inquiry Commission, vol.19, 1834, (167), pp.538-539

frightful extent [and] it affected all that was good and virtuous in a woman, it acted as an aphrodisiac, and subverted all morality.'[24] Writing in *The Lancet*, 'Medicus' observes:

> For those unfortunate creatures who daily resort to this baneful drug as a cheap species of intoxication, I have but little sympathy or commiseration. Their weakness entails a severe punishment even in this world. But there are others, especially among the middle classes of society, who resort to the use of opium under the pressure of severe mental distress; and although nor poppy nor mandragora can "pluck from the memory a rooted sorrow, Or rase the written troubles of the brain", still there are many cases in which morphia, or some other sweet oblivious antidote, by procuring sleep, preserves the sufferer from painful or heart-rending recollections.[25]

The perceived differences are accentuated even further in an article from *The British Journal of Inebriety*, worth quoting here at some length, which, although emphasising the prevalence of an opium habit in the middle and upper classes, neatly extrapolates moral and spiritual dissimilarity from the biological basis:

> [T]he victims are from among the most energetic and the useful sections of society, and it is mainly among the educated and cultured that these cases are seen. It is acknowledged in regard to these that there is a physical difference between the brain pattern of the poorer and less educated as a class when compared with that of the cultured brain-worker. […] [I]t is known that these physical differences carry with them psychological and physiological concomitants, which imply a higher sensitiveness and a greater vulnerability to the physical temperament and mental constitution of the better classes. […] [T]he brain-worker lives in a state of complex thought and emotion […] and the strain of effort calls for the stimulant, the "brain tonic", the nerve restorer or the sedative.[26]

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[24] 'The Opium Trade', *The Medical Times*, vol.1 (October 1839 – March 1840), p.163
[25] Medicus, 'Teetotalism and Opium-Taking', *The Lancet*, vol.57, issue 1451 (21 June 1851), p.694
[26] Robert Armstrong-Jones, 'Drug Addiction in Relation to Mental Disorder', *The British Journal of Inebriety*, vol.12, no.3 (January 1915), pp.129-130

With the addition of gender variance – 'women yield more readily to the love of luxury, excitement, and pleasure, than men do, thus becoming more self-indulgent, and in consequence flying to sedatives in order to cope more readily with the artificial pleasures of social life'[27] – middle class, or as Armstrong-Jones interestingly puts it, 'brain-worker' opiate addiction, although perhaps not morally defensible, was presented as to some degree comprehensible, based, as it were, on positive character traits, and medically defined use carried out, it seems, with a broader social good in mind. If the strain of mental work necessitated the use of 'brain tonics', the physical labourer was not rejuvenated by opium but, on the contrary, all his faculties were further debilitated. As early as 1830 an article in *The Lancet* asks, somewhat grandiloquently:

> Behold the squalid and shapeless creatures who swarm in myriads in our crowded alleys and courts; behold their flabby limbs, cadaverous cheeks and leaden eyes, – the hellish works of buckthorn and diacodium – sleepy, poisonous syrups. Reared, with paralysed nerves, with blunted sensibilities, – with half-made, enervated, half-nourished bodies, these creatures, in after-life, need not the Lethean influence of opium to make them forget their wretchedness. They neither reach the stature nor exhibit the intellectual attributes of manhood. By cold destitution, they are, from infancy, dead to every virtue, and, from their ceaseless labour for bread, are deprived of every hope but that of the grave. Would you add to the pangs of an aching heart, and the tortures of half-cramped limbs, the frightful phantoms of a bewildering drug?[28]

What is of particular import in these accounts is the continual insistence on productivity – if for the middle class 'brain worker' opium could act as an inducement to exertion, for the manual worker its action would be wholly

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[27] Ibid., p.127
[28] 'Noctes Ambrosianae', *The Lancet*, vol.14, issue 362 (7 August 1830)

negative, generating only ineffectiveness. When a more temperate view of opium eating was taken, its relative harmlessness was also expounded in relation to labour. 'The Medical Aspects of the Opium Question' cites Sir George Birdwood, who, in his works on the opium use in the East End of London, mentions 'the case of an old woman aged 90, recently deceased' who, despite taking large quantities of opium daily from the age of seventeen, 'to her last day earned her own living by manufacturing small wares in iron and tin.'[29] This preoccupation with productivity is crucial, for it will allow us to trace the ways in which 'The Man with the Twisted Lip' engages with the issues of 'proper' labour, 'proper' money-making and 'proper' identity. This engagement is most fully articulated, I want to argue, through the creation and circulation of the image of an opium den and it might be fruitful to examine its emergence and representation in more detail.

The aforementioned accounts of Chinese opium smoking propagated by the anti-opium movement were instrumental, as Berridge argues, in influencing both international and home policy on opiate trade and use.[30] As the concerns over domestic drug habit grew, especially in relation to the working classes, the proliferation of anti-opium literature engendered 'a tradition of relating the Far Eastern situation very specifically to domestic English experience.'[31] Habitual opium use – especially in the form of smoking – came to be viewed as an essentially 'foreign' practice, associated primarily with an alien minority of the Chinese and Lascar seamen, resident in the East and South dockland areas of London, whose social and cultural otherness emphasised the supposedly deviant and corrupt influence of opium, adding a

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[29] 'The Medical Aspects of the Opium Question', op.cit., p.123
[30] Virginia Berridge, *Opium and the People*, op.cit., pp.190-191
[31] Ibid., p.191

distinctly racial dimension to the medical, moral and political objections as to

its use. The fear of contagion encompassed both the working and middle

class use – the former because they were mentally and physically inferior

and so akin to the Oriental smoker; the latter, conversely, faced ruin due to

their finer natures which opium degenerated. It is important to note that such

beliefs did not crystallise until the second half of the nineteenth century, when

the increasing need for social control fuelled by the fears of contagion,

pollution and contamination stimulated an almost obsessive production of

newspaper articles, medical theses and books which purported to present

objective, first-hand accounts of 'darkest England', encompassing mostly the

poorest districts of London. These social investigations,

> appearing merely to reveal a grim truth about addiction […] also
> perpetrated a frightening myth. Whilst almost all Victorians might have
> been touched directly or indirectly by opium use, that behaviour was
> reduced and solidified into a stereotypical image of corruption. […]
> Articles like this satisfied the prevalent interests in mystic exoticism, a
> romantic passion for the East, and an often dark curiosity for all things
> foreign. The public appetite for xenophobic anxieties and morbid fears of
> disease and pollution were fed and perpetuated by playing such tales of
> apparently outlandish prodigies. The characters that peopled these
> accounts and coloured them with their seemingly bizarre habits became
> stock types in the public mind and were increasingly honed and
> freighted with symbolic significance.[32]

The social reportage accounts borrowed heavily from the writings of the

missionaries working in Asia, creating, through a type of semiotic

amalgamation, a representation of the opium den which, although located in

the familiar – at least nationally – East End of London, housed sins and

mysteries that were distinctly oriental in origin. The role of fictional re-

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[32] Louise Foxcroft, *The Making of Addiction: The 'Use and Abuse' of Opium in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), pp.70, 71

presentations in the mythologising of the opium den was indeed such that Berridge blames the departure from more restrained descriptions, and the emergence of the fixed association of opium with evil, almost entirely on popular Victorian literature, most notably Dickens, Wilde and Conan Doyle himself.[33] The vividness of the image provided a useful *tabula rasa* onto which various dangers, threats and mysteries of the era could be inscribed and which soon came to be perceived as a faithful rendition of the English opium problem. The reality was, however, much more prosaic – by 1891, when TWIS was first published, there was a miniscule number of 582 Chinese people living in London.[34] A small China-town was established near the river to serve the needs of the Asian population, including the Indian Lascars, who were employed as seamen on-board British ships and whose terms of contract forbade them to legally settle in England.[35] The 'swarms' of Oriental others in the streets of London were thus predominantly of transitory nature and did not account for more than 10% of all the sailors coming ashore.[36] As the opium dens were primarily used by these transients 'there were, in reality, very few of them and most were merely rooms attached to other businesses where recreational smoking took place, as if in a distorted version of a British social club.'[37] However, the social reports authored mostly by middle and upper class observers painted an entirely different picture, which – perhaps by dint of its graphic repetitiveness – helped to establish the connection between opium dens and foreign corruption. One of the first

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[33] Virginia Berridge, *Opium and the People,* op.cit., p.197
[34] Louise Foxcroft, op.cit., p.65
[35] Rozina Visram, *Ayahs, Lascars and Princes: Indians in Britain 1700-1947* (London: Pluto Press, 1986), pp.34-35
[36] Ibid., appendix 3
[37] Louise Foxcroft, op.cit., p.65

descriptions of such an establishment comes from an anonymous author –

most likely the journalist James Greenwood – and, although the Chinese

smokers, of which there are only two, are described in less than flattering

terms – their eyes gleaming 'like those of a satisfied pig' and their

countenances resembling an 'enraptured hog' – the account is nonetheless

striking in its more restrained portrayal of the den.[38] What we are presented

with is a familiar depiction of a London slum, concentrating on the perceived

differences in domestic arrangements, which, although certainly hostile, lack

the air of oriental mystery. Thus, the Bluegate Fields area under investigation

comprises 'many villainous courts and alleys' whose inhabitants 'are the

worst in Europe' and the den itself is located in a square smelling of 'an

appalling odour of bad drainage'.[39] Inside, the room is 'extremely mean and

miserable', with minimal furnishings, comprising 'a small wooden table and

three chairs' and a bed which is 'not arranged according to the English

fashion.'[40] The Chinese proprietor of the opium den was, to the author's great

disappointment, not dressed in 'a gown of gold-embroidered crimson silk, and

with a sash and curly-toed slippers' but rather sported the garb of a working-

class Englishman: 'a long jacket and a comforter wisped round his neck, and

tight trousers, and an old cloth cap on his head.'[41] If we compare this account

with Greenwood's immensely popular 'An Opium Smoke in Tiger Bay' dated

15 years later and certainly based on the *London Society* piece, the additions

and alterations are startling. The search for opium in the East End is

described in quasi-religious terms – it is 'a pilgrimage' and the den 'a

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[38] 'East London Opium Smokers', *London Society: An Illustrated Magazine of Light and Amusing Literature for the Hours of Relaxation*, vol.14, no.79 (July 1868), p.71
[39] Ibid., pp.68, 69
[40] Ibid., p.70
[41] Ibid., p.69

mysterious shrine', the approach to which requires the abandonment of 'all genteel scruples and every shade of civilized fastidiousness.'[42] The mode of finding one's way in Shadwell is given solely with geographical reference to a seemingly endless stream of pubs, taverns, drinking houses and dram shops, emphasising both the link between opium and alcohol and its ubiquitous presence. The street on which the den was to be located 'presented an unbroken scene of vice and depravity of the most hideous sort' and the language used to describe the inhabitants of such a locale has a distinctly animalistic-colonial flavour:

> It was not quite late enough for the tigresses to make themselves sleek and trim, preparatory to going on their customary prowl trough their hunting ground; and there they sat, or lolled, or squatted at their doors, blear-eyed and tousle-haired from last night's debauch. There, too, lounged, and smoked short pipes, and drank out of tavern measures the convenient resting-place of which was the window sills, the males of the tribe – the thieves and bullies, who, quiet enough now, would be wide awake and ready to show their quality when dark came, and the tavern gas was flaring.[43]

Inside the den, Greenwood was greeted by the opium master's English wife, who 'exhibited not the least amazement that one of her own countrymen should have a craving after the celestial luxury'[44], making it thus appear as if the practice was common among the local population. After the requisite depictions of the squalor and 'improper' domestic arrangements within, Greenwood gives a particularly striking and noteworthy account of the woman:

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[42] James Greenwood, 'An Opium Smoke in Tiger Bay' in *In Strange Company: Being the Experiences of a Roving Correspondent* (London: Vizetelly & Co., 1883), p.216
[43] Ibid., p.217
[44] Ibid.

I have said that she was English but it was only by her speech that her nationality could be so readily decided. A small lean woman, with such a marvellous grafting of Chinese about her, that her cotton gown of English cut seemed to hang quite awkwardly on her sharp shoulders. Her skin was dusky yellow, and tightly drawn at the nostrils and the cheek bones, and evidently she had, since her marriage, taken such a thoroughly Chinese view of life, that her organs of vision were fast losing their European shape and assuming that which coincided with her adopted nature.[45]

The moral and bodily degeneration traits are amalgamated here to such an extent that it becomes impossible to separate them in Greenwood's incongruous treatment of evolution theory, according to which the opium master's wife presents such an unnatural and distorted version of British womanhood that her face is *racially* transformed so as to better fit both with her 'nature' and surroundings. The Chinese seamen smoking opium in the den are described in similarly hostile terms and Greenwood professes to be unable to even look at them: 'I never should have supposed the human countenance capable of wearing an expression so sensuous, so bestial and revolting.'[46] Despite his misgivings, he is determined to take the proffered pipe, 'for I was an Englishman', but is firm in his resolve not to recline on the bed and remain seated throughout the procedure, so as to further emphasise the distance between himself and the 'hideous figures' around him.[47] The implicit message of the tale certainly indicates that even the slightest contact with the depravity of the opium den could have disastrous effects – both on body and spirit – and the drug could only appeal to certain degenerate and – what seems to amount to the same thing – foreign types. In the same year in which 'The Man with the Twisted Lip' was published, *The Strand* ran an

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[45] Ibid., p.219
[46] Ibid., p.222
[47] Ibid., p.223

article entitled 'A Night in an Opium Den' which, although most likely intended as a pastiche, drew heavily from the now familiar repertoire of opium den images. Linking the bodily with the domestic, the anonymous author stated that 'den was an appropriate name for the reeking hole to which he [the Chinese guide] conducted us. It was dirty and dark […]. The walls which were a dingy yellow (not unlike the "whites" of the smokers eyes) were quite bare.'[48] The Chinese proprietor had 'an evil look', 'parchment-coloured features' and 'cunning eyes', and the den was filled with 'yellow and stupefied Chinese and Malays sprawled about', including one smoker of 'decidedly evil aspect' who was watching the adventurer 'in the same way in which the prisoned pythons in a serpent-house watch the visitors who come to tap at the glass of their cages.'[49] Similarly, describing the excursions of several Christian missionaries, the evocatively titled 'The East in the West' describes the opium den as a place of 'depravity and deeds of darkness' which 'pandered to the vices' of its visitors and where 'dark deeds had been done.'[50] Trying to convince the smokers of the civilising influence of religion, the visitors are left with a feeling that 'the many deaths which occur in this locality are fully accounted for after visiting such a house'[51], adding a distinctly criminal dimension to the images of moral and physical depravity. The geographical placement of the dens is important here, for it not only divides the city spatially but also symbolically – mapping out and articulating the divide between East and West, Orient and Occident but also, through

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[48] 'A Night in an Opium Den', *The Strand Magazine*, vol.1, no.5 (1891), p.625
[49] Ibid., pp.625, 626
[50] J. Salter, 'The East in the West' in *The Metropolitan Poor: Semifactual Accounts, 1795-1910. Vol.VI: In Darkest England, 1880-1900*, ed. by John Marriott and Masaie Matsumura (London: Pickering & Chatto, 1999), pp.394, 395
[51] Ibid., p.390

metonymic conflation, the poor and the middle classes. In Blanchard Jerrold and Gustave Doré's *London: A Pilgrimage*, an immensely popular, elaborately illustrated publication, the city is configured precisely along those dividing lines and it is *labour*, more than any other activity, which provides the endoskeleton for mapping out the spatial – and so social – ordering of London. Even though the chapter on 'Whitechapel and Thereabouts' starts with a description which unequivocally references the more familiar hierarchy of high and low – 'from cellars to attics – from the resort of the sewer rat to the nest of the sparrow in the chimney-stack' – it quickly moves towards a polarity based on a difference in geographical location, the East and the West.[52] For the middle class 'adventurous people' Whitechapel is no different to a foreign land, a 'savage', lawless 'Alsatia' full of 'strange, dark byways, the natives of which will look upon us as the Japanese looked upon the first European travellers in the streets of Jeddo.'[53] In sharp contrast with the labouring London, which the text celebrates in a stream of images filled with movement and bustling activity that lends its participants an air of dignity, the paupers exist in a world in which 'the day is never aired'; their endeavours – because they do not signify work – serve only to emphasise the apparent link between unemployment, criminality and dirt:

> Rents spread with rags, swarming with the children of mothers for ever greasing the walls with their shoulders; where there is an angry hopelessness and carelessness painted upon the face of every man and woman; and the oaths are loud, and the crime is continuous. […] As the sun rises, the court swarms at once: for here there are no ablutions to

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[52] Blanchard Jerrold and Gustave Doré, *London: A Pilgrimage* (London: Grant & Co., 1872), p.141
[53] Ibid., p.144

perform, no toilettes to make – neither brush nor comb delays the outpouring of babes and sucklings from the cellars and garrets.[54]

The whole of Whitechapel appears as an almost mythical labyrinth, an inferno of all things murky and low, all the more frightening for its lack of bourgeois propriety, order and domestic privacy. Bravely plunging into the heart of darkness, the visitors walk through 'a maze of courts and narrow streets of low houses – nearly all doors are open, showing kitchen fires blazing far in the interior, and strange figures moving about.' They come to 'a low black door' and enter a 'low, long dark room', charged with 'the unmistakeable, overpowering damp and mouldy odour that is in every thieves' kitchen, in every common lodging house, every ragged hotel.' The people they encounter 'crowd upon' them from every corner in a grotesque admixture that is both fascinating and alarming: 'men and women, boys and girls, all quarrelling or rollicking together: the artificial flower-maker with the known thief – the yet virtuous girl with the flaunting hussy.'[55] The adventure culminates in a visit to an opium den, where:

> Upon the wreck of a four-post bedstead (the posts of which almost met overhead, and from which depended bundles of shapeless rags), upon a mattress heaped with indescribable clothes, lay, sprawling, a Lascar, dead-drunk with opium; and at the foot of the bed a woman, with a little brass lamp among the rags covering her, stirring the opium over the tiny flame. […] It was difficult to see any humanity in that face, as the enormous grey lips lapped about the rough wood pipe and drew in the poison. The man looked dead.[56]

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[54] Ibid., p.116
[55] Ibid., pp.145, 146
[56] Ibid., pp.147-148
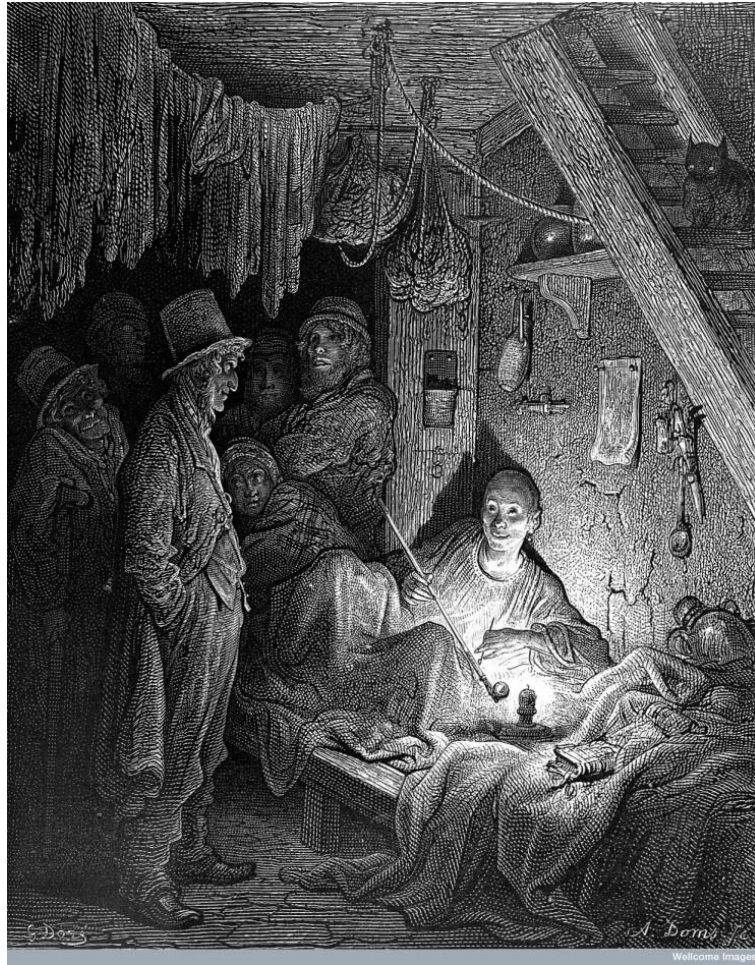
Fig.1.2. Gustave Doré, *Opium Smoking – the Lascar's Room in "Edwin Drood"*, engraving (1872)

Fig.1.3. Opium den, *The Testament of Sherlock Holmes*, Frogwares, 2012, author's screenshot

What these descriptions articulate is a preoccupation with darkness – and darkness, as Griselda Pollock remarks, 'prevents distance so the text inscribes the discomfort of proximity.'[57] Whitechapel is at a remove from the cherished privacy of the bourgeois domestic life because here the closeness – of houses, streets and, above all, bodies – is not intimate but enforced. It is also the uneasy proximity of this foreign world to the familiar London which is accentuated – it takes only 'few minutes' in a cab from Fleet Street to reach 'the lanes and byeways, dark and noisy, and swarming with poor', where everything is 'black and grim' in an 'extraordinary tangle of dark alleys.'[58] This pervasive darkness undoubtedly offers a possibility of a 'vicarious thrill'[59] but it also, quite simply, makes the spectacle of poverty difficult to see and it is precisely the constant need for peering, squinting, piercing and gazing which turns the act of observation into labour or exertion. What we are presented with here is not a detached and leisurely gaze of a *flâneur* – it is work, all the more striking for the engagement it offers with those who, apparently, lack the need for it. This labour of visual encounter is perhaps most evident in the opium den – a small, dark room filled with smoke and 'fumes' – where its juxtaposition with the idleness of smokers' bodies – which are lying down, 'sprawling' and 'looking dead' – is tirelessly stressed.[60] Thus the opium den – as a symbolic image constantly etched into popular imagination – enabled a consolidation and literalisation of the discourses of degeneration,

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[57] Griselda Pollock, 'Vicarious Excitements: *London: A Pilgrimage* by Gustave Doré and Blanchard Jerrold, 1872', *New Formations*, no.4 (Spring 1988), p.37
[58] Blanchard Jerrold and Gustave Doré, op.cit., pp.142, 147
[59] Griselda Pollock, op.cit., p.37
[60] Blanchard Jerrold and Gustave Doré, op.cit., pp.147, 148

contamination and unproductivity, bringing together 'moral concern and

fearful disgust […] with the politics and economies of imperialism.'[61]

Literary influences: De Quincey

It shouldn't be surprising that Isa Whitney acquired his opium habit after

reading De Quincey whilst in college, for *Confessions of an English Opium-*

Eater could arguably be posited as 'one of the most influential fictive

constructs of the Romantic era'[62] and the centrality of the work in shaping

attitudes towards opium, as well as the genre of confessional writing, cannot

be denied. *Confessions*, first published in a serialised form in 1821 and as a

book a year later, certainly presents a complex and multifaceted account of

the opium habit, both extolling its virtues and illuminating the dangers in a

manner true to the Romantic idiom of unique artistic experience, and the

initial distance of De Quincey's glorification of opium from the later model of

pathological degeneration is indeed striking. The text of *Confessions* is

charged with spiritual and religious imagery: 'this is the doctrine of the true

church on the subject of opium', De Quincey states, connecting – in a gesture

as grandiose as it is ironic, the habit of opium-taking with the habit of

worship.[63] (Here we are reminded once again of Isa's brother). Designating

for himself the place of an 'infallible' pope, De Quincey goes on to describe at

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[61] Louise Foxcroft, op.cit., p.75
[62] Robert Morrison, 'De Quincey and the Opium-Eater's Other Selves', *Romanticism*, vol.5, no.1 (1999)
[63] Thomas De Quincey, 'Confessions of an English Opium-Eater' in *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater and Other Writings*, ed. by Grevel Lindop (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p.42

length the mystical opium-induced dreams and visions, borrowing freely from

the Christian, Oriental and Classical traditions. For Foxcroft, 'martyrdom to

opium in these terms was laudable, if not glorious: it set the user apart from,

singled out and above his fellows.'[64] The emphasis on individuality is of

import here, for it places De Quincey's writings firmly within the Romantic

tradition of internalised subjective experience articulated through artistic

affectations of 'child-like innocence combined with an almost mystical

sagacity.'[65] The development of the self and the preoccupation with identity is

precisely, I want to suggest, what structures the entire text of confessions,

and the quasi-religious language De Quincey uses is not merely, as Alethea

Hayter would have it, a 'disagreeable practice' of an addict[66], but rather a

literary device employed in the art of 'self-dramatization'.[67] The 'interest in

rhetorical manipulation of identity' is something Robert Morrison convincingly

traces throughout De Quincey's literary career, enumerating 'an entire range'

of pseudonyms, noms de plume and alter-egos.[68] What is distinctive about

Confessions, however, is the consistent articulating of tension between the

'real' and the imagined self, between the factual and the literary, between the

author and the narrator. The presupposed role of confession – to speak a

unified autobiographical self – is undermined by De Quincey's persistent

questioning of the very project he purports to present. In a letter to the

London Magazine – signed, incidentally, with an oft used pseudonym X.Y.Z.

– he insisted that 'the entire Confessions were designed to convey a

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[64] Louise Foxcroft, op.cit., p.20
[65] Ibid., p.22
[66] Alethea Hayter. *Opium and the Romantic Imagination* (London: Faber and Faber, 1969), p.104
[67] Mike Jay. *High Society: Mind-Altering Drugs in History and Culture* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2010), p.82
[68] Robert Morrison, op.cit., pp.87, 88

narrative of my own experience as an opium-eater, drawn up with entire simplicity and fidelity to the facts'[69], and such (confessional) pronouncements indeed seem to operate as undeniable truths – so much so that Foxcroft can discern an 'unmistakable honesty' permeating *Confessions*.[70] And yet, despite anchoring his project in the discourse of self-telling that seems, ethically, above reproach, the Opium Eater finds the very act of confession questionable:

> Nothing, indeed, is more revolting to English feelings than the spectacle of a human being obtruding on our notice his moral ulcers or scars, and tearing away that "decent drapery" which time or indulgence to human frailty may have drawn over them; accordingly, the greater part of our confessions (that is, spontaneous and extra-judicial confessions) proceed from demireps, adventurers, or swindlers: and for any such acts of gratuitous self-humiliation from those who can be supposed in sympathy with the decent and self-respecting part of society, we must look to French literature, or to that part of the German which is tainted with the spurious and defective sensibility of the French. All this I feel so forcibly, and so nervously am I alive to reproach of this tendency, that I have for many months hesitated about the propriety of allowing this or any part of my narrative to come before the public eye […][71]

The genre of confessional writing, Susan Levin observes, 'mandates a certain kind of focus.'[72] For De Quincey, however, 'digression is confession' – the language of the Opium Eater serves not only – or not principally – to describe the linear progression of his life's 'truths' but rather constantly bifurcates into parenthetical asides, inversions, extended metaphors and dream sequences.[73] This digressive intricacy ensures that the Opium Eater is not, and can never be, simply that which his name would indicate – any

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[69] X.Y.Z., 'Letter to the Editor of the London Magazine', *The London Magazine*, vol.4 (December 1821), p.585
[70] Louise Foxcroft, op.cit., p.23
[71] Thomas De Quincey, op.cit., p.1
[72] Susan M Levin, *The Romantic Art of Confession: De Quincey, Musset, Sand, Lamb, Hogg, Frémy, Soulié, Janin* (Columbia, SC: Camden House, 1998), p.19
[73] Ibid., p.36

attempts at establishing a stable identity are undermined, precisely, by language, which 'fills the space of confession' so that the self becomes (or perhaps remains) textual – 'the Opium Eater is literally the body of language.'[74] Put simply, De Quincey – as an author of his own confession – creates the illusion of authenticity and stability which the Opium Eater – as a narrator – constantly disavows. 'Everything he says', Hayter writes, 'must be scrutinized with a reservation', but she believes this to be necessary simply because 'of the witness's infirmity' – like all addicts, De Quincey 'lied, prevaricated and romanced.'[75] It is perhaps not unexpected, if all too easy, to concentrate mostly on the issue of drug addiction but such a literal reading, I want to posit, does not take into account the struggles between different voices, different types of experiences and different 'selves' inherent in the text, in effect reducing *Confessions* to nothing more than a set of semi-coherent solipsisms. Although opium-eating was to be the main focus of De Quincey's writing, the text is subtitled *Being an Extract from the Life of a Scholar*, and emphasis is certainly placed on knowledge, intellect and learning. The constant references to literary works and facility with classical languages – the Opium Eater's natural instinct on meeting the Malay is to 'address him in some lines from the Iliad'[76] – no doubt served to help 'obtain public interest and respect' and ensured 'the commercial success of the work.'[77] But they also complicate the relationship between the author and the narrator of the text – it is impossible to discern whether the erudite attributes are to be understood as De Quincey's own or rather as a rhetorical device of

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[74] Ibid., pp.37, 22
[75] Alethea Hayter, op.cit.,p.112
[76] Thomas De Quincey, op.cit., p.57
[77] Susan M. Levin, op.cit., p.25

the Opium Eater. What is more, the literary classical scholar, despite being a religiously or mystically oriented disciple of the church of opium, retains the Enlightenment's attributes of practical reason and utility and this opposition is already instituted in the opening paragraph of *Confessions*: 'I here present you, courteous reader, with the record of a remarkable period in my life: according to my application of it, I trust that it will prove, not merely an interesting record, but, in a considerable degree, useful and instructive.'[78] The language used here is telling, for, as Levin observes, the 'remarkable' experience of opium is surrounded by and couched in 'logical, analytic terms.'[79] This linguistic utility extends further still in De Quincey's constant recourse to pecuniary expressions borrowed from the discipline of economy:

> [A]s my self-accusation does not *amount* to a confession of guilt, so, on the other, it is possible that, if it did, the *benefit* resulting to others from the *record* of an experience *purchased at so heavy a price* might *compensate*, by a vast *overbalance*, for any violence done to the feelings I have noticed, and justify a breach of the general rule. Infirmity and misery do not of necessity imply guilt. They approach or recede from shades of that dark alliance, *in proportion* to the probable motives and prospects of the offender, and the palliations, known or secret, of the offence; in proportion as the temptations to it were potent from the first, and the resistance to it, in act or in effort, was earnest to the last.[80]

What *Confessions* presents is thus not a unified voice of a single author/narrator in a linear unfolding but rather a literary conglomerate *Gestalt* where the projected identity certainly appears to be more than a sum of its parts. De Quincey is, or creates himself to be – whether consciously or inadvertently – the Opium Eater, an opium eater, religious mystic, academic scholar, utilitarian philosopher, diligent economist – and what these diverse

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[78] Thomas De Quincey, op.cit., p.1
[79] Susan M. Levin, op.cit., p.26
[80] Thomas De Quincey, op.cit., p.2 [my emphasis]

voices and languages create is a text that can perhaps best be understood

with reference to Bakhtin's notion of polyphony. What the body of

Confessions articulates is a tension and struggle between a multiplicity of

discourses that can neither be reduced to a single utterance nor used to

substantiate and authenticate the confessor's identity. On the contrary, the

self which emerges from the heteroglot play of languages is

> characterised by dispersal and disunity, a self that depends on its
> feminine spectre, a self unlike the autonomous, masculine being that
> characterises a post-Lockean understanding of man's coherence. Fluid
> boundaries, not religiously controlled centeredness define his
> confession. [It is] the reality of the dispersing self as opposed to the
> fiction of the unified, autobiographical self.[81]

The act of confession thus both articulates and constitutes subjectivity – it

is a moment when the self emerges as *dialogic*, that is to say, at a remove

from the professed commitment to an absolute truth and despite – or perhaps

because of – his initial protestations to the contrary, De Quincey's project

reveals 'a desire to affirm duality, to profess that the self cannot know itself.'[82]

This, precisely, is the rhetorical and etymological 'con' of con-fession – it is a

literary narrative, a story in the guise of objective fact-telling which, while

working to obscure the textuality of its origins, simultaneously points to the

impossibility of such a gesture. To put it still more simply, it is 'poietic not

mimetic', a technique for creation, not reflection, of truth.[83]

Since *Confessions* was published anonymously, there were a number of

those who came forward to usurp the authorship, with the most notable

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[81] Susan M. Levin, op.cit., p.19

[82] Jeremy Tambling, *Confession: Sexuality, Sin, the Subject* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990), p.123

[83] Jo Gill, 'Introduction' in *Modern Confessional Writing: New Critical Essays*, ed. by Jo Gill (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), p.4

among these accounts – ranging from Wainewright's more restrained journalistic prose to the outlandish public pronouncements of 'a person calling himself De Quincey Mee' – being perhaps Edgar Allan Poe's announcement that *Confessions* were written by his pet baboon, Juniper.[84] The immense popularity of De Quincey's writing formula can also be glimpsed from the sheer volume of literary imitations, such as Lamb's *Confessions of a Drunkard*, Thompson's 'The Confessions of a Footman' or Colley Grattan's 'Confessions of an English Glutton.' The influence extended beyond British borders, with a host of major European writers, including Balzac, Gogol and Dostoevsky, professing admiration for the Opium Eater.[85] What is of interest here, is that the French and Russian authors first read *Confessions* in a translation by the then eighteen-year-old Alfred Mousset (who, incidentally, later penned *The Confession of a Child of the Century*) and this "translation" – as Paul Sawyer would have it – could more aptly be described as 'a paraphrase with extraordinary deletions, additions and errors.'[86] It goes without saying that no translation offers *verbatim* fidelity, but the comparison of De Quincey's text with Musset's version is particularly striking. Approximately twenty percent of the original is missing entirely, as is the 20-page long appendix; references peculiar to English history or culture – such as an allusion to Cromwell – are removed, but extensive sections of Musset's own writing are added, some as long as a thousand words, with no indication of this authorial change; names of people, places, streets – even

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[84] Robert Morrison, op.cit., p.93
[85] Ibid., pp.94-95
[86] Paul Sawyer, 'Musset's Translation of *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater', The French Review*, vol.42, no.3 (1969)

numbers and figures – are altered.[87] To take account of these changes is crucial, for it shows not only how the play of identities can be extended from the narrative to the linguistic register – the Opium Eater's fragmented self mirrored by the fluidity and malleability of the text – but also how the autobiographical confession cannot serve as a guarantor of stability, even though it has become, in the words of Foucault, one of 'the most highly valued techniques for producing truth.'[88] Through the aforementioned cursory reference to De Quincey's *Confessions* 'The Man with the Twisted Lip' thus stages, I want to argue, in the opening paragraph, its own preoccupation with the manifold modes of producing, representing, articulating and substantiating identity. The reading of the complex relationship this staging produces, taking into account the narrative and linguistic content as well as formalistic requirements, will form the subsequent part of this chapter.

"If You Are Found Again, Then All Must Come Out": 'The Man with the Twisted Lip'

A tableau which follows the opening statements concerning Isa Whitney's opium addiction readily puts into play Victorian anxieties surrounding the relationship between the domestic and public spheres, the interior and exterior. It is also, after the somewhat unusual beginning, a return to the established familiarity of form – albeit with Watson temporarily cast in the role of the detective – for the good doctor's marital bliss is interrupted by the

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[87] Ibid., pp.404-406, 408

[88] Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume I: An Introduction*, trans. by Robert Hurley (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978), p.59

entrance of a damsel in distress, whose husband has been missing for a few days and who, 'she had the surest information', was indulging his drug habit in an opium den near the docks.[89] Here, we are instantly presented with a juxtaposition of conjugal and domestic arrangements – the propriety and orderliness of Watson's middle-class home is amplified by comparison with the turmoil of the Whitneys, both of whom are, spatially or geographically, out of place – Isa *in* the East London opium den, Kate *out* of her own home in the middle of the night – both at a remove from the prescribed bourgeois domesticity. This emphasis on the home life, placed so early on in the story, allows us to extrapolate a number of salient points with which the narrative will be concerned and through, or with which, it can be read, starting with a realisation that what the story describes is not, in fact, a crime but merely a disturbance of bourgeois home life, a confusion of social roles and identities. 'The Man with the Twisted Lip' is thus an enactment of multiple duplicity – at the level of the narrative it is a story of a 'false' beggar, a middle-class man earning money in the guise of a mendicant; but the deception also encompasses the literary form, for the genre precepts of detective fiction are likewise revealed to be a deceit – although certainly playing on the idea of a 'red herring', what we are presented with is a mere 'error' *masquerading* as murder. The story could therefore be termed autological – textually and narratively enacting what it describes – events, characters, identities, literary conventions and plot devices which are, just like the titular lip, *twisted*. To mobilise the multivocal, syndromatic quality of the term is, I believe, crucial to the reading of the story – a twisting can be, at the same time, interwoven or

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[89] Arthur Conan Doyle, 'The Man with the Twisted Lip', op.cit.,p.161

deformed, entwined or abnormal – and it is pertinent to note that etymologically the term signifies, in its earliest form, a rope made of two strands, a conjoining of divergent parts. Apart from making the publication of the story in *The Strand Magazine* rather gratifyingly apt, the grasping of the polyphonic properties of this 'twisted' duality allows us to, as it were, 'learn the ropes' of which the textual weave of the story is comprised. To follow the many twists and turns of the tale, as it winds itself among the couplings of binary opposites – inside/outside, private/public, domestic/occupational – will allow us to syndromatically challenge – quite literarily, since the story deals with drug use – the *habitual* distinction assumed to exist between these terms. The twisted lip of Hugh Boone – part smile, part deformity – thus offers a possibility of a reading which will pay particular attention to the complex and multifaceted construction of identities in the story and their De Quinceyan engagement with a dialogic play of signification.

(As a parenthetical remark, let us briefly note here that the adventure was first published in North America under an altered title of 'The Strange Tale of a Beggar', which seems not only to dispense with the many layers of meaning evoked by the 'twist' of the narrative, but also detracts from the grotesque corporeality of the masquerade, concentrating instead on the 'economic mystery' aspect. Perhaps it is possible to view this alteration as yet another twist of the story?)

Kate Whitney's intrusion into Watson's home certainly signifies, through her affiliation with Isa, the danger opium posed to the middle-class stability and its relative nearness to the West – both of London and the Empire; but also, perhaps more immediately, it creates a first instance in a long register of

similar occurrences present in the text, where a complex relationship of
interior/exterior is established. Writing about Walter Benjamin's *The Arcades
Project*, Tom Gunning posits this binary as a 'crucial emblem' for theorising
the nineteenth century, one which 'responds to an essential division on which
the experience of the bourgeois society is founded, the creation of the interior
as a radical separation from the exterior.'[90] The middle class home thus
becomes primarily a place of exclusion, where 'the bourgeois can dwell and
dream undisturbed by the noise, activity and threats of the street, the space
of the masses and of production.'[91] The domestic interior, Benjamin writes, is
not only 'the universe of the private individual; it is also his étui' – offering
protection but also preventing 'the traces of his everyday objects and
accessories to get lost'.[92] It goes without saying that despite the attempts to
fashion a fully controllable, sequestered space, the exterior always intrudes –
– or, better still, is always already present – in this individual 'cocoon of
consumption', problematising the seemingly clear-cut binary of
inside/outside.[93] Benjamin mentions the insistent violence of the ringing
doorbell, which is precisely how Kate Whitney's invasion into Watson's home
is announced, but 'The Man with the Twisted Lip' also presents a vast
panorama of other places that both enact and complicate the dualism of
exterior and interior, often with and through 'threshold magic' and liminality.[94]
The way in which these spaces are configured, I want to argue, mobilises the
late Victorian concept of 'proper' domesticity as a benchmark against which it

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[90] Tom Gunning, 'The Exterior as *Intérieur*: Benjamin's Optical Detective', *boundary 2*, vol.30, no.1 (Spring 2003), p.106
[91] Ibid.
[92] Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. by Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge, MA and London: Belknap Press, 1999), p.20
[93] Tom Gunning, op.cit., p.106
[94] Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project,* op.cit., p.214 (I1a,4)

is possible to measure and construct a hierarchy of regulation, cleanliness and order, particularly in relation to the questions of identity and labour. 'The Victorians articulated an ideal of home against which men's conduct has been measured ever since'[95], John Tosh explains, and TWIS presents us with a number of separate, yet partially comparable, familial scenarios – Watson's, Isa's, St. Clair's and, perhaps paradoxically, the opium den – the opening scene in Watson's home providing an ideal against which all other relationships and places can be judged. The good doctor's sitting room, if not quite an oasis of oriental luxury, is certainly the 'étui' of which Benjamin speaks, furnished with a comfortable armchair from which a tired man can glance at a clock and where his wife occupies herself with needlework. But there are also more subtle clues that can be gleaned from this description which, when deciphered, seem to confirm Tosh's assertion that the Victorian home became a 'finely tuned' and, most importantly, *readable* indicator of the gradations in social status.[96] Even though the story centres on the question of perceptible (bodily) identity, Kate Whitney's entrance, first announced by the ringing doorbell, interestingly continues to be described in distinctly acoustic, not visual, terms: 'We heard the door open, a few hurried words, and then quick steps upon the linoleum.'[97] The specific mention of the popular floor covering certainly stands as a totem of bourgeois convention – linoleum was ubiquitous in middle class Victorian homes – whereas the mysterious words in the passage could only be exchanged with a servant, 'a badge of middle

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[95] John Tosh, *A Man's Place: Masculinity and the Middle-Class Home in Victorian England* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1999), p.1
[96] Ibid., pp.24, 25
[97] Arthur Conan Doyle, 'The Man with the Twisted Lip', op.cit., p.161

class status'[98], but also a distinctly liminal entity – neither part of the family, nor completely external to it, placed halfway between the domestic inside and the world outside. To a discerning reader, these signs of stature would immediately indicate the place Watson's household occupied in the middle class hierarchy of domesticity, creating, at the same time, a denominational distinction and a familiar referent. By the same token, St. Clair's life could easily be placed on a slightly more elevated plane, certainly when viewed in terms of affluence and an adherence to à la mode bourgeois domestic arrangements. When leaving his comfortable sitting room for the opium den, Watson drives away in a rented hansom cab, whereas St. Clair's out-of-town residence comes complete with stables and a stable boy – 'an insistent marker of social rank.'[99] Indeed, the placement of St. Clair's house, The Cedars, near Lee in Kent, a seven-mile drive away from London, seems to confirm Eric Hobsbawm's assertion that the new ideal of bourgeois living was one based on seclusion and privacy epitomised by a 'suburbanized country house.'[100] The enumeration of these indicators is important here, for it allows us to, firstly, establish a relationship between various characters in the story based upon what could be termed 'domestic phrenology', providing a useful tool for both theorising and analysing the formation of identities in the story; and, secondly, by demonstrating how deceptive the story is in its portrayal of social control – any comfort the reader might derive from a feeling of familiarity is quickly twisted into one of uncertainty and instability. If Watson and St. Clair seem to be separated by almost indexical gradations in middle

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[98] John Tosh, op.cit., p.19
[99] Ibid., p.24
[100] Eric J. Hobsbawm, *The Age of Empire, 1875-1914* (London: Weidenfield and Nicolson, 1987), p.166

class-ness, what they have in common, however, is a decisive movement away from the domestic and its associated pleasures and comforts, and into the more mysterious and threatening body of the city. 'I had left my armchair and cheery sitting-room behind me', Watson intones, 'and was speeding eastwards in a hansom on a strange errand.'[101] What is of import here is the juxtaposition between, on the one hand, private family life forcibly associated with stillness (armchair, sitting-room) and the more public, if not strictly speaking professional, engagement linked to movement (speeding, hansom). This emphasis on the relationship between sitting still and being in motion is, to use a Holmesian metaphor, like a scarlet thread running through the skein of the story, the detangling of which, I want to argue, is absolutely crucial in any reading concerned with the issues of identity, corporeality and labour.[102] Indeed, it could be posited that, under the guise of corrective didacticism, serving to 'interpolate its readers into conformity with the hegemony of white, male, middle-class values in Western capitalist-industrial societies'[103], what the story in fact deals with are various incarnations of *movement*, producing an infinitely more nuanced and heterogeneous scenario. Arguably, the aforementioned reference to De Quincey indicates that 'The Man with the Twisted Lip' is concerned with circulation of identities, and Isa's easy passage from the genteel, upper class student to the unmanly, ruined opium addict sets the scene for a number of character 'transformations', most immediately that of his wife, who changes from a mysterious and gothically

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[101] Arthur Conan Doyle, 'The Man with the Twisted Lip', op.cit., p.162
[102] 'There's the scarlet thread of murder running through the colourless skein of life', Arthur Conan Doyle, *A Study in Scarlet* (London and New York: Street and Smith, 1895), p.54
[103] Charles J. Rzepka, *Detective Fiction* (Cambridge and Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2005), p.21

melodramatic stranger in a black veil to a well-known friend in need. In a similar fashion, Watson – in his movement between the home and the opium den and despite initial misgivings – is able almost instantaneously to slip into, first, the role of a detective and later an adventurous companion and leave the garb of domesticated paterfamilias behind.

Watson's foray into the East – both literal and metaphorical – and his entry into the opium den are described in a language which immediately conjures up images of darkness, danger, threat and otherness:

> Upper Swandam Lane is a vile alley lurking behind the high wharves which line the north side of the river to the east of London Bridge. Between a slop-shop and a gin-shop, approached by a steep flight of steps leading down to a black gap like the mouth of a cave, I found the den of which I was in search. Ordering my cab to wait, I passed down the steps, worn hollow in the centre by the ceaseless tread of drunken feet; and by the light of a flickering oil-lamp above the door I found the latch and made my way into a long, low room, thick and heavy with the brown opium smoke, and terraced with wooden berths, like the forecastle of an emigrant ship.[104]

Here, we are transported back to the Whitechapel of Jerrold and Doré, a mysterious and foreign land of dark, hazy interiors; whilst the den's geographical and spatial location seems to mirror Greenwood's 'Tiger Bay' descriptions, both in its placement near drinking establishments and the profusion of its clientele. The overt comparison with a ship, the den's placement near the docks and wharves, as well as its name, *Bar of Gold*, all draw attention to the immoral and 'unclean' ways of money-making associated with the opium trade of the empire. Formulated in the best Dickensian fashion, Watson's depiction of the den's interior could be taken straight from the pamphlets of the anti-opium campaign:

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[104] Arthur Conan Doyle, 'The Man with the Twisted Lip', op.cit., pp.162-163

> Through the gloom one could dimly catch a glimpse of bodies lying in strange, fantastic poses, bowed shoulders, bent knees, heads thrown back, and chins pointing upwards, with here and there a dark, lack-lustre eye turned upon the newcomer. Out of the black shadows there glimmered little red circles of light [...] as the burning poison waxed or waned in the bowls of the metal pipes. The most lay silent, but some muttered to themselves, and others talked together in a strange, low, monotonous voice [...].[105]

The portrayal of the den as a place of vice and corruption is strengthened by Holmes' assertion that it is 'the vilest murder-trap on the whole river side […] We would be rich men if we had a thousand pounds for every poor devil who has been done to death in that den', linking once again, albeit in a rather curious twist, opium, crime and lucre.[106] As was the case with previously discussed literature opposing the opium trade, here the emphasis is on lack of movement, unproductivity and bodily degeneration. The figures of the opium smokers, in an image which brings to mind Charcot's hysteria studies, appear as a grotesque admixture of half-dismembered body parts, seemingly suspended in-between life and death, dream and reality, in an ever transformative state of flux. Conan Doyle's use of the opium den as a place where multiple identities could be assumed allows for certain literalisation and play upon the very idea of transformation – Whitney enters the "Bar of Gold" a respectable gentleman and emerges 'pale, haggard and unkempt'[107], whereas St. Clair, in a reflected duplication, changes from a 'squalid beggar' into 'a well-dressed man about town.'[108] The den is also a place where Watson trades his 'cheery sitting-room' for a 'singular adventure' with Holmes who, of course, is only able to enter and leave this disreputable

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[105] Ibid., p.163
[106] Ibid., p.168
[107] Ibid., p.163
[108] Ibid., p.192

establishment in the garb of an opium addict. The only (male) protagonist who seems in any way able to function outside of the incessant movement between the various 'selves' is, fittingly enough, the proprietor of the "Bar of Gold", whose identity is wedded to his profession to such an extent that he remains nameless throughout the story, being referred to only as a pleasingly anagrammatic 'rascally lascar' or a 'sallow Malay attendant.'[109] The opium den, thus, serves as a liminal, threshold place – a switching point where stable identity can be transformed, circulated and exchanged – this incessant movement helped by the use of disguise. The story's protagonist, Neville St. Clair, whose disappearance Holmes is investigating, is a well-to-do gentleman who – it transpires – earns his money by pretending to be a beggar named Hugh Boone – the eponymous Man with the Twisted Lip. St. Clair uses the "Bar of Gold" to camouflage his appearance with the help of the den's proprietor, transforming, in a quasi-Jeckyllian fashion, from a refined looking gentleman into a hideous wretch. This necessary use of disguise in St. Clair's chosen 'profession' is mirrored by Holmes' masquerade:

> [H]e sat now as absorbed as ever, very thin, very wrinkled, bent with age, an opium pipe dangling down from between his knees, as though it had dropped in sheer lassitude from his fingers. I took two steps forward and looked back. It took all my self-control to prevent me from breaking out into a cry of astonishment. He had turned his back so that none could see him but I. His form had filled out, his wrinkles were gone, the dull eyes had regained their fire, and there, sitting by the fire and grinning at my surprise, was none other than Sherlock Holmes.[110]

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[109] Ibid., pp.167, 164
[110] Ibid., pp.164-165

For Holmes, it seems, disguise is not so much a professional necessity as an inherent skill, a metaphor for his entire vocation. Although his livelihood is to some extent dependent on skilful dissemination there is no 'work' involved in the movement between the various selves, all it takes is an act of will, a change of position. Throughout the canon, Holmes' ability to alter his appearance transcends class – he impersonates a groom (SCAN), an aged book seller (EMPT) and a sailor (SIGN), gender – when he turns into an old woman (MAZA), and nationality – becoming an Italian priest (FINA) or an American of Irish descent (LAST). Whereas for St. Clair it is necessary to use clothing and make-up to affect his transformation, Holmes' use of subterfuge is not merely external but embodied, in a profoundly personal sense –James Eli Adams terms it 'deep subjectivity' – for it symbolises a phantasy of unalienated labour, a profession that cannot be washed off.[111] This relationship of identity and occupation is one of the dominant tropes of the story, playing upon Victorian anxieties about non-productive bodies, 'clean' money and 'proper' labour. Based upon the popular science of physiognomy, it was customarily acknowledged that profession could manifest in corporeal signs and a skilled observer could read and decipher the traces work left on the body. Indeed, it is one of Holmes' most often paraphrased and repeated dogmas that 'by a man's finger-nails, by his coat-sleeve, by his boots, by his trouser-knees, by the callosities of his forefinger and thumb, by his expression, by his shirt-cuffs – by each of those things a man's calling is plainly revealed.'[112] Thus, the visible signs of labour serve to anchor one's identity, providing an easy reference point for ascertaining where in the social

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[111] James Eli Adams, *Dandies and Desert Saints: Styles of Victorian Masculinity* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1995), p.152
[112] Arthur Conan Doyle, *A Study in Scarlet*, op.cit., p.24

hierarchy each body should be located. In the words of Rosemary Jann, the uncanny ability to decipher the corporeal makes Holmes, 'the reader of all social codes, appear to be subject to none.'[113] She persuasively argues that by following a rigid typology of bodily signs the stories reveal 'Doyle's ideological investments', working to obscure 'the unequal subordination to social control.'[114] Put simply, under the guise of scientific objectivity, the Holmesian method obliquely privileges the upper classes, whose bodies are not marked by labour, and whose identities thus come to be defined not by what they *do* but rather by what they *are*. While I do not intend to question the overall validity of such an analysis – it certainly stems from a widely accepted postulation that the late Victorian period characterised the lower classes as more embodied, in every sense, than their more refined counterparts – I feel that to simply view 'The Man with the Twisted Lip' as a vehicle for the advancement of bourgeois doxa is to succumb too easily to the language of the established *Weltanschauung*. The corporeal play of signification in TWIS is contingent upon a multitude of relational inter-dependencies and a reading which traces the many-stranded lineage of identities in the story certainly problematises the easy equation of detective fiction with the ideology of the *status quo*.

St. Clair's over-elaborate disguise – his 'shock of orange hair, a pale face disfigured by a horrible scar [...] a bulldog chin'[115] – is necessary not only to clearly mark him out as a beggar but also, and perhaps more importantly, to provide a visible identity at the opposite end of the spectrum from his 'proper',

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[113] Rosemary Jann, 'Sherlock Holmes Codes the Social Body', *ELH*, vol.57, issue 3 (Autumn 1990), p.702
[114] Ibid., p.687
[115] Arthur Conan Doyle, 'The Man With the Twisted Lip', op.cit., p.174

middle-class self – inherently lacking any distinguishing characteristics, corporeal or otherwise. Whereas Hugh Boone can be neatly compartmentalised and catalogued, St. Clair's 'real' life certainly confounds any attempts at defining identity in relation to labour. Although appearing to have 'plenty of money' and living 'in good style', St. Clair has, in fact, 'no occupation' – thus to confirm his identity as a gentleman of good character requires recourse to *external* factors – his *habits* and his *finances*:

> [Neville St. Clair] had no occupation, but was interested in several companies and went into the town as a rule in the morning, returning by the 5:14 from Cannon Street every night. Mr St. Clair is now thirty-seven years of age, is a man of temperate habits, a good husband, a very affectionate father, and a man who is popular with all who know him. I may add that his whole debts at the present moment, as far as we have been able to ascertain amount to 88 pounds 10s., while he has 220 pounds standing to his credit in the Capital and Counties Bank.[116]

In stark contrast to the habitués of the opium den, whose habit marks them as passive and unproductive, St. Clair's daily routine of travel between the country home and the city allows him to claim affiliation with the respectable (middle)-class of professionals. Despite the fact that nobody seems to know what it is precisely that St. Clair is doing, the very fact that he at least appears to be 'doing something' allows him to continue leading his double life for several years: 'As I grew richer I grew more ambitious, took a house in the country, and eventually married, without anyone having a suspicion as to my real occupation. My dear wife knew that I had business in the City. She little knew what.'[117] Despite this conflation of activity and decency, for the Victorian readership of *The Strand* the figure of – to use Audrey Jaffe's apt

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[116] Ibid., p.170
[117] Ibid., p.191

term – *the man who does something in the City*, was an epitome of the era's

anxieties surrounding the issue of labour and productivity in the newly

emergent capitalist market economy.[118] The city financier, 'with interest in

several companies', personified identity detached from means of production,

with capital and money, as Elaine Scarry argues, as surrogates for embodied

corporeality.[119] It is not surprising therefore that the police searching the "Bar

of Gold" for St. Clair's body find in its place only the grotesquely physical

Boone, whose visible presence serves to remind us with renewed vigour that

the body of a capitalist exists as 'an attribute of nonparticipation.'[120]. The next

day, however, St. Clair's coat is discovered by the police, washed up ashore,

'every pocket stuffed with pennies and half-pennies.'[121] Here, the substitution

is literalised – St. Clair's body enters the scene replaced by, and in the guise

of, capital – but there is also a figurative dimension to this exchange. The

cast away garment, heavy with the ill-gotten spoils, surfaces at the Thames

wharf where the trade from the empire, including opium, also entered the

British Isles; bringing together, in a seemingly effortless yet profound gesture,

all the various strands of the story under scrutiny here. Further, if we return to

the question of domesticity, the room in the den where St. Clair effects his

transformation into Boone seems to exemplify a domestic interior which

stands in direct opposition to the middle-class apartment. Benjamin

elaborates:

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[118] Audrey Jaffe, 'Detecting the Beggar: Arthur Conan Doyle, Henry Mayhew and "The Man with the Twisted Lip"' in *Sherlock Holmes: The Major Stories with Contemporary Critical Essays*, ed. by John A. Hodgson (Boston: Bedford Books of St. Martin's Press, 1994), p.405
[119] Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), p.261
[120] Ibid., p.265
[121] Arthur Conan Doyle, 'The Man With the Twisted Lip', op.cit., p.176

> Ever since the time of Louis Philippe, the bourgeois has shown a tendency to compensate for the absence of any trace of private life in the big city. He tries to do this within the four walls of his apartment. It is as if he had made it a point of honour not to allow the traces of his everyday objects and accessories to get lost. Indefatigably, he takes the impression of a host of objects; for his slippers and his watches, his blankets and his umbrellas, he devises coverlets and cases. He has a marked preference for velour and plush, which preserve the imprint of all contact. In the style characteristic of the Second Empire, the apartment becomes a sort of cockpit. The traces of its inhabitant are molded into the interior. Here is the origin of the detective story, which inquires into these traces and follows these tracks.[122]

All the signs of what Benjamin astutely terms 'bourgeois pandemonium' are absent here – the flat is 'plainly furnished', with wooden floor and a table as the only indicators of comfort, there are no objects on which the traces of *habit*ation could imprint themselves and, consequently, nothing to detect.[123] But if the room is devoid of any distinguishing characteristics, the body of Boone, 'a crippled wretch of hideous aspect', compensates for this lack by a dazzling display of corporeality – both in its immediate visibility and the traces it leaves in the otherwise barren room, whereby the windowsill and the floor of the flat are marked with drops of blood.[124] Benjamin's pronouncement as to the nature of a bourgeois room – 'for all the coziness it radiates, the strongest impression you receive may well be, "You've got no business here"' – in the den becomes, to use the term once again, twisted.[125] The particular use of the phrase 'business' in a description pertaining to a distinctly familial setting is noteworthy here, for it signifies, however obliquely, a discrepancy between the two terms – a discrepancy which in the Victorian period came to

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[122] Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, op.cit., p.20
[123] Walter Benjamin, *One-Way Street and Other Writings*, trans. by Edmund Jephcott and Kingsley Shorter (London: NLB, 1979), p.49
[124] Arthur Conan Doyle, 'The Man with the Twisted Lip', op.cit., pp.172, 173
[125] Walter Benjamin, 'Experience and Poverty', trans. by Rodney Livingstone et al, in *Selected Writings*, vol.2 (Cambridge, MA and London: Belknap Press, 1999), p.734

be perceived as an irrevocable aspect of both modern urbanity and capitalist economy. As Tosh explains:

> [A]s work became detached from home, so its association with a heartless commercial ethic became closer. […] The world of business was seen as necessary, but morally contaminating. […] Home provided the refuge from work in all its negativity. […] Domesticity was a characteristically Victorian response to the damage which entrepreneurial capitalism had wrought on the fabric of human relations. […] The city might be the place where money was made and the world went round, but for many its menacing social problems outweighed its cultural advantages. […] The place of home in the bourgeois culture could be summed up by the proposition that *only at home could a man be truly and authentically himself*.[126]

The opium den, serving as a place of both labour and domestic life for Boone and the Lascar proprietor, throws into sharp relief the supposed division of home and work, private and public, interior and exterior. In its Möbius strip-like topography, it could be likened to Benjamin's arcade, 'a contradictory and ambiguous space that allows an interpenetration – not only of spaces, but of ways of inhabiting and using space.'[127] Parenthetically, if we return here to the social commentary on opium, it becomes easier to comprehend the insistent, almost obsessive, delineation of domestic arrangements in the opium dens – to the Victorian mind, the perceived image of the dens as places of work and earnings could not easily be reconciled with that of domestic life. The opium den in TWIS is a space through which an unlikely association of St. Clair/Boone and the Lascar takes place, linking the two characters in a double bind of identity realised through an admixture of work and home. This is precisely where the importance of the den – as an image, symbol or metaphor – lies: like the arcade, as Gunning argues, it

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[126] John Tosh, op.cit., pp.30, 31, 32, 33, emphasis added
[127] Tom Gunning, op.cit., p.106

simultaneously expresses 'both aspects of this apparent contradiction.'[128] To use Bakhtinian vocabulary, the den is *dialogic*, that is to say, embodying and articulating irresolvable tension that continues to refract the supposed binary terms, without giving salience to either. Put still more simply, the dualism of home/work or inside/outside cannot be upheld, for there always already exists a multiple slippage of meaning – like Boone's body, the words 'bleed' into one another, leaving traces even in the most barren of habitats. Or, to reference De Quincey once again, language, in its infinite capacity to move beyond authorial intention, will inevitably disrupt any attempts at fixing meaning. In TWIS, this dictum seems to apply equally to place and character identities, in a polyphonic weave of relations that is as multi-stranded as it is complex. Describing how St. Clair's wife stumbled upon his supposed murder, Holmes gives account of her arrival in London to 'pick up a small parcel of considerable value' from a shipping company located near the den. Walking back to the train station she subsequently found herself in Upper Swandam Lane – an entirely fictitious address, the identity of which 'commentators have been unable to agree on'[129] – where a rather remarkable scene ensued, worth citing at some length:

> Mrs. St. Clair walked slowly, glancing about in the hope of seeing a cab, as she did not like the neighbourhood in which she found herself. While she was walking in this way down Swandam Lane, she suddenly heard an ejaculation or cry, and was struck cold to see her husband looking down at her and, as it seemed to her, beckoning to her from a second-floor window. The window was open, and she distinctly saw his face, which she describes as being terribly agitated. He waved his hands frantically to her, and then vanished from the window so suddenly that it seemed to her that he had been plucked back by some irresistible force from behind. […] Convinced that something was amiss with him, she

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[128] Ibid., p.110
[129] Arthur Conan Doyle, 'The Man with the Twisted Lip', op.cit., p.162, annotation 9

rushed down the steps […] and running through the front room she attempted to ascend the stairs which led to the first floor. At the foot of the stairs, however, she met this Lascar scoundrel of whom I have spoken, who thrust her back and, aided by a Dane, who acts as assistant there, pushed her out into the street. [130]

The somewhat disproportionate reaction of St. Clair is certainly instructive, for it seems already to posit him, in the hysterical 'unmanliness' of the scene, at a remove from the fully controllable bourgeois identity and closer to Isa and the opium smokers. But the above passage also instigates an important configuration of interior/exterior that merits further scrutiny. What is of immediate interest, is the almost painterly symmetry of the tableau vivant depicted in the scene: the wife on the street outside, the husband inside the den, both out of place and certainly where the other does not expect them to be. The open window of the den in which St. Clair appears – and through which, incidentally, the police suspect Boone of pushing his dead body – serves here as a spatial hyphen between the exterior and interior, at the same time part of the building and the street. As Anne McClintock observes, bourgeois preoccupation with maintaining strictly defined boundaries led to a fetishisation of threshold objects, such as windowsills, which, through ritualistic maintenance, gained 'exhibition value as class markers'.[131] What is remarkable here is the apparent lack of distinction between the inside and outside spaces – if the street was vile and abhorrent then the den, as a liminal place with fluctuating identity, a workroom and a home, certainly could not offer any of the plush safeguards of the bourgeois apartment. If Mrs. St Clair was a body out of place on her spontaneous errand in the disreputable

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[130] Ibid., p.170
[131] Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (New York and London: Routledge, 1995), p.170

neighbourhood of East London, it was even more true of the den which could only serve as a place of *habit*ation to those whose lives were marked, precisely, by *habit*. This is perhaps why, when trying to enter the den, she immediately finds herself 'pushed into the street' by the Lascar who, true to his name (from Hindi *lashkari,* 'soldier'), defends the entrance. This is the threshold magic of which Benjamin speaks – the violence of the outside world intruding on the interior must be appeased by 'fallen household deities' and the Lascar, the outcast of the Empire cast in the part of an intermediating butler, inadvertently performs the same role as the Lares and Penates of a bourgeois dwelling: 'chairs beside an entrance, photographs flanking a doorway'.[132] Just like the nameless servant who opens the door to Kate Whitney and whose presence we can only divine from the clues left in the text, the Lascar seems to exist in a 'twilight zone' of the story, in between public and private, colonial and local. It is perhaps aptly ironic that as the proprietor of the "Bar of Gold" he is also a paradigm of capitalist professionalism, a man who just like St. Clair, 'does something in the city' and whose identity, linguistically at least, is not unified or stable, for he is referred to as either 'a Lascar' or 'a Malay'. (We are reminded here of De Quincey's opium-taking Malay, his, as Marsha Bryant terms it, 'confessional other'.)[133] The figure of the Lascar, although just like Isa Whitney seemingly marginal to the development of the narrative, is thus implicated in the problematic of identity formation in a way which helps to articulate the complex relationship of imperial policy, trade, labour and domesticity.

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[132] Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, op.cit., p.214 (I1a, 4)
[133] Marsha Bryant, 'The Confessional Other: Identity, Form and Origins in Confessional Poetry', in *Identity and Form in Contemporary Literature*, ed. by Ana María Sánchez-Arce (New York and London: Routledge, 2013), p.179

It is important to note that despite her affirmation that 'there is so keen a sympathy between us', Mrs St Clair is not able to recognise her husband in Boone – 'even a wife's eyes could not pierce so complete a disguise'.[134] Instead, she is assured of his presence in the opium den by signs which are, once again, wholly external – a box of bricks he undertook to buy for his son: 'she sprang at a small deal box which lay upon the table, and tore the lid from it. Out there fell a cascade of children's bricks. It was the toy which he had promised to bring home.'[135] Even if St. Clair's body leaves no visible traces, in a manner in which Boone's does, what betrays him is not the imprint of labour but, paradoxically, domesticity, for the only marks of St. Clair's presence in the den are those associated with the familial – his clothing and the wooden blocks. The implications of this familiality, however, symbolically extend beyond the confines of the domestic, providing a link with the national and the commercial – opium was commonly transported shaped into bricks and it certainly provided, financially at least, the 'building blocks' of the imperial project. Although the fact that the residue should not be corporeal but rather external certainly seems to bear out Jann's assertion discussed previously, it also, arguably, serves to put under scrutiny the easy assumption of cohesive and heterogeneous identity. If in the opium den Mrs St. Clair is not able to recognise her husband, in a 'proper' domestic environment – St. Clair's home – she can positively confirm that a letter purporting to come from her husband has indeed been written by 'one of his hands [...] It is very unlike his usual writing, and yet I know it well.'[136] Writing, although detached from the body of St. Clair, is here an immediate sign of

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[134] Arthur Conan Doyle, 'The Man with the Twisted Lip', op.cit., pp.183, 192
[135] Ibid., p.172
[136] Ibid., p.182

familiarity, a marker of identity that can, quite literally, be read. Yet the very fact that St. Clair has several 'hands' (a suitably corporeal metaphor) seems to hint not only at a possibility of a co-existence of a whole host of identities but also an opportunity for dissimulation, writing in a different hand that cannot serve as a marker of identity precisely because it is not familiar, it has not been formed by habit. Paradoxically, although at a first glance Boone is the antithesis of St. Clair, in certain respects they are more complementary than contradictory, for both exemplify an identity that exists only insofar as it is perpetually enacted. St. Clair's artifice lies not only in the creation of Boone – what could be termed 'external' masquerade – but in the easy reliance on familial habit in substantiating his identity as a gentleman. 'The interior forces the inhabitant to adopt the greatest possible number of habits – habits that do more justice to the interior he is living in than to himself'[137], Benjamin writes, adding that the defining characteristic of late nineteenth century domestic interior was that its space 'disguised itself', acting as a 'stimulus to intoxication and dream.'[138] The bourgeois home and the opium den are thus both presented as spaces built on passivity and diffusion of identity – the home as a place of distinct separation from the workplace, the den as a place of 'unseemly' money-making. The only way St. Clair can maintain the fiction of his double identity is by creating yet another practice that will put a degree of separation between his 'proper' self and his alter-ego Boone and which will serve as a social guarantee of the propriety of his endeavours – that of the habitual movement between his home in Kent and the City. Put simply, St. Clair's professed occupation as a financial worker goes unchallenged

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[137] Walter Benjamin, 'Experience and Poverty', op.cit., p.734
[138] Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, op.cit., p.216 (I2,6)

because in stark contrast to the beggar he impersonates, he doesn't sit still. The City worker's identity, therefore, is never to be found simply in one place, but – paradoxically – it can become fixed only by maintaining a constant state of flux. St. Clair seems to simultaneously reconcile and dismantle the opposition between work and home life – the fiction of his 'true' self serving to emphasise the fact that no place can function as a locus of stable identity. As a country gentleman, St. Clair appears to be well off, and the provenance of his fortune is never questioned – the money he earns remains 'clean' as long as the person earning it can be recognised as St. Clair – however duplicitous this identity happens to be. By contrast, Hugh Boone's earnings are dependent precisely on his adherence to a fixed corporeal image – his body *is* his work, for, as Holmes remarks, 'his appearance is so remarkable that no one can pass him by without observing him. [...] A shock of orange hair, a pale face disfigured by a horrible scar [...] all mark him out from amid the common crowd of mendicants.'[139] Although Boone could also be described as a 'man who does something in the City', he serves as the antithesis of an anonymous finance capitalist not only because of his putative corporeal visibility but also, perhaps more importantly, because he earns his money by sitting still. Whereas St. Clair's circadian routine is ostensibly one of incessant movement between home and city, between domestic and public sphere, Boone remains anchored to one place – a 'small angle in the wall', where, in yet another rendition of a 'habit', he 'takes his daily seat.'[140] Although Holmes calls him a 'professional beggar', begging cannot be viewed as a profession precisely because it does not involve any *visible* labour – by

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[139] Arthur Conan Doyle, 'The Man with the Twisted Lip', op.cit., pp.174-175
[140] Ibid., p.174

sitting still Boone is in fact trading his identity as narrative, providing 'piteous spectacle' in exchange for charity.[141] Interestingly, for St. Clair, there is no labour involved in creating Boone – on the contrary, he seems to take pleasure in playing the role and, to utilise the 'twisted strand' metaphor once again, views begging as *money for old rope* – but finds his former occupation as an investigative journalist to be 'arduous work.'[142] The easy effacement of labour from the activity of begging points towards the problematic of productivity and monetary gain – complicated further by the fact that Boone pretends to have an 'honest trade' by selling matches. Incidentally, the matches Boone feigns to sell are specifically referred to as 'vestas', the name derived from Roman mythology, where Vesta was the goddess of the domestic hearth. (It is perhaps not coincidental that the story takes place in June, the month of the Vestalia). Symbolically, therefore, what Boone is trading in – or pretending to trade – is his domesticity, the middle-class private life in exchange for public exposure, which paradoxically also means erasure, for it is realised only as a constant masquerade. 'His appearance is so remarkable, that no one can pass him without observing him', Holmes states, but it is precisely because of the habitual visibility of Boone that his assumed identity is never questioned and can be perpetuated.[143] As Jaffe argues, what is of real import here is not the supposed truth or falsity of the beggar's identity, but rather the reassurance a charity-giver can receive from being able to tell the difference between them.[144] Begging, thus, implicates the donor in a system of exchange based not only on circulation of money –

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[141] Ibid.
[142] Ibid., p.191
[143] Ibid., p.174
[144] Audrey Jaffe, op.cit., p.411

the trading of compassion for coin – but also, more importantly, circulation of identities – the belief in the truth of the readable image authenticated through projection. Put still more simply, the charity giver is implicated in an exchange with the beggar that relies, at least in part, on difficult reciprocity – on the part of the one who gives aid, it is based on a susceptibility to, and possibility of, identification; on the part of the mendicant, it lies in the ability to provoke sympathy. This is precisely why, as Jaffe explains, the figure of the 'false' beggar was, and perhaps remains, the focus of profound anxiety:

> [H]is confrontation with the potential charity giver presents an exemplary moment of theatricality in social life: a moment at which, in Marshall's words, individuals "face each other as actors and spectators". And that confrontation involves an exchange not only of money but also of identity – identity already implicated in a system of representation and exchange. [...] The "false beggar" endangers the charity giver's identity by manipulating his sympathy, encouraging him to identify with a mere representation. The fiction of "true beggar" is consolatory, therefore, in its construction of a figure who not only will not, but cannot, project – who is a vessel, pure and simple, for the charity giver's projection.[145]

Boone, therefore, certainly appears to be a 'false' beggar – a creation emanating not from necessity but certain need for work that would be less arduous. But, interestingly, it is not a term that is ever utilised in the story; on the contrary, Boone is instead referred to as a somewhat enigmatic 'professional' beggar. The expression seems almost oxymoronic – the effacement of labour from the activity of begging, its adversative relation to work – after all, it was supposed that one turned to mendicancy because of an inability to gain employment – stand in direct opposition to the image of a dedicated professional worker. According to Reiter, the text explains Boone's

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[145] Ibid., pp.411, 412

'professionalism' by equating it with 'knowing how to work around police regulations, having a regular spot, and successfully manipulating the beggar trade – creating sympathy by appearing pathetically shocking or grabbing attention with witty repartee', and she highlights the 'inconspicuous production' of begging – nothing to 'make, do or sell' – as a reason why it does not appear laborious enough.[146] But begging, just like profession, is also an inherently *public* affair, a declaration which, in the case of Boone, comes to be expressed corporeally. What the beggar trades in, therefore, is identity as image, directed towards and realised through a body which then comes to be aligned with productivity itself. The 'professional' beggar is thus, at least partially, synonymous with 'false' beggar – both expose identity as a masquerade, a spectacle of consumption, and both endanger the desire to 'locate the truth of identity in the body.'[147] The fear this closeness of mendicancy and mendacity engenders is evident in the attempts to separate the 'true' and 'false' beggars, the 'deserving' and 'undeserving' poor – a project which, according to Gareth Stedman-Jones, was at the forefront of shaping social policy in the late Victorian period.[148] Volume 4 of Henry Mayhew's *London Labour and the London Poor* is particularly instructive here, for it deals with those that *will not work*, namely prostitutes, thieves, swindlers and beggars, with an extensive part on mendicants written by Andrew Halliday, obsessively enumerating the minutiae of different begging types, including 'Decayed Gentlemen', 'Frozen-Out Gardeners' and evocative 'Lucifer Droppers.' The introduction to the chapter, referencing historical and

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[146] Paula J. Reiter, op.cit., p.76
[147] Audrey Jaffe, op.cit., p.410
[148] Gareth Stedman-Jones, *Outcast London: A Study in the Relationship Between Classes in Victorian Society* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1971), p.327

religious sources, draws a sharp distinction between legitimate and fraudulent beggars:

> It will be found that imposture in beggary has invariably been the offspring of a high state of civilization, and has generally had its origin in large towns. When mendicancy assumes this form it becomes a public nuisance, and imperatively calls for prohibitive laws. The beggar whose poverty is not real, but assumed, is no longer a beggar in the true sense of the word, but a cheat and an impostor, and as such he is naturally regarded, not as an object for compassion, but as an enemy to the state. In all times, however, the real beggar – the poor wretch who has no means of gaining a livelihood by his labour, the afflicted outcast, the aged, the forsaken, and the weak – has invariably commanded the respect and excited the compassion of his more fortunate fellow-men.[149]

In Halliday's account, pretending to be a beggar involves a kind of acting – assuming the appearance, mannerisms and traits of the type chosen to impersonate – it is never simply a pretence based on inability to work but also one extending to encompass the use of another profession. In the part on 'disaster beggars', for example, Halliday wryly observes that 'after a serious coal-mine accident "blown-up miners" swarm in such numbers all over the town that one might suppose the whole of the coal-hands of the north had been blown south by one explosion.'[150] Not surprisingly, this group comprises mostly of impostors, some of whom are easily detected, for when questioned about the particulars of their work 'they become insolent and move away from you', whereas others are 'more artful':

> [Their] tales are borne out by every external appearance, and also by a complete knowledge of the place whence they pretend to have come. [...] They can converse about mining operations, they describe minutely the incidents of the accident by which they suffered, and they have the names of coal owners and gangsmen ever ready on their tongues. In

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[149] Henry Mayhew, *London Labour and the London Poor: Cyclopaedia of the Conditions and Earnings of Those That Will Work, Those That Cannot Work, and Those That Will Not Work*, vol.4 (London: Griffin, Bohn and Company, 1862), p.393
[150] Ibid., p.429

addition to this they bare some part of their bodies – the leg or the arm – and show you what looks like a huge scald or burn.[151]

To be able to see through such a complete disguise one requires, as Jaffe aptly puts it, 'Holmesian powers of detection' – the capacity to read and successfully interpret the signs that distinguish the 'true' and 'false' versions of the type under impersonation.[152] What *London Labour and the London Poor* and similar publications provide, therefore, is a typology of social and physical codes, a codex of urban physiognomy that would allow its readers to distinguish between real and assumed identities. 'The original social content of the detective story was the obliteration of the individual's traces in the big-city crowd', Benjamin writes, and in the figure of the 'false' beggar this obliteration paradoxically seems to find its fullest realisation, for it is a body that is readable only insofar as it refers to a preordained set of characteristics, none of which are its own.[153] Boone's instant visibility is thus a mere pretence of individuality, a masquerade which allows him to avoid detection and which will also eventually lead to his unmasking. This, as Jann contends, is a treatment typical of Doyle's oeuvre, one which permits Holmes to enforce, under the guise of scientific objectivity, 'the fixity and naturalness of the social ordering.'[154] 'The Man with the Twisted Lip', however, places the beggar and the professional so close together that any unambiguous distinction between them becomes blurred, generating an anxiety of unproductivity and improper earnings, augmented by the fact that Boone's

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[151] Ibid.
[152] Audrey Jaffe, op.cit., p.407
[153] Walter Benjamin, *Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism*, trans. by Harry Zohn (London: Verso, 1987), p.43
[154] Rosemary Jann, 'Sherlock Holmes Codes the Social Body', op.cit., p.686

place of work is in Threadneedle Street, a southern boundary of The Bank of England in the heart of the City. But profession, let us not forget, is also a euphemism for prostitution, and the story certainly provides a number of links between the figure of a beggar, a city worker and a prostitute, not least because, as Reiter briefly remarks, in sacrificing his finer nature to the demands of crude economic necessity St. Clair is 'portrayed as having prostituted himself.'[155] All three figures exemplify uneasiness about money-making and illegitimate exchange and all of them 'made plain what was normally imagined', that is to say, the deep-seated ambiguity of productive labour.[156] In the same way in which women who were prostitutes by night often turned into respectable workers by day, St. Clair could alternate between his life as a financier and a beggar, throwing into sharp relief the precarious nature of social typology. It was also a stark reminder that visibility could not serve as a guarantee of knowledge – the painted woman and the tainted man both used masquerade as a means to subvert the system which would codify them according to a preordained set of inherent characteristics, for their work resided in subterfuge, in a possibility of playing a part which could give them 'means of subsistence without labour.'[157] Prostitutes also, just like beggars, engendered suspicion because their 'occupation' involved taking the domestic habits into the public sphere, 'sitting still' where movement was called for:

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[155] Paula J. Reiter, op.cit., p.78
[156] Françoise Barret-Ducrocq, *Love in the Time of Victoria: Sexuality, Class and Gender in Nineteenth-Century London*, trans. by John Howe (London and New York: Verso, 1991), p.35
[157] Henry Mayhew, op.cit., p.35

> So long as she was in a hurry, obviously busy, the woman of the people was playing her proper role; her brisk passage through the streets was the gauge of her honesty. Loitering in the street, on the other hand, hanging about for too long or without an obvious errand, was seen as unnatural, since female activity was firmly centred on the world of interior, indoors. So any wandering about which could not be explained by shopping or some other necessary activity came to be perceived as a factor or sign of doubtful morality.[158]

Movement, therefore, serves as an assurance of propriety, which is why, as previously argued, St. Clair's circadian routine of travel between the suburb and the City can signify, and indeed comes to be read, as a reassuring marker of his social status, an equivalent of productivity, which the beggar and the prostitute in their assumed stillness seem to lack. It is interesting to note that a way to deal with mendicancy and courtesanship was to criminalise them in the 1824 Vagrancy Act, which decreed that a suitable punishment for these offences, centred as they were on lack of productive effort, was to commit them 'to the House of Correction, there to be kept to Hard Labour for any Time not exceeding Three Calendar Months.'[159]

What the story forcibly makes clear, therefore, is the fact that St. Clair's identity is as much a product of a convention, an assumed role, as that of Boone – the masquerade does not end with the removal of the beggar's garb. Although the final resolution initially seems to substantiate the claim that the story simply follows an established pattern whereby 'Holmes plays his usual role of preserving middle-class prerogatives by concealing gentlemen's secrets'[160], the narrative in fact reveals an inherent fluidity and interchangeability of identities that cannot be contained. The story

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[158] Françoise Barret-Ducrocq, op.cit., p.10
[159] Vagrancy Act 1824, c.83, 5 Geo 4, p.700
[160] Rosemary Jann, *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes: Detecting Social Order* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1995), p.93

persistently correlates St. Clair with other characters in the tale – with Holmes

through use of disguise and professionalism, with Watson through social

standing and domesticity, with Isa through 'unmanly' behaviour and habit

and, lastly, with the Lascar through 'dirty' money-making – and these multi-

stranded associations subtly but unremittingly point to the fact that St. Clair's

identity is never entirely his own, that to do away with Boone does not

reinstate the status quo; on the contrary, it throws into even sharper relief the

impossibility of fully preserving the fiction of an authentic self. To put it

differently still, the charge of the story's undivided complicity with the

bourgeois doxa rests on the assumption not only that St. Clair and Boone's

identities are entirely separate but also that the latter is simply an inferior and

fraudulent variant of the former, an aberration of an autonomous, 'true' self.

If one reads the story carefully, however, it quickly becomes apparent that the

polyphonic play of identities, their intrinsic multiplicity, is repeatedly woven

through the narrative like a refrain and relates not only to the titular

protagonist but all other characters – or even, as was the case with the opium

den, places – of the tale. This polarity is perhaps most evident when applied

to Isa, in the apparent ease of movement between the gentleman and the

opium addict, but is also referenced in the scene of Holmes' transformation in

the opium den, the Lascar's struggle with Mrs. St. Clair or, perhaps most

interestingly, if somewhat opaquely, in the opening scene in Watson's home

which certainly warrants closer scrutiny. If Holmes and St. Clair's mobility

could act as a source of anxiety for the Victorian readership of *The Strand*, at

the other side of the spectrum Watson's unchanging nature seems to be

penned to provide easy comfort, enforcing the ideal of the self-contained,

fully regulated identity, positively immovable in its middle-class stability. 'It took all my self-control to prevent me from breaking out into a cry of astonishment', he states on encountering Holmes in the opium lair, but it is self-control he is nonetheless able to exercise, even in a situation where he is, irrefutably, 'a body out of place.'[161] Such a reading, however, is put into question by a seemingly trivial linguistic oversight. When Kate Whitney arrives at Watson's house to seek help his wife, Mary, invites her to 'sit here comfortably and tell us all about it. Or should you rather that I sent *James* off to bed?'[162] Watson's first name is, of course, John and this inexplicable change has troubled students of the Sherlockian canon for many years, with the proffered solutions ranging from the commonplace (a typing mistake) to the outlandish (James was John's twin brother who usurped his place).[163] This transformation, I want to argue, hints at a certain unpredictability inherently written into the text – as was the case with De Quincey's Opium Eater, here at the very level of language there is a possibility that things are not what they appear to be, that identity can never be fixed. The name James/John becomes an empty signifier without anchorage, setting the scene for the relentless unfolding and dismantling of identities in the story. Far from being a provider of comfort therefore, the figure of Watson thus becomes perhaps the most unsettling character of the tale, for his name always remains 'improper'; it simultaneously substantiates and disavows his identity while hinting, ever so ingeniously, that familiarity cannot serve as a guarantor of stability. In this, it evokes the Freudian notion of the uncanny,

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[161] Arthur Conan Doyle, 'The Man with the Twisted Lip', op.cit., p.164
[162] Ibid., p.161
[163] The explanations have been collated by Leslie S. Klinger in '"A Rose By Any Other Name"' in *The New Annotated Sherlock Holmes, vol.1*, op.cit., pp.194-196

where '*heimlich* becomes increasingly ambivalent, until it finally merges with its antonym *unheimlich*. The uncanny is in some way a species of the familiar.'[164] But if Watson's forename functions as a dispersive misnomer, the opposite seems true of St. Clair's last name, for it comes to signify, quite literally, the very process of establishing his 'true' self. The surname is derived from the Latin *clarus* or French *clair*, its meaning translated as 'clear', 'pure', 'clean' and this etymology becomes crucial when we study the scene of St. Clair's 'unmasking', worth quoting here at considerable length:

> The prisoner lay with his face towards us, in a very deep sleep, breathing slowly and heavily. He was a middle-sized man, coarsely clad as became his calling, with a coloured shirt protruding through the rent in his tattered coat. He was, as the inspector had said, extremely dirty, but the grime which covered his face could not conceal its repulsive ugliness. A broad wheal from an old scar ran right across it from eye to chin, and by its contraction had turned up one side of the upper lip, so that three teeth were exposed in a perpetual snarl. A shock of very bright red hair grew low over his eyes and forehead. [...] "He certainly needs a wash," remarked Holmes. [...] Holmes stooped to the water jug, moistened his sponge, and then rubbed it twice vigorously across and down the prisoner's face. [...] Never in my life have I seen such a sight. The man's face peeled off under the sponge like the bark from a tree. Gone was the coarse brown tint! Gone, too, was the horrid scar which had seamed it across, and the twisted lip which had given the repulsive sneer to the face! A twitch brought away the tangled red hair, and there, sitting up in his bed, was a pale, sad-faced, refined-looking man, black-haired and smooth-skinned, rubbing his eyes and staring about him with sleepy bewilderment. Then suddenly realizing the exposure, he broke into a scream and threw himself down with his face to the pillow.[165]

When St. Clair transforms into Hugh Boone, therefore, the change of identity seems to happen at the level of language as well as at the level of the body – he becomes 'unclean' physically and metaphorically, not *clair* and not

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[164] Sigmund Freud, *The Uncanny* [1919], trans. by David McLintock (London: Penguin, 2003), p.134
[165] *Arthur Conan Doyle, 'The Man with the Twisted Lip', op.cit., pp.187-189

St. Clair. In order for his 'true' identity to emerge it is necessary for him to 'come clean', that is to say, have his face washed by Holmes in an almost ritual cleansing and also, crucially, confess the nature of his transgressions to the great detective and thus reclaim his 'proper' name. 'I am sure, Mr Holmes, that we are very much indebted to you for having cleared the matter up'[166], says inspector Bradstreet, but this 'clearing up' seems only to confuse and intertwine even further various meanings *clair* acquires throughout the story – a proper name, physical cleanliness, uncontaminated domesticity, suitable occupation, legally acquired money. If metaphorically St. Clair comes to be associated with all these connotations this association can nonetheless never be understood as anything other than an idealised projection, for it is repeatedly called into question both naratively and linguistically. Although St. Clair is certainly introduced as a paragon of Victorian virtue – through reference to his seemingly blameless state of finances and domestic affairs – as the story unfolds the layers of propriety become gradually stripped, until we arrive at the emasculated figure in the prison cell, not only disconnected from but actively antithetical to the initial quasi-apotheosised version. Even if it is possible to argue, as Reiter does, that Holmes' promise not to reveal St. Clair's secret acts to ensure that the latter can at least try to 'achieve this personal and professional idea of wholeness and freedom from the economic laws of supply and demand'[167], this imaginary completeness is persistently compromised by the very name to which St. Clair is forced to pay allegiance. Philologically, the uncanny doppelganger Boone always haunts the figure of St. Clair, for if we remove

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[166] Ibid., p.193
[167] Paula J. Reiter, op.cit., p.79

(clean away) the initial 'C' we are left with the habitat of the beggar – the unclean (opium) 'lair' which, as a literal and etymological place of lying down, works to stop the City worker's continual movement in its tracks. The double, or perhaps duplicitous, nature of St. Clair's identity is also hinted at 'in literation', for, anagrammatically, he is exposed as a *liar*. In consequence, the police's insistence that 'there must be no more of Hugh Boone' and St. Clair's subsequent solemn abjuration do not bring cathartic closure or 'the final restoration of class boundaries'[168] – on the contrary, by exposing the ever present slippage of meaning at work they serve only to emphasise the incessant circulation of identities.

Even if the borders of class cannot be said to be firmly reinstated the story nonetheless displays a thematic preoccupation with the issue of social mobility which merits further scrutiny. Taking a leaf out of Jaffe's book, who, by making use of Mayhew's *London Labour and the London Poor* is able to demonstrate how the imagined proximity of the figures of a gentleman and a beggar was a generative source of anxiety, I want to look at Charles Booth's seminal study *Labour and Life of the People*. The magnum opus, running to seventeen volumes in its third edition under a revised title *Life and Labour of the People of London*, is particularly relevant to read alongside 'The Man with the Twisted Lip' for a number of salient reasons, not least because, I want to argue, the figure of Boone seems to be modelled closely on Booth himself, both narratively and nominally. The work, based on a series of papers given to the Royal Statistical Society, appeared in print in 1889, only two years before the publication of TWIS – the socio-cultural milieu of both was

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[168] Rosemary Jann, *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes: Detecting Social Order,* op.cit., p.95

therefore intimately linked and it is not implausible to suppose that Conan

Doyle, a staunch crusader for social reform, was familiar with Booth's survey.

The uneasy ambivalence the study displays, particularly in relation to the

questions of domesticity and employment, seems especially germane in

helping us to read the conflictual nature of St. Clair/Boone's character, as

well as illuminating the geographical and spatial treatment of the metropolis

and the relationship of public and private life. Although *Life and Labour*

seems to have received less public acclaim – and, curiously, less academic

attention – than *London Labour and the London Poor*, it was an

immeasurably significant work which came to set 'the parameters for

knowledge of the late-Victorian metropolis for the past one hundred years.'[169]

What distinguishes Booth's study from its eminent precursor is primarily the

insistence on a move away from a more anecdotal or journalistic style – a

taxonomy founded on personal observation – towards a sociological

methodology based on numerical and statistical data. Although Booth

borrows freely from Mayhew's classificatory hierarchy, dividing the 900 000

inhabitants of East London into eight groups, the imaginative and emotive

language is replaced by a more objective categorisation – a grouping based

solely on frequency of earnings, with a notable exception of group G and H,

referred to only as 'Lower middle class' and 'Upper middle class' respectively,

whereas group A merges 'occasional labourers' together with 'loafers and

semi-criminals'.[170] The information gathered came from many different

sources: in addition to interviews, house visits and School Board statistics

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[169] Judith R. Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight: Narratives of Sexual Danger in Late-Victorian London* (London: Virago Press, 1992), p.30

[170] Charles Booth, *Life and Labour of the People, vol.1: East London* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1889), p.33

Booth 'received much valuable assistance from relieving officers, rent collectors, officers of the Charity Organisation Society, and others.'[171] The vast amounts of data thus collected were to be used principally to highlight the areas of London in the greatest need of ameliorative measures, and not, as Booth was at pains to point out, to attribute causes of poverty to a particular set of behaviours: 'the very poor live in a state of chronic want. It might be their own fault that this is so; that is another question; my first business is simply with the numbers who, from whatever cause, so live under conditions of poverty and destitution.'[172] As the study encompassed the entirety of the capital, Booth's findings challenged the ubiquitous notion of the unbreachable divide between the East and West of London, demonstrating that their composition was much more heterogeneous and that large areas of poverty could be found even in the most affluent districts. The newly emerged social geography of London was represented as a series of 'Poverty Maps' (Fig.1.4.) which allowed, at a glance, the identification of social gradations which were infinitely 'more subtle than the dichotomous juxtaposition'[173] featured in previous accounts concerned with mapping out poverty and which prompted Booth to claim that 'the hordes of barbarians of whom we have heard, who, issuing from their slums, will one day overwhelm modern civilization, do not exist.'[174]

Booth tried to cultivate a persona of a fully rational, empirical observer who, by relying on quantifiable data, was able to resist the temptation to romanticise his object of study:

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[171] Ibid., p.37
[172] Ibid., p.33
[173] Judith R. Walkowitz, op.cit., p.32
[174] Charles Booth, *Labour and Life of the People*, op.cit., p.39

No one can go, as I have done, over the description of the inhabitants of street after street in this huge district, taken house by house and family by family – full as it is of picturesque details noted down from the lips of the visitor to whose mind they have been recalled by the open pages of his own schedules – and doubt the genuine character of the information and its truth. Of the wealth of my material I have no doubt, and if I fail in drawing the picture I desire to draw, the fault is mine. I am indeed embarrassed by the mass of my material, and by my determination to make use of no fact to which I cannot give a quantitative value. The materials for sensational stories lie plentifully in every book of our notes; but even if I had the skill to use my material in this way – that gift of the imagination which is called "realistic" – I should not wish to use it here.[175]

Fig.1.4. 'Map Shewing [sic] Degrees of Poverty in London' (1889-1890), Charles Booth, *Labour and Life of the People*

Yet, despite constant, almost compulsive, highlighting of the scientific, detached and objective nature of his project, Booth's writing displays a strong affinity with the genre of social investigation reliant on 'moralized impressions

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[175] Charles Booth, 'Condition and Occupations of the People of East London and Hackney, 1887', *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society*, vol.51, no.2 (1888), pp.277-278

of social customs and conditions that reproduced familiar tropes of

degeneration, contagion, and gender disorder, in order to mark off the

dangerous from the respectable working class.'[176] After providing some

statistics on the number and geographical distribution of group A – the

occasional labourers, loafer and semi-criminals – Booth's account quickly

loses its air of pragmatic indifference:

> Their life is the life of savages, with vicissitudes of extreme hardship and occasional excess. [...] From these come the battered figures who slouch through the streets and *play the beggar* or the bully, or help to foul the record of the unemployed; these are the worst class of corner men who hang round the doors of public houses [...]. They render no useful service, they create no wealth; more often they destroy it. They degrade whatever they touch, and as individuals are perhaps incapable of improvement [...]. It is much to be desired and hoped that this class may become less hereditary in its character. There appears to be no doubt that it is now hereditary to a very considerable extent.[177]

What is of particular interest in Booth's study, as Walkowitz remarks, is the

insistent recourse to the codes of bourgeois domestic propriety in codifying

respectable and rough neighbourhoods. This urban phrenology relied on

established visual semiotics that associated 'children playing in the streets,

women gossiping at the door, open doors, broken windows [...] presence of

prostitutes and thieves' with disreputable streets, while 'flower pots, closed

doors, lace curtains, scrubbed doorsteps, hanging birdcages, almost empty

streets' were guarantees of respectability.[178] Similarly, in Benjamin Seebohm

Rowntree's study of the patters of poverty in York, greatly influenced by

Booth's work, the additional 'remarks' from the pages of investigators'

notebooks show obsessive concern with the cleanliness of the household

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[176] Judith R. Walkowitz, op.cit., p.33
[177] Charles Booth, *Labour and Life of the People*, op.cit., p.38, emphasis added
[178] Judith R. Walkowitz, op.cit., pp.34-35

and involve almost exclusively the perceived tidiness or disorder of the domestic realm.[179] What we are presented with here is a familiar equation of privacy, cleanliness and order with moral superiority, so ingeniously portrayed in TWIS. The outward signs of middle-class respectability – actualised through domestic arrangements – served to ensure that St. Clair would not be accused of 'playing the beggar', revealing that perception of class affinity signified its veracity. Put simply, while a convincing enactment of prescribed typology helped to successfully decode one's social standing, it also irrevocably linked identity with masquerade, a continual game of shifting representations. In this respect, Booth and St. Clair/Boone display striking similarities, so much so that it would not be implausible to presume that the titular protagonist of TWIS was at least partially based on Booth's own experiences. Following in the footsteps of investigative journalists such as James Greenwood and social reformers like Octavia Hill, Booth devised a novel way of studying the conditions in which the poor lived – by affecting disguise and masquerade he was able to lodge anonymously with the working classes of East End, using his experiences to advance the scientific mission of *Labour and Life of the People*. His project is noteworthy for a way in which it departs from the earlier sensationalised accounts of 'darkest England' and, above all, the lack of personal influence on the lives of the observed – Booth's purpose, as Deborah Nord points out, was to further reform 'without having any direct, personal impact on the individual poor.'[180] What is of particular import in Booth's rather scant accounts of his

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[179] Benjamin Seebohm Rowntree, *Poverty: A Study of Town Life* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1901), pp.16-25
[180] Deborah Epstein Nord, *The Apprenticeship of Beatrice Webb* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1985), pp.153-154

experiences as a lodger is a feeling of admiration and easy intimacy with his objects of study as well as persistent unease with the realities of middle-class life. Starting from a position of a detached and objective observer, Booth posits that it is not easy to 'gain a sufficient insight into the lives of these people. The descriptions of them in the books we read are for the most part as unlike the truth as are descriptions of aristocratic life in the books they read.'[181] Although for a statistical study 'three families are not many', he nonetheless found that

> The people with whom I lived became, and are still, my friends. [...] I have found: wholesome, pleasant family life, very simple food, very regular habits, healthy bodies and healthy minds, affectionate relations of husbands and wives, mothers and sons, of elders with children [...] I saw little to mar a very agreeable picture [...]. The children [...] have when young less chance of surviving than those of the rich, but I certainly think their lives are happier, free from the paraphernalia of servants, nurses and governesses, always provided they have decent parents.[182]

It is perhaps all too easy to dismiss Booth's findings as belonging to the genre of 'romanticised poverty' writings, viewed, essentially, through a filter of bourgeois domestic propriety; however, the distinct absence of, both, moral condemnation and expressions of inherent difference grounded in biology or heredity, mark it as a certain ideological deviation from the earlier studies of poverty. Thus, describing his landlady's brother-in-law, a painter out of work who is often found in public houses, Booth astutely observes that 'he perhaps drinks because he has nothing to do rather than has nothing to do because

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[181] Charles Booth, *Labour and Life of the People*, op.cit., p.157
[182] Ibid., pp.157, 158, 160

he drinks.'[183] Even more remarkable feature of Booth's sojourn among the East-Enders was, however, his growing realisation that this was a life he preferred – so much so, that he elected to live in East End tenements for the duration of the investigations into the lives of its inhabitants, leaving his wife and children in the newly acquired manor house. Marry Booth's confession to her cousin is particularly telling here:

> I think it rests him more in some ways than even Gracedieu's quiet and beauty. At any rate it is plainly a second string to one's bow, looked on as a holiday relaxation – as one would not have expected beforehand. He likes the life and the people and the evening roaming – and the food! which he says agrees with him in kind and time of taking better than that of our class.[184]

As Nord points out, the passage suggests that Booth considered 'East End working-class life a relief – culinary or otherwise – from his life with [his wife] and their children[185] , in the same way in which St. Clair regarded his life as Boone a respite from the arduous journalistic work but also, importantly, a secret of which his wife knew nothing. St. Clair's suburban domesticity is thus revealed not as a place where 'his deepest needs were met' and where he could be 'truly and authentically himself' but rather a more disquieting part of an ambiguous network of interchangeable spaces – a peripheral, not central, entity in the nexus of identity formation.[186] Just as Booth's masquerade allowed him to 'explore multiple self-identities and to question his class/gender position'[187], leading to dissatisfaction with the demands and conventions of middle-class life, so does St. Clair's enactment of Boone put

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[183] Marry Macaulay Booth, *Charles Booth: A Memoir* (London: Macmillan, 1918), p.107
[184] Deborah Epstein Nord, op.cit., p.157
[185] Ibid.
[186] John Tosh, op.cit., pp.1, 33
[187] Judith R. Walkowitz, op.cit., p.37

into question the assumed separateness of home and work, the gentleman and the beggar. Both positions reveal a degree of pleasure to be had not only in deception and impersonation but also in a possibility of even temporary escape from the confines of strictly regulated existence of bourgeois decorum. From such a vantage point, the markers of St. Clair's social status – his domestic habits and finances – appear not as unmistakably aspirational or comforting but rather as unsettling signs of identity that, far from being natural or inevitable, is instead revealed to be *hard work*. This positioning of identity as labour returns us to the dichotomy of movement and stillness discussed earlier, which weaves a web of similarities and discrepancies between all the characters of the story. As previously argued, the beggar's habit of sitting still disqualifies his efforts as labour, precisely because it does not involve immediately recognisable productivity; whereas the City worker's routine comes to signify the visibility of work, or rather a fiction of visibility, articulated in movement. The image of unproductive immobility is evoked early on in the narrative, through the figure of Isa and, concomitantly, the figures of the opium smokers, which come to stand, in direct opposition to both Holmes and St. Clair, as symbols of fixed identity. This fixedness does not imply, as it has come to signify at the scene of St. Clair's exposing, an adherence to a 'true' self but rather, as Jaffe argues, a loss of identity, an impossibility of movement.[188] The opium den thus functions as a place of exchange only for those who, paradoxically, are able to turn habit into productivity. Reiter argues that in stark contrast to the other characters in the story the great detective's professionalism marks him as a figure of

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[188] Audrey Jaffe, op.cit., p.424

wholeness – his vocation comes to seamlessly blend with his identity to the point where they become undistinguishable – he is an embodiment of integrity and completeness that St. Clair lacks.[189] But such a reading cannot account for the unresolvable tension between visible and imperceptible, or 'professional', labour which the story so forcibly expresses. Holmes, just like St. Clair, Boon and the Lascar, appears to be yet another version of a man who does something in the city, who 'professes rather than produces'[190] and the fact that Watson first encounters Holmes in an opium den is telling, for it immediately links the art of detection with certain inertness and lack of easily quantifiable labour. Indeed, in an image which evokes both the opium smoker and the beggar, Holmes solves the case by sitting still:

> He took off his coat and waistcoat, put on a large blue dressing-gown, and then wandered about the room collecting pillows from his bed and cushions from the sofa and armchairs. With these he constructed a sort of Eastern divan, upon which he perched himself cross-legged, with an ounce of shag tobacco and a box of matches laid out in front of him. In the dim light of the lamp I saw him sitting there, an old briar pipe between his lips, his eyes fixed vacantly upon the corner of the ceiling, the blue smoke curling up from him, silent, motionless, with the light shining upon his strong-set aquiline features.[191]

In answer to inspector Bradstreet's questions as to how the solution of the case was reached, Holmes replies that he solved it 'by sitting upon five pillows and consuming an ounce of shag.'[192] Here, work appears to be nothing more than a habit, a spectacle of excessive consumption which neatly links this final passage with the opening paragraphs concerning Isa

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[189] Paula J. Reiter, op.cit., p.79
[190] Ibid., p.422
[191] Arthur Conan Doyle, 'The Man with the Twisted Lip', op.cit., p.184
[192] Ibid., p.193

Whitney's addiction. But if the productivity of detection becomes implicated in the supposed idleness of the opium smoker or the beggar – idleness, let us stress, understood as both morally and economically threatening – is it not also possible to reverse this connotation and posit that Holmes' professional ethic can have a bearing on how the bodies of those 'out of work' are interpreted? In a different turn of phrase, to acknowledge the conflictual ambiguity of Holmes' status as an expert and an amateur, one who is able to generate value even in a state of outward unproductivity, and extend this tension to encompass other characters of the story, could perhaps allow us to depart from a monologic model of reading in which a gentleman and a beggar are always mutually exclusive. To cite Benjamin, 'according to the rules of the detective novel, bourgeois legality and crime are two opposites. [...] Sometimes one slides easily into the other.'[193] One such ambiguity the story presents, and which I believe productive to examine in more detail, is the topos of confession with which, so to speak, the story is bookended – starting with De Quincey's *Confessions of an English Opium Eater* and concluding with what, for reasons of symmetry, could be termed St. Clair's "Confessions of an English Gentleman Beggar", to which I will now turn.

In *The History of Sexuality* Foucault singles out confession 'as one of the main rituals we rely on for the production of truth', adding that 'Western man has become a confessing animal.'[194] It is interesting to note, therefore, that in his brief discussion of the developments in crime fiction he claims that 'from

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[193] Walter Benjamin, *Understanding Brecht*, trans. by Anna Bostock (London: Verso,1983), p.83

[194] Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, op.cit., pp.58, 59. For a reading which challenges this assumption, arguing that the Victorian era in fact expresses a profound discomfort with overt self-expression, placing value on 'negated feeling', see John Kucich, *Repression in Victorian Fiction*.

Gaboriau onwards' the focus of the narrative shifted to 'the struggle between two pure minds – the murderer and the detective', where

> We are far removed indeed from those accounts of the life and misdeeds of the criminal in which he admitted his crimes, and which recounted in detail the tortures of his execution: we have moved from the exposition of the facts or the confession to the slow process of discovery; from the execution to the investigation; from the physical confrontation to the intellectual struggle between criminal and investigator.[195]

Here, Foucault posits confession as antithetical to investigation, placing it on the side of the physical rather than cerebral, in a somewhat sweeping gesture that locates the emergence of Victorian detective fiction in a rejection of the corporeal. This almost simultaneous elevation and denigration of confession within the same historical milieu – the claim that it was ubiquitously applied in every sphere of cultural, social and institutional production *apart* from crime literature – reinforces its ambiguous status as a vehicle for the construction and discovery of truth. In short, as the previously highlighted critique of De Quincey brought into view, to think about confession is 'to enter into profound uncertainty.'[196] Foucault's claim seems to be challenged not only etymologically – detection, after all, just like confession, signifies exposure – but also, as Christopher Pittard argues, because it ignores 'detective fiction's fascination with the (bodily) material, and especially the dirty – traces, marks, clues.'[197] In 'The Man with the

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[195] Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. by Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1975), p.69
[196] Jo Gill, op.cit., p.1
[197] Christopher Pittard, *Purity and Contamination in Late Victorian Detective Fiction* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), p.19

Twisted Lip', confession, physicality and dirt are brought together in the final

scene of St. Clair's unmasking:

> Holmes stooped to the water jug, moistened his sponge, and then
> rubbed it twice vigorously across and down the prisoner's face. [...]
> Never in my life have I seen such a sight. The man's face peeled off
> under the sponge like the bark from a tree. Gone was the coarse brown
> tint! Gone, too, was the horrid scar which had seamed it across, and the
> twisted lip which had given the repulsive sneer to the face! A twitch
> brought away the tangled red hair, and there, sitting up in his bed, was a
> pale, sad-faced, refined-looking man, black-haired and smooth-skinned,
> rubbing his eyes and staring about him with sleepy bewilderment. Then
> suddenly realizing the exposure, he broke into a scream and threw
> himself down with his face to the pillow.[198]

The term 'unmasking' is perhaps somewhat incongruous here, for it seems

to be St. Clair/Boon's very face which peels off under the sponge, in an

image which, as Pittard remarks, is suggestive of medieval torture scenes.[199]

The removal of dirt – the literal and symbolic cleansing (*Clair-ing*) – serves as

a gateway to confession, presented here, paradoxically, as both a necessity

and a salvation:

> "My God! What an exposure! What can I do?" [...] "If you leave it to a
> court of law to clear the matter up," said he [Holmes], "of course you can
> hardly avoid publicity. On the other hand, if you convince the police
> authorities that there is no possible case against you, I do not know that
> there is any reason that the details should find their way into the papers.
> Inspector Bradstreet would, I am sure, make notes upon anything which
> you might tell us and submit it to the proper authorities. The case would
> then never go into court at all." "God bless you!" cried the prisoner
> passionately. [...] "You are the first who have ever heard my story.[200]

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[198] Arthur Conan Doyle, 'The Man with the Twisted Lip', op.cit., p.189
[199] Christopher Pittard, op.cit., p.19
[200] Arthur Conan Doyle, 'The Man with the Twisted Lip', op.cit., pp.190-191

In Pittard's view, 'the power of the sponge here is not only to solve the mystery, but to erase the very crime itself', and he identifies this crime as 'St. Clair's false begging.'[201] But, as we saw earlier, the marginal treatment of mendicancy by both its perpetrator ('what was a fine to me?') and the police force ('if we are to hush things up') is telling, because it signals that the real interest of the story lies in the domestic and professional transgressions which put into question the nature of St. Clair's identity. This final act of cleansing and confession is often theorised as a normalising return to the fiction of true self which 'functions as a kind of reassurance' and which works to strengthen Holmes' position as a masterful enforcer of middle-class codes of propriety.[202] In such a reading, confession operates as a discourse of polarity, with clearly defined boundaries between the confessee and the listener and where the latter resides in and speaks (or listens) from a central seat of power. As Jeremy Tambling elaborates:

> The confessor's power from the centre names those who are its objects and that means, almost by definition, that no naming of the centre takes place – it is assumed to be rational, natural, normal, simply because of where it is. The history of confession is that of power at the centre inducing people at the margins to internalise what is said about them – to accept that discourse and to live it, and thereby to live their oppression.[203]

Although the very genre of detective fiction seems contingent upon the criminal's confession, what is striking about TWIS, and indeed many other stories of the canon, is that it functions merely as a confirmation, not revelation of truth. Holmes' power, therefore, seems to reside precisely in his

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[201] Christopher Pittard, op.cit., p.16

[202] Rosemary Jann, *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*, op.cit., p.93

[203] Jeremy Tambling, *Confession: Sexuality, Sin, the Subject* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1990), p.6

ability to exercise it – to hear the other speak what is already known. Indeed, this power is applied to criminals and clients alike – it is requisite of anyone wishing to consult Holmes that they 'state their case' with complete honesty, or risk dismissal in what often amounts to scenes of emotional blackmail.[204] The price to be paid is thus not economic – Holmes seldom requires payment for his services – but rather symbolic, linking the exercise of power with pleasure. This pleasure, I want to argue, is not confined to the one who listens but extends to the confessee – it is, as Foucault claims, the result of overcoming 'the obstacles and resistances [...] in order to be formulated.[205] Being forced, from the supposedly marginal position, to confess and to overcome the difficulty of confessing, marks it as 'an act of bravery, a quasi-heroic and emancipatory act, and thus pleasurable in virtue of its very claims about pain and shame.'[206] If we return to the *Confessions of an English Opium Eater*, this is precisely the struggle De Quincey articulates in the opening paragraphs – the desire for gratification and the urge for expression, 'interconnected like the two sides of a Moebius strip', and the resistance to the centripetal force of unification which would reduce the multi-stranded textual narrative to an expression of one 'true' self.[207] That is why, in TWIS, to 'do away' with Hugh Boone is to perpetuate the falsity of Neville St. Clair – the double life can remain a secret if St. Clair 'comes clean', that is, in a gesture reminiscent of Mayhew's 'street stories', if he trades his identity as narrative once again. The power Holmes holds over St. Clair is thus

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[204] See, for example, 'The Adventure of the Second Stain' or 'The Problem of Thor Bridge'
[205] Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, op.cit., p.62
[206] Chloë Taylor, *The Culture of Confession from Augustine to Foucault: A Genealogy of the 'Confessing Animal'* (New York and Oxon: Routledge, 2010), p.88
[207] Kyle Arnold, 'The Need to Express and the Compulsion to Confess: Reik's Theory of Symptom-Formation', *Psychoanalytic Psychology*, vol.23, no.4 (2006), p.740

established not in the discovery and exposure of St. Clair's 'true' identity, but rather in the very system of exchange: out of a number of possible identities – or stories – one is chosen to stand as the officially designated 'truth'. St. Clair is free to inhabit the empty category of 'St. Clair the gentleman' precisely because what really matters is the maintenance and circulation of 'proper' fiction. 'No crime, but a very grave error has been committed' states Holmes, 'You would have done better to have trusted your wife'[208]; but St. Clair's failure to disclose his multiple identities cannot cease to be maintained. 'If the police are to hush things up, there must be no more of Hugh Boone'[209], declares inspector Bradstreet, and in so doing the authorities become complicit in the very system they accuse St. Clair of perpetuating. By trading his confession for confidentiality, St. Clair is required to invent yet another 'self' for the benefit of his family, ensuring that identity will always remain in the realm of (textual) representation. But this constant proliferation of various 'selves' also ensures that identity emerges, through 'the labour of a confession' as *exertion*.[210] Holmes' solution, therefore, is finally to put both the beggar and the gentleman to work, but, ironically, it is a gesture which also implicates the detective, for he is now required to ensure that, paradoxically, 'what must be spoken must also remain secret.'[211] What this double bind perhaps reveals is not a fully hierarchical view of confession but rather, to turn to Bakhtin, an inherently dialogic nature of linguistic

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[208] Arthur Conan Doyle, 'The Man with the Twisted Lip', op.cit., p.190
[209] Ibid., p.193
[210] Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, op.cit., p.66
[211] Frances Bartkowski, 'Epistemic Drift in Foucault' in *Feminism and Foucault: Reflections on Resistance*, ed. by Irene Diamond and Lee Quinby (Boston, MA: Northeastern University Press, 1988), p.49

interaction. Writing on the nature of confession in the novel, he claims that Dostoevsky:

> depicts confession and the confessional consciousnesses of others in order to reveal their internally social structure, in order to show that they (confessions) are nothing other than an event of interaction among consciousnesses, in order to show the interdependence of consciousnesses that is revealed during confession. I cannot manage without another, I cannot become myself without another; I must find myself in another by finding another in myself (in mutual reflection and mutual acceptance). Justification cannot be self-justification, recognition cannot be self-recognition. I receive my name from others, and it exists for others (self-nomination is imposture).[212]

Such a model challenges the view of confession as essentially centralising, allowing us instead to see it as a moment in a dialogic multi-vocality that, as an element of language, can also be productive, not simply reductive, in the tensions it enacts. It also, to return to TWIS, opens a possibility to read Holmes somewhat against the grain – not only as a confessor but a confessee. Put simply, the story depends on Holmes' solution and it is precisely this solution, the chain of reasoning, which must be exposed in order for the narrative to be able to fulfil its function as detective fiction. It is not enough, therefore, for Holmes to simply solve the case – if Watson is to chronicle the narrative the detective must also confess the very method of detection – textuality is depended on disclosure. Holmes can, consequently, be termed a model professional, for detection requires, precisely, *to profess* – problematising the link between occupation and confession even further. Nevertheless, in 'The Man with the Twisted Lip' the only explanation Holmes grants is to announce that the case was solved

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[212] Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, trans. by Caryl Emerson (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), pp.287-288

through emulating the beggar (sitting still) and the opium smoker (excessive consumption). Perhaps this is so because, with St. Clair's disguise gone, the truth is now *clear* to see; or perhaps this is a desperate act of non-disclosure through which the fiction of unified and stable self could be maintained. However, by covertly acknowledging the multi-stranded lineage of characters in the story, the interaction, to use Bakhtinian vocabulary again, among their consciousnesses, 'The Man with the Twisted Lip', through its network of correlations and characterological inter-dependencies, tirelessly sustains and illuminates the heteroglot energy at work in the text.

❧ Chapter 2 ❦

Deviations of Familiarity: Corporeal Identity, Degeneration

and Writing in 'The Adventure of the Creeping Man'

Fig.2.1. Sidney Paget, Professor Presbury from 'The Adventure of the Creeping Man', illustration from *The Strand Magazine*, 1923

Story Synopsis:

Holmes and Watson are visited by Trevor Bennett, personal secretary to eminent Professor Presbury and fiancé of his daughter, Edith. Recently, the Professor became engaged to Miss Morphy, a girl several decades younger than himself, and it was around that time that the family noticed a marked change in his behaviour, moods and habits. Following a mysterious trip to Prague, letters began to arrive for the Professor, each marked with an 'X', which he forbade Bennett to handle and which he hid in a wooden box. Shortly after, the secretary, walking around the house at night, encountered the Professor crawling along the hall on his hands and feet. At this stage in Bennett's narrative Edith Presbury arrives at Baker Street in a state of great agitation, announcing that the previous night she awoke to see her father staring at her through the window of her second floor bedroom. Holmes and Watson arrange a meeting with the Professor, during which he becomes furiously angry and threatens them with violence. Later that night, the entire party, disguised in the bushes of Presbury's mansion, bears witness to his strange behaviour – the Professor runs around the garden, climbing walls and swinging from branches, until he is attacked by the family dog and rendered unconscious. On examining the contents of Presbury's wooden box, Holmes discovers that the Professor has been injecting himself with langur monkey serum obtained from a foreign doctor, in a desperate attempt to regain his youthful energy in anticipation of the wedding with Miss Morphy and that the drugs were gradually turning him into an ape. To avoid scandal, Holmes agrees to suppress the case.

It is instructive to observe that most commentaries on the 'Adventure of the Creeping Man' – a tale of an eminent university Professor whose infatuation with a young girl leads him to experiment with 'monkey serums' in a desperate search for his lost youth – seem to focus almost exclusively on the experimental-biological aspect of the narrative, claiming, as Leslie Klinger bluntly puts it – that it is 'more of a science-fiction story than a mystery.'[1] Although the tale might indeed seem like an outré and inferior variant of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* or Robert Louis Stevenson's *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, the experiments with animal tissues described in the story are not as fantastical as they might at first appear. On the contrary, the adventure seems perfectly in keeping with the social and medical interests of the era and can therefore productively be studied in relation to its engagement with the themes of rejuvenation, degeneration and contamination. While I am wary of placing too much emphasis on the issue of authorial influence, the understanding of the socio-historical milieu is nonetheless of vital importance, for it opens the narrative to a more contextual reading, one not anchored to a view that the story's interest lies *solely* in its use of 'the theme of rejuvenation'[2] or that 'it is almost pure sex'[3], highlighting instead how it deals with the multifaceted question of identity construction and representation. Although the story is generally considered rather substandard – Nicholas Meyer's literary version of Watson goes as far

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[1] Arthur Conan Doyle, 'The Adventure of the Creeping Man' in *The New Annotated Sherlock Holmes, vol.2*, ed. by Leslie S. Klinger (New York: W.W. Norton, 2005), editor's introduction, p.1636

[2] Edward J. Van Liere, 'A Critique of the Biological Plots of Sherlock Holmes' in *Beyond Baker Street: A Sherlockian Anthology*, ed. by Michael Harrison (Indianapolis and New York: The Bobbs-Merril Company, 1976), p.296

[3] O.F. Grazebrook cited in Christopher Redmond, *In Bed with Sherlock Holmes: Sexual Elements in Arthur Conan Doyle's Stories of the Great Detective* (Toronto: Simon & Pierre, 1984), p.123

as to call it forged drivel[4] – I find it hard not to agree with Jonathan Barnes'

assertion that it is in fact 'one of the richest and most singular investigations

of Holmes' long career.'[5] To do it justice, therefore, a detailed and painstaking

analysis is called upon here, taking into account not only the content of the

narrative, but also – and just as importantly – the form, the structure and

above all, despite Conan Doyle's protestations that his writing was 'at its best

but plain English', the language.[6] Such an approach – actively engaging and

cross-referencing diverse historical, cultural and literary registers – can

facilitate a more syndromatic reading which will hopefully aid our

understanding of the complex and many-sided relationship between various

discourses under scrutiny in this thesis.

Socio-Cultural History: Human/Animal

The early twentieth-century surge of interest in all matters relating to bodily

renewal and the regaining of dwindling vital energy found perhaps its fullest

articulation in, and through, the works of Eugene Steinach and Serge

Voronoff. Steinach, a biology Professor and Nobel Prize nominee, used his

extensive research into hormones and glands to re-invent a procedure which,

although medically no more than a simple vasectomy, was to 'produce more

sex hormones, which revitalised the entire organism, leading to virtual

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[4] Nicholas Meyer, *The Seven-Per-Cent Solution: Being a Reprint from the Reminiscences of John H. Watson, M.D.* (London and New York: Norton, 1993)
[5] Jonathan Barnes, 'Mediumistics', *Times Literary Supplement* (25 June 2010), p.3
[6] Arthur Conan Doyle cited in Ibid.

"rejuvenation".'[7] The first patient, a man who 'had lost weight and appetite [...], his skin was dull, his hair grey and scanty, and his muscles weak', after the operation (performed, let us add, without his knowledge or consent) 'became hale and hearty [...], carried loads up to 220 pounds with ease, [...] and looked like a youthful man at the height of his vitality.'[8] A careful staging of the spectacular effects of the procedure, both in print and, perhaps even more importantly, photographic medium (Fig.2.2.), ensured its instant popularity, attracting a number of high-profile clients, such as W.B. Yeats, who praised the operation for making him 'feel very well, full of energy and life.'[9] By the 1930s thousands of procedures had been carried out all over the world and the cult status of the operation can be attested by the fact that Steinach's name was commonly used as a verb – to undergo the rejuvenation procedure was to be 'Steinached'.[10]

A somewhat more extreme version of Steinach's research – and also, interestingly, even more popular and enduring – can be found in the experiments of Serge Voronoff, an émigré surgeon working in Paris and affiliated with the Collège de France. Not content with the effects of vasectomy as a method for regaining virility, Voronoff devised a procedure 'which involved grafting testicular tissue from chimpanzees or baboons into [the scrotum of] aging men', to supplement a failing testicular gland and thus regain the lost vital energy.[11] Although initial reaction to such a dictum was

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[7] Chandak Sengoopta, 'Medical Science, Technology and the Body' in *A Cultural History of the Human Body. Vol.5: In the Age of Empire*, ed. by Michael Sappol and Stephen P. Rice (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2010), p.107

[8] Ibid.

[9] Stephen Lock, '"O That I Were Young Again": Yeats and the Steinbach Operation', *British Medical Journal*, vol.287, no.6409 (Dec. 24 - 31, 1983), p.1966

[10] Chandak Sengoopta, 'Medical Science, Technology and the Body', op.cit., p.119

[11] Ibid., p.120

rather sceptical, Voronoff's public presentations – complete with a

rejuvenated specimen's testimony and a series of 'before' and 'after' images

– safeguarded his status as a leading expert on the grafting technique and

turned him into an international celebrity.[12]

(a) SEVENTY YEAR OLD PATIENT BEFORE THE STEINACH OPERATION
(b) TWO MONTHS AFTER THE STEINACH OPERATION
(Ufa Steinach-Film)
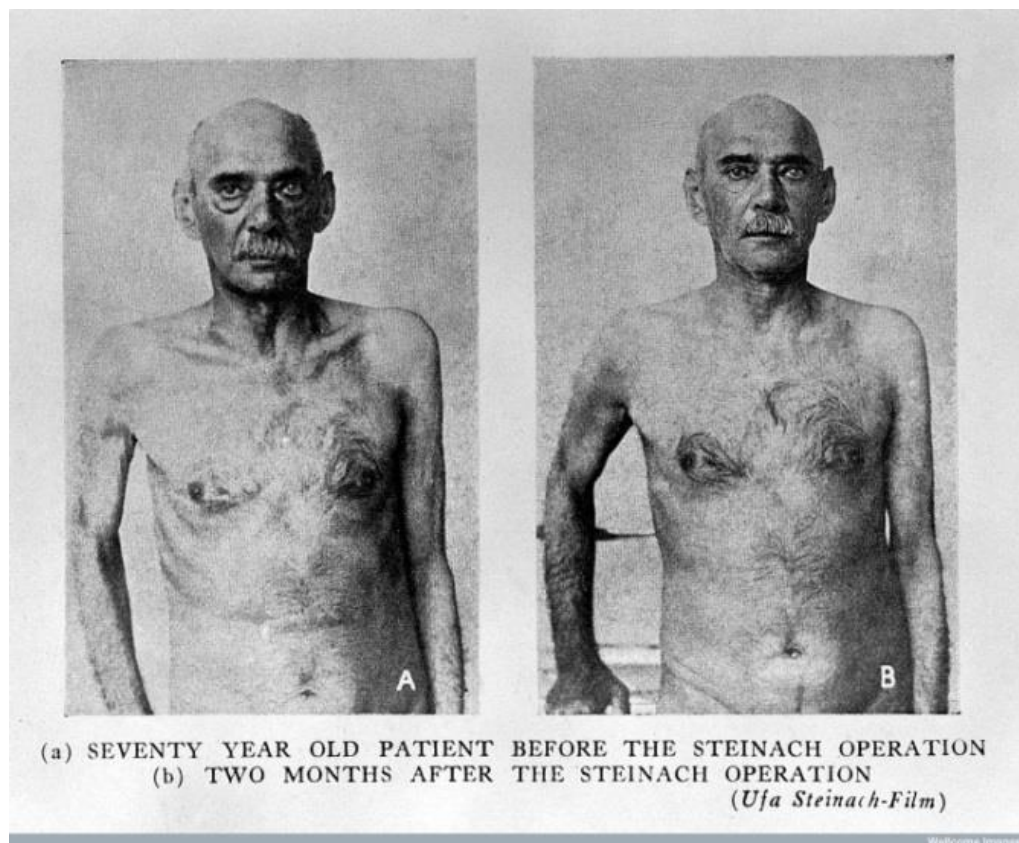
Fig.2.2. Before and after picture of a rejuvenated man. Paul Kammerer, *Rejuvenation and the Prolongation of Human Efficiency*.

Despite the fantastical nature of the surgery, inter-species implanting soon

became the most sought-after medical procedure of the 1920s – the demand

forcing Voronoff to establish a 'monkey farm' on the Italian Riviera, with a

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[12] Brett A. Berliner, 'Mephistopheles and Monkeys: Rejuvenation, Race and Sexuality in Popular Culture in Interwar France', *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, vol.13, no.3 (2004), p.311

sole purpose of harvesting simian testicular tissue. The French government also played an important role in Voronoff's success, directly supporting his experiments and going as far as to entrust the governor general of French West Africa with the task of protecting all monkeys in the colonies, ensuring their capture only for scientific purposes.[13] The impact of Voronoff's research on public life was so substantial that it had a direct influence on commercial policy-making – in 1927 *The New York Times* related a story of an insurance company refusing to pay an annuity to a man who had undergone the grafting procedure, arguing that he was now rejuvenated and so no longer could be viewed as a pensioner incapable of employment.[14] Not surprisingly, the potential commercial use of the grafting method also generated a lot of interest and the seriousness with which Voronoff's technique was treated can plainly be seen in the report published in the highly respected *British Medical Journal*, describing the application of testicular insertion to the improvement of livestock:

> Last November a delegation representing the Ministry of Agriculture, and consisting of a physiologist, a geneticist, a dietician, and a veterinary surgeon, visited Algiers, where, in company with similar delegation from other countries, Dr. Serge Voronoff demonstrated testis grafting in relation to agriculture. The delegation had three main aims: to study the technique, to examine animals subjected to this technique, and to investigate the economic results.[15]

The language used in the report is telling, for it points to both the 'proper' technical nature of the endeavour and conflation of international politics,

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[13] Ibid., p.317
[14] 'Company Refuses to Pay His Old-Age Annuity to Hungarian After Rejuvenation Operation', *The New York Times*, Editorial General News (27 February, 1927), p.7
[15] 'Voronoff's Experiments on the Improvement of Livestock', *The British Medical Journal*, vol.1, no.3507 (24 March, 1928), p.505

science and economy. Voronoff's research was clearly considered of such import that governments of several countries deemed it judicious to dispatch delegations, comprised of a number of specialists, to study his methods and subsequently publish their findings. Despite noting that 'the sheep were not confined under proper experimental conditions, nutritional factors were disregarded, and control was unsatisfactory'[16], the point that the results were somewhat disappointing was not in any way attributed to the unscientific nature of Voronoff's claims but rather to the fact that the experiments were not conducted in an environment conducive to science, such as England: 'It is suggested, however, that both claims might be tested further and more critically in this country, where conditions are more favourable to scientific control than in Algeria.'[17] Although the colonies of the empire played a crucial role in Voronoff's experiments, their part was to be confined to simple 'manufacturing' of the biological material, while the 'real' scientific work could only be conducted on the home soil. Popular culture of the 1920s was also quick to make use of Voronoff's work, with numerous literary, musical and artistic productions referencing the grafting procedure, such as Bulgakov's wonderful satire *Heart of a Dog* or Champsaur's roman à clef *Nora, la Guenon Devenue Femme* – whose suggestive mixture of fears, anxieties and enthralments surrounding the issues of race, animality and sexuality were to echo in various media for years to come (Fig.2.3.).[18]

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[16] Ibid.
[17] Ibid.
[18] For a detailed analysis of *Nora, la Guenon Devenue Femme* see Brett A. Berliner, op.cit.

Fig.2.3. Movie poster for *The Beast of Borneo*, dir. by Harry Garson (1934)

While the preoccupation with zoomorphic hybridisation, viewed against the backdrop of Steinach's and Voronoff's experiments, seems particularly vivid in the early twentieth century, it should be seen as part of a broader cultural shift around all matters corporeal, both a product and a producer of the political, socio-cultural and scientific revolutions which shaped and (re)formed the late Victorian era. The reading I propose should not be seen as an unproblematically linear progression but rather a more diffusive pattern of influence, based on the notion of a 'long nineteenth century' – which according to some critics can plausibly be extended to the 1960s and certainly encompasses 'The Adventure of the Creeping Man' published in

1923 and set twenty years earlier.[19] To put it differently, one must be careful not to succumb to easy causality, which would draw a univocal line of progression, tracing instead the heteroglot weave of voices, discourses and positions in their intertextual entanglement. Bearing in mind that the complexities of the connections between the history of human/animal relations, science and politics cannot adequately be articulated by a swift and condensed account, let us put forward a proposition that the rapid imperial expansion of the nineteenth century facilitated a discovery of new great ape and early hominid species, leading to the development of the idea of human/ape transmutation and, ultimately, paving way for Darwin's evolution theory. As Raymond Corbey argues, a shift from the earlier cosmological ontology based on divine reason to the evolutionary belief in blind contingency and environmental determinism engendered a move from hierarchies of 'simian kinship', where apes were identified as peaceful and uncorrupted, to a more menacing scenario in which 'all sorts of apish beings came to be perceived as wild and ferocious.'[20] The closing of the gap between humans and animals posed a threat to the conviction of human distinctiveness, dignity and spirituality, bringing into view the precarious nature of stable identity:

> Not only did the new sciences demolish a comfortable anthropocentrism, but they also problematised the relation between external appearances and internal reality, most notably in the case of the human body. The human being was not the distinctive creature it appeared to be on the surface: its lowly origins could be traced by the zoologist, who dissected to find internal structural similarities between human and animal bone, muscle, and tissue; by the embryologist, who

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[19] Lesley A. Hall, *Sex, Gender and Social Change in Britain Since 1880* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000), p.10
[20] Raymond Corbey, *The Metaphysics of Apes: Negotiating the Animal-Human Boundary* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p.60

posited that ontogeny recapitulated phylogeny – that the human individual passed through its whole history of species evolution during gestation; by the microbiologist, who demonstrated that like all other organisms, humans were, in their most basic components, nothing more than globs and protoplasm.[21]

This radical destabilisation sought to find refuge in the narratives of progress – 'humankind's beginnings may have been humble, but it had acquired a higher standing in the course of its "assent" towards proper humanness.'[22] Consequently, 'correct' human subjectivity was to be established on the bases of animal alterity – both in body and spirit – and the modern era's shift towards a Bakhtinian 'body without orifices' can be theorised as a part of this movement:

> The ugliness of the monkey was the opposite of classical beauty, and the latter anthropocentric and Eurocentric aesthetic standard – as a canon of disgust – was widely applied to "apish" non-European "races" and early hominids as well. The ape's body is the grotesque form […], it is the opposite of the classical statuary of the Renaissance, elevated on a pedestal and monumental. Grotesque bodies are hairy and disproportionate, have protuberant faces, bellies, buttocks and feet, visible genitals, and an open mouth. They appear in carnivalesque inversions as parodies of what is deemed proper and fair.[23]

The corporeal aspect is important here, for it came to be translated directly onto character traits, merging bodily 'bestiality' with degeneration of spirit. Thus, to put it simply, to look 'like an animal' was simultaneously to behave like one – the 'lower' races of which Corbey speaks – understood here as any group which departed from the perceived perfection of the white European upper middle classes – were frequently theorised, in a desperate effort of

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[21] Kelly Hurley, *The Gothic Body: Sexuality, Materialism, and Degeneration at the Fin de Siècle* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p.56
[22] Ibid., p.34
[23] Ibid., p.75

expulsion and projection, as 'unable to restrain themselves, as prone to violence, rape, incest, cannibalism.'[24] Translating degeneration onto the field of criminology and building upon the science of phrenology and physiognomy, experts such as Morel, Galton and Lombroso devised complex systems of classification, centred on heredity and transmission, which could be employed in identifying offenders and delinquents based on corporeal signification, providing a proof that 'evolution could in certain circumstances work in reverse, returning a complex and civilised being to the state of primitivism from which it had emerged.'[25] The theory of degeneration followed the inevitability of evolution in a movement which was both reversed and, importantly, accelerated – if the progress from animal to human was gradually unfolding 'over an unthinkable period of time', deterioration worked rapidly and abruptly.[26] Morel's seminal *Treatise on the Degeneration of the Human Species* articulated a theory of hereditary distribution that considered degeneration to be a disease with three distinct categories of symptoms: 'physical deformity, perversion of the organism and disturbance of the emotional faculties.'[27] If 'defective' parents produced offspring, a cumulatively growing spiral of decline and pathology followed:

> The first generation, infected by such modern poisons as urban pollutants and addictive stimulants, passed its infection through the "seed": to a second generation prone to epilepsy, neurasthenia, and hysteria, a third generation hovering near the brink of insanity, and a fourth and final generation doomed to congenial idiocy and sterility.[28]

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[24] Ibid., p.76

[25] Victoria Margree and Bryony Randall, 'Fin-de-Siècle Gothic' in *The Victorian Gothic: An Edinburgh Companion*, ed. by Andrew Smith and William Hughes (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), p.218

[26] Kelly Hurley, op.cit., p.66

[27] William Greenslade, *Degeneration, Culture and the Novel 1880-1940* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p.16

[28] Kelly Hurley, op.cit., p.66

Similarly, Lombroso's classification encompasses the entire body in a minutiaee of signifiers, marking the atavistic type characteristic of the 'lower races' – such as the African, Indian or Polynesian – who, through corporeal departure from the Caucasian 'normality', are posited closer to apes and at a remove from Europeans on the evolutionary scale.[29] Here, the spatial distribution of the world's population becomes affixed on a strictly temporal axis, moving from the 'savage' hominid apes to the 'civilised' pinnacle of perfection, articulated as a white European male. What is of particular interest here is the easy translation of the degeneration theory from the colonial or racial otherness onto the metropolitan life and the body of the city, now perceived as in itself 'diseased', placing the discourse of transmissible deterioration in a wider social spectrum. Although degeneration afflicted individual bodies, 'at every point the biological model of the degenerate provided ways to theorise social decay'[30] – a model, let us add, in which causes and effects became conflated into a circle of tautological attribution:

> A predisposition to vice could be either inherited or acquired during an individual's lifetime; in either case, the contamination could be passed on through either heredity or simple association, through sexual intercourse or social intercourse. Degeneration came to stand for a sort of general turpitude with which modern society was infecting itself, and against which modern society had to police itself.[31]

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[29] Ibid., p.95

[30] Stephen Arata, *Fictions of Loss in the Victorian Fin de Siècle* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p.3

[31] Kelly Hurley, op.cit., p.71

The urban poor, with their 'deformed skulls, protruding jaws, and low brain weights'[32] presented a mirror image of the colonial 'low race' savage and displayed a capacity to 'degenerate on the lines of reversion to older racial types'[33] :

> In the true bred cockney of the East End, the most degenerate cockney, we can see a return to an earlier archaic type of man. Mr. Gantlie made careful observations and measurements of several cockneys. He says of one "height five feet, three inches; his jaws are misshapen; he cannot bring his front teeth within half an inch of each other; his upper jaw is pointed; and falls within the arch of the lower." And this cockney with "undershot" jaw is a matter of my own personal observation.[34]

The degeneration theory neatly amalgamated the anxieties surrounding the issues of race, class and gender, providing an outlet for easy compartmentalisation and classification of all the elements perceived as threatening to the 'ideal' nineteenth century subject. What was at stake in these medical or scientific depictions was not so much a charitable preoccupation with the frightful living conditions of the urban slum-dwellers but rather their negative impact on the wellbeing of the entire nation:

> In late-Victorian England, the theory of urban degeneration was used to explain away the nation's economic decline after the boom of mid-century: Britain was faltering because it was forced to draw both its labour force and its recruits for the imperial army from a class of degenerates. The new "subspecies" of degenerate proletariat found in the inner city was born with a stunted and weakened physique, and thus was constitutionally incapable of hard work; and born with a stunted and

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[32] Nancy Stepan, 'Biology and Degeneration: Races and Proper Places' in *Degeneration: The Dark Side of Progress*, ed. by J.E. Chamberlin and Sander L. Gilman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), p.98

[33] John Milner Fothergill, *The Town Dweller: His Needs and His Wants* (New York: D. Appleton and Co, 1889), p.114

[34] Ibid., p.113

weakened moral character, and thus constitutionally prone to such evils as idleness, criminality, alcoholism, and political agitation.[35]

Corporal degeneration thus led directly to moral and economic degeneration, extending in an apparently unproblematic causality from individual to social bodies. Indeed, the inculpation of the 'degenerate' types for all manner of national ills was so strong that it led one commentator to declare that 'the deterioration, both physical and mental, of town bred organisms, is a matter not meant for the philanthropist, but for the social economist.'[36]

The 'proper' body of the bourgeois subject thus came to be defined in a double movement of opposing polarity: outwards – to the exotic otherness of the Empire, and inwards – to the 'savagery' of the urban poor, conflating both into a construct whose identity resided, and thus could be read, in a visibility of atavistic bodily traits associated with inherent criminality. The treatment of a body as a diagnostic toolkit is of vital importance in my reading of 'The Adventure of the Creeping Man' and will bear further scrutiny in the subsequent parts of this chapter. Here, let us once again briefly mark the apparent ease with which the various registers – those of evolution, race, class or gender – become superimposed in the discourse of criminal anthropology – a discourse which, as Alan Sekula claims, emerged with the creation of a criminal 'biotype' – a body which was 'organically distinct from the bourgeois'.[37] Cesare Lombroso's extensive study of criminal body traits is truly bewildering in its grotesquely multiplying array of animal species from

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[35] Kelly Hurley, op.cit., p.70
[36] John Milner Fothergill, op.cit., p.114
[37] Alan Sekula, 'The Body and the Archive', *October*, vol.39 (Winter 1986), p.16

which corporeal comparisons can be drawn, not least because his similes are a startling departure from the Darwinian line of descent model. Detailing with truly scientific commitment the physical anomalies of 'born criminals', he states that the forehead is 'sometimes receding, as in apes'; the ears stand out from the face 'as in the chimpanzee'; the nose resembles 'the beak of the bird of prey'; the mouth exhibits both 'lemurine' and 'canine' traits; the teeth, which are 'rarely normal', recall those of reptiles, rodents, simians and even lower vertebrates; while gynecomastia in the male and 'flabby and pendant' breast of the female criminal mark both cases with 'the appearance of an animal.'[38] In *The Criminal*, Havelock Ellis also establishes a link between the animal and the lawbreaker, stating that 'insistence on the feline aspect is very frequent among those who describe criminals' and that 'his nose is often aquiline, beaked, reminding one of a bird of prey.' He goes on to approvingly cite Lombroso's dictum that: 'born criminals have projecting ears, thick hair, a thin beard, projecting frontal eminences, enormous jaws, a square and projecting chin, large cheek-bones, and frequent gesticulation. It is, in short, a type resembling the Mongolian, or sometimes the Negroid.' Moreover, 'many men have large nipples and large well-marked areolae. This is often very remarkable.'[39] What emerges from those descriptions is a body which is 'other' in almost every respect: 'sexually indeterminate, developmentally indeterminate, even humanly indeterminate.'[40] The 'Negroid type', effeminate, zoomorphic corporeality of the criminal is thus translated, virtually verbatim, onto the body of the London slum dwellers – conceived – even in the more

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[38] Cesare Lombroso and Gina Ferrero-Lombroso, *Criminal Man According to the Classification of Cesare Lombroso* (New York and London: G.P. Putnam, 1911), pp.12-19
[39] Havelock Ellis, *The Criminal* (New York: Scribner & Welford, 1890), pp. 82, 83, 84, 89
[40] Ronald R. Thomas, 'The Fingerprint of the Foreigner: Colonizing the Criminal Body in 1890s Detective Fiction and Criminal Anthropology', *ELH*, vol. 61, no.3 (Autumn 1994), p.665

sympathetic accounts – as an undifferentiated mass of subhuman creatures, living like the 'uncleanest of brute beasts.'[41] The corporeal, moral, intellectual and political registers are here superimposed and conflated into a figure – or rather, a re-presentation of a figure – whose very existence offends all the senses: 'the meaningless swarming of unknown beings in the rooms and courtyards evoke images of the irrational and the animal kingdom, while the mephitic stenches of rubbish and unwashed bodies could only indicate obscenity.'[42] This overlaying exemplifies, as Peter Stallybrass and Allon White argue, a move from the metonymic to metaphoric language – 'the *social* articulations of depravity are constantly elided with and displaced by [...] a language in which [...] the poor *are* pigs.'[43] Here, the Lombrosian evolutionary scale comes into play once again, demarcating a boundary between the clean, civilised bourgeois subject and the filthy, degenerate slum dweller through a relative distance or proximity to animals. This taxonomy is taken further still by Frederic Engels, for whom all the 'anomalous' traits of the poor become exemplified – and metaphorically condensed – in the category of 'the Irish':

> They are uncouth, improvident, and addicted to drink. They introduce their brutal behaviour into a section of English society by no means noted for civilized habits or moral principles. [...] They are to be found everywhere. The worst accommodation is good enough for them; they take no trouble with regards to their cloths which hang in tatters; they go barefoot. [...] One may depend on upon seeing mainly Celtic faces, if

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[41] Andrew Mearns and others, 'The Bitter Cry of Outcast London: An Inquiry into the Condition of the Abject Poor' [1883] in *The Fin De Siècle: A Reader in Cultural History, c.1880-1900*, ed. by Sally Ledger and Roger Luckhurst (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p.32

[42] Françoise Barret-Ducrocq, *Love in the Time of Victoria: Sexuality, Class and Gender in Nineteenth-Century London*, trans. by John Howe (London and New York: Verso, 1991), p.8

[43] Peter Stallybrass and Allon White, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1986), p.131

ever one penetrates into a district which is particularly noted for its filth and decay.[44]

Here, the threat of contamination is emphasised not only through a seemingly natural association of Irishmen and filth, but also their pervasiveness – 'they are to be found everywhere', like vermin or insects. In a tautological circle of contagion, the innate bestial characteristics are further accentuated by close association with animals:

> The Irish have brought with them the habit of building pigsties immediately adjacent to their houses. If that is not possible, the Irishman allows the pig to share his sleeping quarters. This new, abnormal method of rearing livestock in the large towns is entirely of Irish origin. […] The Irishman eats and sleeps with his pig, the children play with the pig, ride on its back and roll about in the filth with it. Thousands of examples of this might be seen in all the big cities of England.[45]

The language used here to describe the grotesquely symbiotic relationship of the Irish people and their pigs is tinged with suggestions of sexual obscenity, at the same time referencing Morel's theory of hereditary distribution – the 'abnormal' habits of the parents can already be seen in the behaviour of the offspring. In fact the ubiquitous presence of the Irish merges with the spectacle of the children and the pigs to such an extent that it becomes impossible to determine with certainty whose bodies Engels is talking about. This depravity is easily extended from the corporeal to the domestic and social:

> The Irish are not used to furniture: a heap of straw and a few rags too tattered to wear in the daytime suffice for bedding. The Irish need only a

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[44] Frederick Engels, *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, [1845] trans. by W.O. Henderson and W.H. Chaloner (Oxford: Blackwell, 1971), pp.104, 105
[45] Ibid., p.106

bare plank, a broken chair and an old chest for a table. All that the Irishwoman needs in her kitchen are a teapot, a few saucepans and coarse dishes. The kitchen also serves as a living room and bedroom. If an Irishman is short of fuel, everything within reach is thrown on the fire – chair, door posts, skirting boards, shelves and floor boards, if they are still there.[46]

What is expressed in this depiction is essentially a disorder – a world in which matter is, to use Mary Douglas' expression, 'out of place' and where neither bodies nor things conform to 'symbolic systems of purity.'[47] Those systems, whilst explicitly concerned merely with surveying and objective description, implicitly engendered hierarchies of regulation that were now to govern and subjugate the very object they purported to study. Or, to put it differently, the literary illustrations of threatening transgressions articulated through a correlation of various bodies – that of the poor, the colonial other, the animal – and their subsequent mapping out onto the body of the city, the nation and the home, created the very taxonomies they professed to observe, in effect fashioning normatively invested representations, while maintaining the fiction of disembodied scientific observation.

Literary Influences: Gothic Fiction

Outside of the socio-medical texts the narratives of evolutionary progress and degeneration of body and spirit found perhaps their most noticeable literary articulation in the genre of gothic fiction, which in the late nineteenth century shifted its preoccupation from 'the fear of corrupted aristocracy or

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[46] Ibid.
[47] Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), p.36

clergy, represented by the haunted castle or abbey, to the fear embodied by monstrous bodies.'[48] The bodies of gothic fiction are represented in a quasi-Darwinian – or perhaps in Darwinism pushed to its logical, if extreme, conclusion – mutability and plasticity, providing a seemingly unending array of morphic arrangements which could, following a Bakhtinian terminology, easily be termed grotesque:

> Darwinism described the natural order as a disorder, within which species identity was characterised by admixture of flux rather than integrity and fixity. Similarly, the Gothic represents human bodies as between species: always already in the state of indifferentiation, or undergoing metamorphoses into a bizarre assortment of human/non-human configurations.[49]

It is precisely the somatic re-making of the human subject which, as Hurley claims, marks fin-de-siècle gothic fiction as a direct response to the anxiety generated by the scientific, biological and medical discourses of the Victorian period. While I feel it necessary here to once again point to the dangers of simple linear causality, it is nonetheless possible to establish a relation between the logic of the theories of re/degeneration and the re-orientation of focus in the late-Victorian gothic. If the bio-medical sciences of the late nineteenth century opened up a space of anxiety about the nature of human identity – at the same time working to assuage the crisis by creating models of normative subjectivity – then gothic fiction can be seen as a symbolic articulation of those fears, marking 'a particularly modern preoccupation with boundaries and their collapse.'[50] In this respect, fin-de-siècle gothic, although

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[48] Judith Halberstam, *Skin Shows: Gothic Horror and the Technology of Monsters* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1995), p.16
[49] Kelly Hurley, op.cit., p.10
[50] Judith Halberstam, op.cit., p.23

no doubt chronologically and thematically linked to earlier articulations of the genre, emerges as quite a distinct set of narrative concerns, predicated not on the familial blood purity and aristocratic legacy bur rather widening its scope to encompass national and social identity based on class, race and gender distinctions. Furthermore, as Halberstam argues, the focus on the nobility 'gave way to a middle class identified by both their relation to capital as producers and consumers and a normal sexuality that leads to reproduction.'[51] As a consequence, what distinguishes late Victorian gothic from its earlier manifestations is an obsession with excess or 'multiple modes of consumption and production, with dangerous consumptions and excessive productivity, and with economies of meanings.'[52] This is a concern which gothic shares with Victorian detective fiction, which, as Christopher Pittard argues, 'dramatises an anxiety about material contamination and impurity, including a metaphorical category of crime as dirt, and aligns detection with the act of cleaning […].'[53] This preoccupation with purity and dirt at the level of the narrative is twofold: firstly, it is articulated in the policing of transgressions, rendering matter 'out of order' to be criminal, and, secondly, in playing on the very science of detection, in which nothing is superfluous, or wasteful, 'since anything may be significant.'[54] Although it might initially seem that detective fiction, and Holmes stories in particular, with their emphasis on the rational and analytical, do not easily fit the mould of "gothic", the suspense element serves to provide a common ground between the two genres, both in structural and narrative orientation. Indeed, as Richard

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[51] Ibid., p.16
[52] Ibid., p.3
[53] Christopher Pittard, *Purity and Contamination in Late Victorian Detective Fiction* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), p.3
[54] Ibid., p.12

Alewyn argues, providing a literary genealogy of the gothic vis-à-vis the mystery story, it is possible to locate the detective novel in the heart of early romantic 'shock' narratives:

> The horror story is the abstinence neurosis of the aging Enlightenment. To a race starved by rationalism and bored with bourgeois security, it offered the forbidden fruits of mystery and of fear. If one strips away its nerve-shattering packaging – old castles in desolate mountains, around which at night the storm howls and the moon sheds an uncertain light – there remains a core similar to the simplest model of detective novel.[55]

It is interesting to briefly note here the similarities between the attitudes to gothic and detective genres displayed by their creators which position both at a remove from 'proper' literature and in the realm of the 'monstrous'. Halberstam cites Robert Louis Stevenson, who pronounced his most famous novella, *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, to be a 'gothic gnome' and 'worried that he produced a gross distortion of literature', thus blurring the distinction between the gothic subject matter and its form.[56] Similarly, detective fiction, often published in a serialised form in cheap periodicals, engendered suspicion that it was itself 'a waste product, a commodity for consumption and disposal […], to be consumed and then thrown away, without lasting value.'[57]

A useful classification of the late Victorian gothic, and one which merits further elucidation, is provided by Alexandra Warwick, who tracks a distinct spatial shift in the horror narratives of the second part of the nineteenth century, locating them either within an emphatically domestic setting or,

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[55] Richard Alewyn, 'The Origin of the Detective Novel' [1974], trans. by Glenn W. Most, in *The Poetics of Murder: Detective Fiction and Literary Theory*, ed. by Glenn W. Most and William W. Stowe (San Diego and London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1983)
[56] Judith Halberstam, op.cit.,p.12
[57] Christopher Pittard, op.cit., pp.12, 20

conversely, the urban environment.[58] The re-presentations of Victorian

metropolitan life have been extensively analysed and documented and I feel

that any attempt at a summary would be redundant here.[59] What is of

significance, however, is the fact that it is precisely the urban setting with

which the beginnings of detective fiction – certainly of the British variety – are

often aligned, providing as a stable point of origin the historical rise of the

new police force, whose function was to 'read a city which had grown far

beyond the easy knowledge of its inhabitants.'[60] For Albert Hutter, detective

fiction is thus 'essentially urban' and the detectives' primary concern is 'with

the problem of knowledge, a problem only intensified by the urban upheaval

in which they move.'[61] Providing a link between the issues of city life,

evolution/degeneration and literature Warwick elucidates:

> By the end of the century the city has become its Other, dominantly figured as labyrinth, jungle, swamp and ruin, and described as blackened, rotten, shadowed and diseased. Most importantly, perhaps, this city of dreadful night is populated by others who threaten to overrun or undermine the fabric of the imperial metropolis. These others are partly Himmelfarb's Gothic poor, evolved now in such a way that their class difference is imagined as biological and even racial difference. The criminal too is represented with a similarly increasing insistence on his/her physical difference, and seen as embodying the survival of atavistic qualities of the savage human, even of the animal.[62]

In stark contrast, the domestic gothic, exemplified by the works of the

Brontë sisters, traces

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[58] Alexandra Warwick, 'Victorian Gothic' in *The Routledge Companion to Gothic*, ed. by Catherine Spooner and Emma McEvoy (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2007), pp.30-35

[59] See, for example, Judith R. Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight* or Robert Mighall, *A Geography of Victorian Gothic Fiction*.

[60] Albert D. Hutter, 'Dreams, Transformations, and Literature: the Implications of Detective Fiction', *Victorian Studies*, vol.19, no.2 (December 1975), p.194

[61] Ibid., pp.194-195

[62] Alexandra Warwick, op.cit., pp.34-35

> [the] claustrophobic psychological dramas that represent sadomasochistic relations between men and women. In contrast to the emphatic Victorian development of the idea of home as a place of peace, safety and protection, the Brontës' domestic spaces, and the state of marriage or family life that the spaces embody, are terrifyingly ambiguous. […] The language of Gothic, of sensation, terror, shock, and its characters are translated into a bourgeois domestic arena.[63]

While the scope of what Warwick's category of the 'domestic' encompasses seems to be needlessly self-limiting – is it not possible to extend familial relations beyond those of opposite sexes? – it is nonetheless a very useful and necessary category, and one whose reach extends beyond the confines of the horror story. Although I do not in any way dispute the validity of theorising detective fiction within the milieu of Victorian urban modernity, what I want to suggest is that to make it the exclusive focus of one's reading, treating the domestic and the municipal as fully distinct binaries, is to miss an important aspect not only of a mystery story but also of the way in which the Victorian city was re-configured. Referencing Bakhtin's depiction of the carnival, Stallybrass and White argue that

> whilst the 'low' of the bourgeois body becomes unmentionable, we hear an ever increasing garrulity about the city's 'low' – the slum, the rag-picker, the prostitute, the sewer – the 'dirt' which is 'down there'. In other words, the axis of the body is transcoded through the axis of the city, and whilst the bodily low is 'forgotten', the city's low becomes a site of obsessive preoccupation, a preoccupation which is itself intimately conceptualised in terms of discourses of the body.[64]

This argument, whilst no doubt valid and persuasive, seems to rely on a reading which is overly concerned with gratifyingly symmetrical relations of meaning configured at a one-to-one ratio and, in the case of the passage

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[63] Ibid., pp.30, 31
[64] Peter Stallybrass and Allon White, op.cit., p.145

quoted above, complete with a diagram. The pattern of correspondence and signification thus created appears rigidly linear, allowing only for movement along vertical axis of 'high' and 'low'. If it is indeed true, as Stallybrass and White claim, that discourses of the body and the city became inseparably synonymous then any attempt to 'explain' one through the other cannot amount to anything other than a set of rhetorical figures or an extended metaphor. While such a composition is certainly necessary to establish hierarchical transcoding – at the same time remaining faithful to Bakhtin's analysis of the carnivalesque high and low – its binary 'fixation' does not seem adequate in analysing phenomena which, while anchored in a specific set of socio-cultural conditions, come into being through dynamic cross-referential interaction. I want to suggest that it might perhaps be more productive to widen the scope of interaction and triangulate the binary by introducing the category of the domestic into its fold. This choice is by no means accidental. The domestic not only directly links the municipal with the corporeal but also allows us to comprehend more fully the importance of the textual register in the formation of identity. The Victorian urban environment was imagined through literary outpourings of social investigators and reformers in a way which shifted the focus of poverty from moral shortcomings, locating it instead 'in the homes and bodies of the poor themselves.'[65] Although, as the title makes plain, Henry Mayhew's *London Labour and the London Poor* is concerned with painstakingly cataloguing the minutiaee of *metropolitan* life, the descriptions are frequently based on a comparison with the familial. Thus, the city nomads – who, despite Mayhew's

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[65] Judith R. Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight: Narratives of Sexual Danger in Late-Victorian London* (London: Virago Press, 1992), p.30

pretentions of objectivity, are painted almost solely in negative terms –

display improvidence by the fact that their habits are 'not domestic', 'home

has few attractions', only a fraction of them are married and 'of the rights of

children [they] understand nothing.'[66] Similarly, in Charles Booth's seventeen-

volume study, *Life and Labour of the People of London*, what distinguishes

'civilised' and respectable neighbourhoods in the poor areas of the capital

from those lacking moral standards can be read through visible signs of

domestic order: 'flower pots, closed doors, lace curtains, scrubbed doorsteps,

hanging birdcages, almost empty streets.'[67] Domesticity, as John Tosh

explains,

> denotes not just a pattern of residence or a web of obligations, but a
> profound attachment: a state of mind as well as a physical orientation.
> […] Domesticity in this sense was essentially a nineteenth-century
> invention. One can go further and say that it was an integral aspect of
> modernity: socially it was inconceivable without large-scale urbanization;
> culturally it was one of the most important expressions of that
> awareness of individual interiority which had developed since the
> Enlightenment.[68]

To mobilise a different source, let us consider how the link of city and

domesti-*city*, referencing at the same time the issues of purity, crime and

control, is re-presented in a popular advertisement for Hudson's soap which

appeared in the London newspaper *The Graphic* in 1888 (Fig.2.4.). The

poster establishes, according to Pittard, 'a relationship between crime and

dirt, and between detection and cleansing in six words', positing the

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[66] Henry Mayhew, *London Labour and the London Poor: A Cyclopaedia of the Conditions and Earnings of Those That Will Work, Those That Cannot Work, and Those That Will Not Work*, vol.1 (London: Griffin, Bohn and Company, 1861), pp.11, 20
[67] Judith R. Walkowitz, op.cit., p.35
[68] John Tosh, *A Man's Place: Masculinity and the Middle-Class Home in Victorian England* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1999), p.4

policeman and the soap as equivalents and symbolically aligning law-breaking with contamination.[69]

Fig.2.4. An advertisement for Hudson's soap, *The Graphic*, 1 December 1888

The iconography of the advertisement seems clear – the bright light of the policeman's lantern signifying purity, cleansing and order against the darkness, contamination and dirt, and elevating the simple, everyday act of using soap through association with a wider project of social sanitisation – 'arresting *all* dirt and cleansing *everything*.' In their brief description of a slightly later version of the poster Stallybrass and White position it as complementary to the imperial discourse – 'as the Empire shed light upon the 'darkness' of Africa, so the sanitary regime would shed light upon the city's

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[69] Christopher Pittard, op.cit., p.2

dark places.'[70] Such a reading, as Pittard argues, misses the importance of the fact that the advert first appeared weeks after the Whitechapel murders of Jack the Ripper, 'at a very specific moment in criminal history' and its primary importance lies therefore in associating impurity with crime and detection with cleansing. [71] Although each of these approaches – global and local – undoubtedly presents a scenario in which the Hudson's soap advertisement can successfully be placed, they also appear to miss the vital connection between the urban and domestic environments which comes to be articulated here. The advert is perhaps more subtly ambiguous than either commentator gives it credit for – disconcertingly layering the textual and the visual in a kind of fractal double bind where the whole advertisement contains and displays a version of itself and where it is not dirt, disorder or crime but the 'writing on the wall' which is illuminated or symbolically 'cleansed'. Although the London setting is plainly recognisable, it is precisely the visible proximity of Big Ben which places the dark alley and the policeman at a remove from the East End slum, locating it instead at the heart of the city, on whose walls, quite literally, the spectacle of domestic commodity was being displayed. In the same way in which the proliferation of literary works on the lives of the poor introduced the slum into the Victorian home, the advertisements blurred the distinction between public and private, domesti-*city* and city. As Anne McClintock persuasively argues:

> Victorian advertising reveals a paradox, however, for, as the cultural form that was entrusted with upholding and marketing abroad those founding middle-class distinctions – between private and public, paid work and unpaid work – advertising also from the outset began to confound those distinctions. Advertising took the intimate signs of

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[70] Peter Stallybrass and Allon White, op.cit., p.134

[71] Christopher Pittard, op.cit., pp.2, 3

domesticity (children bathing, men shaving, women laced into corsets, maids delivering nightcaps) into the public realm, plastering scenes of domesticity on walls, buses, shopfronts and billboards. At the same time, advertising took scenes of empire into every corner of the home, stamping images of colonial conquest on soap boxes, matchboxes, biscuit tins, whiskey bottles, tea tins and chocolate bars. By trafficking promiscuously across the threshold of private and public, advertising began to subvert one of the fundamental distinctions of commodity capital, even as it was coming into being.[72]

It is of interest to briefly note here, in view of the subject matter of CREE, that the proliferation of cleaning product advertisements in the late nineteenth century went hand in hand with the insistent use of monkeys to promote soap. This trend can be observed in the campaigns of all the major brands such as the unambiguously labelled Brooke's Monkey Brand Soap, whose imagery exemplifies what, as McClintock argues, are 'fetishes straddling nature and culture.'[73] The advertisement (Fig.2.5.) presents a spectacle of conflicting traits – human/animal, public/private, domestic/commercial – articulating, as it tries to humorously disavow, the implied threat of liminal identity. Linking the previously discussed issues of animality, degeneration, urbanity and labour, the monkey

was an icon of metamorphosis, perfectly serving soap's liminal role in mediating the transformations of nature (dirt, waste and disorder) into culture (cleanliness, rationality and industry). […] The soap-monkey became then emblem of industrial progress and imperial evolution, embodying the double promise that nature could be redeemed by consumer capital and that consumer capital could be guaranteed by natural law.[74]

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[72] Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (New York and London: Routledge, 1995), p.209
[73] Ibid., p.216
[74] Ibid., p.217

Fig.2.5 Brooke's Monkey Brand Soap advertisement, 1901

'The Adventure of the Creeping Man', I want to argue, presents a scenario which reconfigures the urban through and with the domestic and therefore necessitates a reading which will pay particular attention to the details of bourgeois family life, locating them in relation to the wider socio-cultural issues. The story is of course concerned with the question of identity formation in a way which places it in the framework of previously sketched questions of re/degeneration, contamination and purity, but those issues are re-presented and configured above all through *individual*, rather than social bodies and *familial*, rather than social relations. The 'technological fascination' with modernity which Peter Hutchings ascribes to Holmes stories, linking them with Stoker's unapologetically gothic *Dracula* in the process, is

curiously absent from 'The Adventure of the Creeping Man' – there are no 'typewriters, telegraphs, phonographs, railway timetables, newspapers or shipping reports'[75] – and the only overtly 'modern' aspect of the story finds expression in its use of the ridiculed monkey serum. Although the drugs in this singular adventure seem to always appear in connection with writing, this writing is not technological or mechanical in the 'modern' sense – the letters, papers and receipts are always – and this is accentuated throughout the text – written by hand. This insistent coupling of *soma* and *scriptum* is crucial, for it allows us to establish the axis along which questions of identity politics in the story are structured – theoretically, historically or linguistically. It also places the narrative in the orbit of yet another important trope useful in theorising gothic fiction, namely that of the uncanny. It is perhaps unavoidable to discuss the concept in relation to Freud's well-known essay, the trajectory of which delineates a number of salient points that find articulation in 'The Adventure of the Creeping Man' and which will bear further scrutiny in subsequent parts of this chapter. Here, let us briefly draw attention to the link between the uncanny and the gothic, which, according to David Punter, serves to remind us that:

> [E]xperience continually overflows the bounds of reason; it suggests other realms which hover just beyond the reach of our conventions and assumptions, it asserts the irreducible presence of the 'ghost in the machine', and thus […] the forms of knowledge which run counter to everyday expectations. […] The uncanny suggests that the notion of 'what might be allowed' is fundamentally unstable. […] It suggests the uncontrollable nature of memory, of trauma, of haunting; it serves to

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[75] Peter J. Hutchings, *The Criminal Spectre in Law, Literature and Aesthetics: Incriminating Subjects* (London and New York: Routledge, 2001), p.11

remind us that we cannot, at the end of the day – or during the watches at night – exorcise the ghost.[76]

In 'The Adventure of the Creeping Man', I want to argue, the uncanny finds articulation through an association of the corporeal and the linguistic, which works to produce a setting predicated on constant resurfacing of familiar objects and characters which are essentially 'out of place', both in the narrative and at the level of the text. The linguistic register of the 'unheimlich' is of crucial importance for it allows Freud to theorise the word as an embodiment of the very concept it describes – through a carefully staged and exhaustive philological analysis he is able to show how '*heimlich* becomes increasingly ambivalent, until it finally merges with its antonym *unheimlich*. The uncanny is in some way a species of the familiar.'[77] This union, however, is never fully accomplished for both words linguistically maintain separate spheres of signification. As such, the uncanny can be said to exemplify the Bakhtinian double-voiced word, which inserts 'a new semantic intention into a discourse which already has, and which retains, an intention of its own'[78] Thus the work of the uncanny in CREE at the same time articulates and disavows the familiar domesticity of the bourgeois home, playing on the articulated tensions between inside/outside, purity/contamination or corporeal/cerebral, while never reducing either term to simple antithesis or synonymity.

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[76] David Punter, 'The Uncanny' in *The Routledge Companion to Gothic*, ed. by Catherine Spooner and Emma McEvoy (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2007), pp.131-132, 136
[77] Sigmund Freud, *The Uncanny* [1919], trans. by David McLintock (London: Penguin, 2003), p.134
[78] Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, trans. by Caryl Emerson (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), p.189

"When One Tries to Rise Above Nature One Is Liable to Fall below It":

'The Adventure of the Creeping Man'

The first clue as to the focus of 'The Adventure of the Creeping Man' can perhaps already be gleaned from its title. The juxtaposition of terms used here is telling, for it immediately conjures up an image which is somewhat unexpected and disturbing, a grotesque figure of a crawling or skulking human form. The dichotomy of animal/man invoked by this picture structures the entire text of the story, reappearing (compulsively, or symptomatically as Samuel Rosenberg would claim) in different constructions throughout the narrative – always, however, I want to argue, in relation to the concepts of identity, loss and excessive enjoyment. The story opens with a description of Holmes which bears uncanny resemblance to the depiction of the opium den scene discussed in 'The Man with the Twisted Lip':

> When I arrived at Baker Street I found him huddled up in his arm-chair with updrawn knees, his pipe in his mouth and his brow furrowed with thought. It was clear that he was in the throes of some vexatious problem. With a wave of his hand he indicated my old arm-chair, but otherwise for half an hour he gave no sign that he was aware of my presence. Then with a start he seemed to come from his reverie, and, with his usual whimsical smile, he greeted me back to what had once been my home.[79]

Here, as in the 'Twisted Lip' story, the identity of Holmes seems inherently fluid and changeable – there is no 'work' involved in the movement from static to dynamic, all it takes is 'a start', a change of position. As a character Holmes is indeed unique because he seems able to transition between

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[79] Arthur Conan Doyle, 'The Adventure of the Creeping Man' in *The New Annotated Sherlock Holmes, vol.2*, ed. by Leslie S. Klinger (New York: W.W. Norton, 2005), p.1637

various identities, or at least character-defining stages, without appearing grotesque or, perhaps more importantly, without any loss to/of his subjectivity. This is in stark contrast to other male protagonists whose identity formation is predicated on some form of psycho-somatic sacrifice, as was the case with Neville St. Clair or Isa Whitney in TWIS and, in 'The Creeping Man', Professor Presbury. The first account of the Professor, given by his assistant, confirms his place in the familial and vocational hierarchy and establishes him as a paragon of bourgeois respectability:

> The Professor […] is a man of European reputation. His life has been academic. There has never been a breath of scandal. He is a widower with one daughter, Edith. He is […] a man of very virile and positive, one might almost say combative, character.[80]

The Professor, at the age of sixty-one, begins courting a young girl, Alice Morphy, in a manner which diverges greatly from the behaviour expected from someone of his social standing:

> It was not, as I understand, the reasoned courting of an elderly man, but rather the passionate frenzy of youth, for no one could have shown himself a more devoted lover. […] None the less, it did not meet with full approval in his own family. "We thought it rather excessive", said our visitor. "Exactly. *Excessive and a little violent and unnatural.* […]"[81]

What is of particular interest and importance here is the insistence on the excessive nature of the Professor's conduct. It is precisely the axis of excess, I want to argue, along which the story's structure is predominantly oriented, mapping out the questions of identity, sexuality and writing. Presbury's enjoyment – or rather his search for the ultimate enjoyment – produces

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[80] Ibid., p.1640
[81] Ibid. [My emphasis]

anxiety because it stands in vivid opposition to the established familiarity upon which his 'usual' identity is predicated. It is 'violent and unnatural' because it is 'other'. As Slavoj Žižek writes:

> We always impute to the 'other' an excessive enjoyment: he wants to steal our enjoyment (by ruining our way of life) and/or he has access to some secret, perverse enjoyment. In short, what really bothers us about the 'other' is the peculiar way he organizes his enjoyment, precisely the surplus, the 'excess' that pertains to this way […]. The basic paradox is that our Thing is conceived as something inaccessible to the other and at the same time threatened by him. According to Freud, the same paradox defines the experience of castration, which, within the subject's psychic economy, appears as something that "really cannot happen", but we are nonetheless horrified by its prospect.[82]

The 'otherness' of the Professor manifests itself in a complex matrix of changes which are symptomatic, insofar as they are immediately visible, and which seem to predominantly affect the corporeal sphere . 'His intellect was not affected' but 'he was under some shadow', 'his lectures were as brilliant as ever' but 'there was something new, something sinister.'[83] The commonplace appearance of Presbury: 'he was a portly, large-featured man, grave, tall, and frock-coated, with the dignity of bearing which a lecturer needs'[84], contrasts sharply with the grotesque behaviour he exhibits under the influence of the self-administered drug: 'he sank down into a crouching position, and moved along upon his hands and feet, skipping every now and then as if he were *overflowing* with energy and vitality.'[85]

Presbury's identity seems to shift from the 'proper' to the 'improper' in a way which defies the logic of simple reversal. Rather, it is the simultaneous

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[82] Slavoj Žižek, *Tarrying With the Negative: Kant, Hegel and the Critique of Ideology* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993), p.203
[83] Arthur Conan Doyle, 'The Adventure of the Creeping Man', op.cit., p.1641
[84] Ibid., p.1649
[85] Ibid., p.1657, emphasis added

coexistence of purportedly conflicting traits which produces the startled reaction of his family and friends – it is the sudden fluidity of his identity, its persistent movement, that is problematic. Were it only a question of a single transformation, a clearly delineated move from human to animal form, the stakes would not be as high – after all, a 360 degree turn can easily be disguised as *volte-face* – a temporary offer of resistance mistaken for revolutionary progress. The power of alteration in the 'Adventure of the Creeping Man' lies instead in the nexus of constant movement created by the passage of signification between the supposed binary poles, creating a network which, by dint of its motility, is predicated on inherent multiplicity. This variability should not be taken in a prescribed fashion to simply signify a coexistence of a number of divergent strands which, when placed together to interact, generate a new, quasi-gestalt entity. Rather, it is to be understood as heteroglot in a Bakhtinian sense – that is, as an active engagement of conflicting parts which resists the unification of synthesis through the formation of, and an involvement with, spaces of liminality.

The established, almost *a priori* given character of Professor Presbury is compromised by his quasi-medical experiments on at least two levels. In an image which mirrors the experiences of Isa Whitney from TWIS it is the very act of drug-taking which alters his identity – both in a factual and figurative sense. As the title of the story suggests, the events produce a startling and immediately evident change in Presbury's appearance. The Professor is injecting himself with langur monkey serum, therefore – quite simply and literally – he becomes 'unmanly' through the process of what could only be described as animalisation or mutation; but also, more ambiguously, his

manhood is under threat because the 'excessive and unnatural' behaviour he displays means a loss of the veneer of respectability associated with the locus of his socio-cultural status, his placement as a gentleman, a 'staid, elderly philosopher.'[86] Presbury's 'role' as a creeping man is thus manifold – firstly, because he is transmuting into an animal and so loses the ability to walk *upright*; and secondly, because he can no longer be comfortably posited as an *upright* member of society. Here, the propositions of degeneration theory find their fullest articulation – the identity of a middle/upper class, intellectually superior, white European male, who would certainly be placed near the top of Lombroso's evolutionary axis, suddenly coming under threat by association with the animalistic, and so, by extension, the low and debased. Thus the titular protagonist of the story becomes a mixture of high and low, human and animal – a grotesque figure of 'in between', with perpetually fluctuating identity. This incessant movement is not, however, fluid and effortless – as is the case with Holmes – but rather comes into being as a result of a struggle. (Parenthetically, let us also note here that Presbury is described as a physiology Professor at *Camford* – the only time in the Sherlockian canon where a place name is wilfully, and felicitously, obscured in this manner – a playful linguistic hybridisation of Cambridge and Oxford).

There are indications in the narrative that the Professor's secret is perpetuated – as well as partly discovered – through an association with letters and writing. After a return from a fortnight's trip – the enigmatic nature of which is posited as the first sign of change to Presbury's character – his secretary, Trevor Bennett, receives a letter from a friend in Prague who

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[86] Ibid., p.1638

comments on the Professor's presence in the city. The fact that travel abroad, outside of England, was necessary to put the chain of events into motion is telling, for it establishes a precedent for the reading of the story based on a series of carefully staged opposites – Great Britain/Europe, man/animal, self/other. Those parings, however, take on the form of impenetrable binaries only insofar as they work to institute an element of tension or delineate the points between which the story passes – under close scrutiny they cannot be upheld as firmly established counterparts, but rather reveal the mutable cross-contamination around which the narrative pivots. Thus, although the origin of the problem can be traced to Prague – and so to the remote 'outside' – the subsequent deliveries of the monkey serum Presbury receives are delivered by post from London. There can be no comfortingly familiar equation of the threat of otherness with that which is foreign – the traces of contamination are present 'at home', on the inside. Here, the story once again references its proximity to Victorian gothic, which, despite its manifest preoccupation with identifying, fixing and expelling the 'foreign', monstrous body, implicitly acknowledges that 'it is internal not an external danger' which needs to be dispelled.[87]

The fact that the letters containing the drug come from *Commercial* Road gains significance in relation to the association of 'proper' money-making, identity and labour discussed in the previous chapter in relation to TWIS. Presbury is, in a quite literal sense, trading his established identity – as a Professor, father, gentleman – for a 'new' – or perhaps additional – self which is perceived as a calamity precisely because it is excessive and superfluous.

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[87] Judith Halberstam, op.cit., p.15

The drug needs to be paid for – not given – because it is only in a process of exchange that the surplus value of mon(k)ey can be extracted. 'We embark on social projects not in spite of what they will cost us but because of what they will cost us'[88], Todd McGowan asserts, establishing a link between an act of loss and a source of enjoyment. Forfeiture is never only about not having, a sacrifice – rather, it is a constitutive element in a complex system of transactions, a *fort-da* game. Therefore, paradoxically, Presbury's loss of money and 'primary' identity gives him access to the sources of enjoyment which were previously unreachable and which those outside of this structure find 'excessive and unnatural.' The letters the Professor receives are instantly recognisable because they are marked with an 'X' – a symbol used to denote a lack of a proper name, of an established identity, as well as a place where something – a possible treasure – is hidden. The letters – and by association the drugs – thus carry with them a tantalising promise of a subjectivity which is constituted anew and which can be richly rewarding. The pursuit of this promise means that the subject is caught in a circle of compulsive repetition which produces within the psyche 'an essentially masochistic structure'[89] centred on the death drive. As McGowan summarises:

> The death drive emerges with subjectivity itself as the subject enters into the social order and becomes a social and speaking being by sacrificing a part of itself. This sacrifice is an act of creation that produces an object that exists only insofar as it is lost. This loss of what the subject doesn't have institutes the death drive, which produces enjoyment through the repetition of the initial loss. […] The subject must continually repeat the sacrificial acts that produce the object, despite the damage that such acts do to the subject's self-interest.[90]

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[88] Todd McGowan, *Enjoying What We Don't Have: The Political Project of Psychoanalysis* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 2013), p.162
[89] Ibid., p.13
[90] Ibid.

Presbury's pursuit of Miss Morphy, which leads him to disavow his place in the structure of society, is thus – through the compulsive repetition of injecting the monkey serum – at the same time an incessant replication of the originatory moment of loss from which identity emerges and an attempt to return to the imaginary absolute enjoyment of unification, despite clear signs that the process is not without troubling side effects. Miss Morphy functions here as *the* primary lost object, the attainment of which can never be accomplished precisely because it exists only insofar as it is 'not there'. Indeed, in 'The Adventure of the Creeping Man', Alice Morphy does not appear as a character, she is only paradoxically present *in absentia*, as a referent in the realm of the imaginary. Her role, however, can be explained by the recourse to the genealogy of her name – Morphy, from the Greek μορφή and Latin *morphe* meaning figure, shape or form. Professor Presbury is thus, quite literally, changing shape, morphing – his form becomes *amorphous* and *zoomorphic.* The name of Ovid's Morpheus – the god of dream forms in *Metamorphosis* – also derives from μορφή – Miss Alice Morphy is therefore a figure of pure fantasy and Presbury's insistent pursuit of this dream cannot amount to anything more than a delusion. Moreover, if we return to the degeneration theories, the proposed union of the Professor and Miss Morphy is also highly problematic because, as will be explicated further, on playing out the age difference, it obliquely draws attention to the question of hereditary transmission and, through the introduction of money, establishes a link between the financial and 'spermatic' classifications. Even if Presbury's courtship seemed distasteful to his family – 'we thought it rather excessive', on the part of Miss Morphy's father 'there was no objection', since 'Professor

Presbury was rich.'[91] If we follow Ben Barker-Benfield, who states that for a Victorian male 'sex and money were rapidly becoming the only measures of identity', Presbury seems to exemplify the uneasy fusion and interchangeability of the two economies.[92] However, the figuring of sperm as a commodity within a tightly governed system meant that its 'mismanagement' could yield disastrous results. Doctor A.K. Gardner, a leading authority on the topic, declared in no uncertain terms that 'marriage between old men and young girls' was *contra naturam*: 'Unfortunate is the imprudent man who dares to drink without care from this cup of delight. Nature knows how, in such a case, to punish cruelly an infraction of her laws.'[93] The punishment, owing to the 'abnormal condition of the sperm at an advance period of life', was to be realised – in accordance with the laws of hereditary transference – in the ensuing offspring, who are 'habitually marked by a serious and sad air […], are weak, torpid, lymphatic, if not scrofulous, and do not promise a long career.'[94] The sexuality of Presbury thus appears 'abnormal' both prior to and after the experiments with rejuvenating langur serum injections – in both cases there is a risk of hereditary contamination: either from 'bad' sperm or animality. It could be argued, as Halberstam does with reference to the gothic novel, that the 'monstrous manifestations' of sexuality – or perversions – serve merely as a backdrop for a consolidation of normal, or normative, sexuality.[95] In CREE, the latter seems to be articulated through the idealised union of Presbury's daughter, Edith, and his assistant,

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[91] Arthur Conan Doyle, 'The Adventure of the Creeping Man', op.cit., p.1640
[92] Ben Barker-Benfield, 'The Spermatic Economy: A Nineteenth Century View of Sexuality', *Feminist Studies*, vol.1 (1972)
[93] Augustus Kinsley Gardner, *Conjugal Sins Against the Laws of Life and Health: And Their Effects Upon the Father, Mother and Child* (New York: J.S. Redfield, 1870), p.173
[94] Ibid., pp.174, 175
[95] Judith Halberstam, op.cit., p.17

Trevor. Such a reading, however, is immediately put into question by an ostensibly incidental linguistic slippage. In a passage which seems to duplicate the scene between Watson and his wife in TWIS, discussed in the preceding chapter, Trevor Bennett is called "Jack" by his fiancée, Edith:

> [T]he door opened and a young lady was shown into the room. As she appeared Mr. Bennett sprang up with a cry and ran forward with his hands out to meet those which she had herself outstretched.
>
> "Edith, dear! Nothing the matter, I hope?"
>
> "I felt I must follow you. Oh, Jack, I have been so dreadfully frightened! It is awful to be there alone."[96]

Here, as in 'The Man with the Twisted Lip', this startling change hints at a certain unpredictability integrally written into the text – at the very level of language there is a possibility that things are not what they appear to be, or – to put it differently – that there is a possibility of movement which follows the heteroglot logic. It could be argued that the precise use of "Jack" is not accidental, for it is a name commonly employed in English as a generic designation of 'a man'. As such, it stands as an open signifier without fixed identity, attributable to anyone – in this instance functioning as a misnomer in both literal and figurative sense. It is also of interest to note the disparity of meaning between the two names – etymologically, 'Jack' is said to be of Celtic origin, from the Welsh word *iach* meaning 'healthy', 'strong', 'full of energy', whilst 'Trevor' comes from the Gaelic *Ó Treabhair* and was commonly used as an epithet meaning 'tight' or 'prudent'. This careful semantic construing allows for a complex and multifaceted association to be traced, mapping out more fully the relationship between the figure of

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[96] Arthur Conan Doyle, 'The Adventure of the Creeping Man'*, op.cit., * p.1644

Professor Presbury and that of his assistant, Bennett, putting to work yet another strand of the domestic and familial arrangements within the story. The identity of Trevor/Jack seems to mirror that of Presbury prior to/after injecting the mysterious serum – it is a movement from the judicious to the incongruous – which, in the case of the Professor, takes place 'in reality', at the level of the body. In relation to Bennett, however, it is confined to the linguistic register and comes to light only through Edith's slip of the tongue, the other's speech. It is perhaps in this slippage that the uncanny nature of the text reasserts itself most forcibly, moving between the corporeal and the linguistic and engendering certain instability in and amidst both registers. The *unheimlich* is, first and foremost

> the crisis of the proper: it entails a critical disturbance of what is proper (from Latin *proprius*, 'own'), a disturbance of the very idea of personal or private property including the properness of proper names, one's so-called 'own' name, but also the proper names of others, of places, institutions and events. It is a crisis of the natural, touching upon everything that one might have thought was 'part of nature': one's own nature, human nature, the nature of reality and the world.[97]

Significantly, Presbury's first name is never mentioned in the story – the moniker 'Jack' – with all its implications –could therefore equally be ascribed to the Professor. Presbury is a nameless, undifferentiated 'Jack' precisely because the story hinges upon the instability and malleability of his identity – if he is not truly 'himself' then a proper name would not substantiate his individuality. 'It was not my father with whom I lived', states Miss Presbury, 'his outward shell was there, but *it was not really he*.'[98] But also, going back

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[97] Nicholas Royle, *The Uncanny* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), p.1
[98] Arthur Conan Doyle, 'The Adventure of the Creeping Man', *op.cit.*, p.1646 [emphasis added]

to the etymological signification, the Professor turns into a 'Jack' – strong, healthy, full of energy – through the process of animalisation, becoming 'unmanly', which also equates with the loss of his primary, established identity:

> The hall door had slowly opened, and against the lamp-lit background we saw the tall figure of Professor Presbury. He was clad in his dressing gown. As he stood outlined in the doorway he was erect but leaning forward with dangling arms, as when we saw him last. Now he stepped forward into the drive, and an extraordinary change came over him. He sank down into a crouching position and moved along upon his hands and feet, skipping every now and then as if he were overflowing with energy and vitality. He moved along the face of the house and then round the corner […]. The Professor was clearly visible crouching at the foot of the ivy-covered wall. As we watched him he suddenly began with incredible agility to ascend it. From branch to branch he sprang, sure of foot and firm of grasp, climbing apparently in mere joy at his own powers, with no definite object in view. With his dressing-gown flapping on each side of him, he looked like some huge bat glued against the side of his own house, a great square dark patch upon the moonlit wall.[99]

Although the scene emphasises Presbury's animalistic behaviour it cannot simply be reduced to a case of unambiguous carnality. Rather, the mutable nature of the process of transformation is accentuated here – even under the influence of the serum the Professor seems to retain some of his former, that is to say human/gentleman, characteristics. 'I have never seen a more strange sight than this impassive *and still dignified* figure crouching frog-like upon the ground'[100], Watson asserts – the dignity no doubt amplified by the fact that the Professor is fully clothed in a dressing-gown. Similarly, even when not intoxicated by the drugs, Presbury seems to display an unusual level of 'unmanly' savagery:

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[99] Ibid., pp.1657-1658
[100] Ibid., p.1658 [emphasis added]

"That is conclusive," said the Professor, glaring angrily at my companion. "Now, sir" – he leaned forward with his two hands upon the table –"it seems to me that your position is a very questionable one."
Holmes shrugged his shoulders.
"I can only repeat that I am sorry that we have made a needless intrusion."
"Hardly enough, Mr. Holmes!" the old man cried in a high screaming voice, with extraordinary malignancy upon his face. He got between us and the door as he spoke, and he shook his two hands at us with furious passion. "You can hardly get out of it so easily as that." His face was convulsed, and he grinned and gibbered at us in his senseless rage. I am convinced that we should have had to fight our way out of the room if Mr. Bennett had not intervened.[101]

The fact that it is always possible to detect a trace of Presbury's nobility in his altered phase and, conversely, a suggestion of bestiality in his seemingly 'natural' state, points towards a cross-contamination which escapes any attempts to define it as a simple reversal of roles. Rather, it supports the claim that 'The Adventure of the Creeping Man' stages the problem of identity formation as a relentless unfolding and dismantling, an incessant movement defying unification. In this sense, Presbury's identity could be called grotesque – in a way in which the term is defined in the Bakhtinian nomenclature – that is to say, removed from the static, delineated and closely controlled 'classical' selfhood, the structure of which 'precludes exchange between the subject and the world of objects.'[102] To be able to put into question the boundaries of unified, cohesive subjectivity allows for a more ambivalent position of manifold correlations, or – in other words – dialogism, to emerge. To return once again to the Darwinian evolution theory, we could say that Presbury's unstable changeability serves to remind us that:

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[101] Ibid., p.1650
[102] Heather Merle Benbow, 'Ways In, Ways Out: Theorizing the Kantian Body', *Body & Society*, vol. 9, no. 57 (2003), p.60

> Man with all his noble qualities, with sympathy which feels for the most debased, with benevolence which extends not only to other men but to the humblest living creature, with his god-like intellect which has penetrated into the movements and constitution of the solar system – with all these exalted powers – *Man still bears in his bodily frame the indelible stamp of his lowly origin*.[103]

If the name 'Jack', in all its multifaceted meanings, can productively be used to delineate certain characteristics of Presbury, why then, it might be asked, does the Professor's daughter make the mistake in relation to her fiancé, Trevor? This linguistic slippage allows us to establish a certain correlation, albeit an asymmetrical one, between Presbury and Bennett – with Miss Presbury as the axis along which the relationship is configured. If the professor, in an uncanny twist, can be symbolically aligned with the label 'Jack', losing the proper name he never had, then the literal substitution of 'Trevor' for 'Jack' makes sense precisely because Bennett's identity is, paradoxically, that of a *Jedermann*. His part in the story seems to fulfil the role of a comfortably familiar referent onto which the reader can project the ideals of self-contained, fully regulated corporeality in stark contrast with the more fluid and unstable identity of Presbury. 'He was a tall, handsome youth about thirty, well dressed and elegant'[104], runs the description of Bennett, immediately establishing him as a paragon of middle-class virtue, even if there was, however, 'something in his bearing which suggested the shyness of the student rather than the self-possession of the man of the world.'[105] Indeed, Bennett's identity seems to be predicated on an effacement of any distinguishing characteristics, concentrating instead on his orientation in

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[103] Charles Darwin, *The Descent of Man and Selection in Relation to Sex* (London: John Murray, 1871), p.405 [emphasis added]
[104] Arthur Conan Doyle, 'The Adventure of the Creeping Man', op.cit., p.1638
[105] Ibid., pp.1638-1639

relation to Presbury: '[T]his gentleman, Mr. Trevor Bennett, is professional assistant to the great scientist, lives under his roof, and is engaged to his only daughter. Certainly we must agree that the Professor has every claim upon his loyalty and devotion.'[106] This depiction is significant, for it simultaneously links and separates the characters of Bennett and Presbury through the creation of a highly hierarchical affiliation which is nonetheless presented as a natural and expected state of affairs and which also introduces Bennett – a paid employee – into the midst of Presbury's family circle. To use a bodily metaphor, Presbury is represented, quite unambiguously, as the 'head' – both in a sense of a paterfamilias and as a university professor whose work is purely intellectual. In comparison, Bennett's situation appears much more ambiguous and precarious – his engagement with Edith and residence in the Presbury home which places him inside the family, through association with waged labour simultaneously expels him from the intimacy of familial arrangements; or, to put it differently, he is located in a liminal space between the commercial and the domestic, blurring the distinction between the economic and the sentimental on which the existence of Victorian domesticity was predicated.[107] This connection is problematised further if we take into account Miss Presbury's position in relation to both men and consider the etymology of the name 'Edith', which comes from the Old English *Eadgyð*, derived from *ead*, meaning 'riches, treasure' and *gyð*, meaning 'war'. Miss Presbury is, therefore, immediately established in the linguistic register as a valuable prize, the attainment of which is however irretrievably linked with violence. Thus, it becomes possible to view the bond between Presbury and

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[106] Ibid., p.1640
[107] John Tosh, op. cit., p.13

Bennett as that of competition, where, as Eve Sedgwick claims, the intense ties of rivalry, structured by emulation and identification, are a potent source of knowledge about the adversarial males.[108] Such a reading creates a scenario which sees Bennett functioning as the invasive 'third term', 'representing something external and potentially annihilating'[109] to the familial dyad. It is here that the full meaning of 'Trevor' can be realised – he is 'tight', 'economical' and 'frugal', that is to say, not liable to share his 'treasure'. Consequently, when viewed in relation to the sub-textual feud with Bennett, Presbury's infatuation with Miss Morphy can be seen as an attempt at a quasi-sublimated substitution – exchanging a daughter for a young lover could ensure that the libidinal dynamic states intact, albeit in the confines of fantasy. Miss Presbury's error, therefore, pertains to precisely the same orientation of desire – that is to say, it simultaneously admits and disavows 'Trevor', trying to, as it were, have the oedipal cake and eat it. Or, to put it still more simply, to misname her fiancé ensures that the father figure – the Jeder/Übermensch 'Jack' of the story – remains ever present in the libidinal triangulation. Indeed, it is telling that in his altered state, under the influence of the serum – and so when not truly 'himself' – Presbury immediately climbs to his daughter's bedroom window, in a scene that is both disturbing and charged with erotic tension:

> I was awakened in the night by the dog barking most furiously. Poor
> Roy, he is chained now near the stable. I may say that I always sleep
> with my door locked; for, as Jack — as Mr. Bennett — will tell you, we all

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[108] Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), pp.21, 23

[109] Rosalind Minsky (ed.), *Psychoanalysis and Gender* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), p.149

have a feeling of impending danger. My room is on the second floor. It happened that the blind was up in my window, and there was bright moonlight outside. As I lay with my eyes fixed upon the square of light, listening to the frenzied barkings of the dog, I was amazed to see my father's face looking in at me. Mr. Holmes, I nearly died of surprise and horror. There it was pressed against the windowpane, and one hand seemed to be raised as if to push up the window. If that window had opened, I think I should have gone mad. It was no delusion, Mr. Holmes. Don't deceive yourself by thinking so. I dare say it was twenty seconds or so that I lay paralyzed and watched the face. Then it vanished, but I could not — I could not spring out of bed and look out after it. I lay cold and shivering till morning.[110]

It is of importance that Miss Presbury's erroneous misnaming takes place when narrating this particular encounter, for it substantiates the claim that the relationship between herself, Presbury and Bennett is predicated on a certain, complex and multifaceted, slippage of and among identities, circling around the connection between the corporeal and the linguistic. If we take the parental bond between Edith and her father to be the originatory place of desire in the story then the figures of Bennett and Miss Morphy acquire the added significance of proxy objects by means of which this desire can be expressed. The move from 'Trevor' to 'Jack' thus becomes implicated in the double logic it aids to create – firstly, through a linguistic association of Presbury and Bennett it allows for a libidinal displacement and, secondly, it points towards a more problematic convergence of identification and desire. This displacement can of course simply be read as an actualisation of the oedipal scenario, whereby the parental love object is replaced by an external one. Such a reading is, however, problematised by the lingering traces of Presbury's presence, articulated through the use of 'Jack'. Consequently, Edith's desire for her father is realised in a transposition onto Bennett, in the

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[110] Arthur Conan Doyle, 'The Adventure of the Creeping Man', op.cit., p.1646

same way in which the Professor's pursuit of Miss Morphy can be viewed as a sublimation of his feelings towards his daughter. What is of significance here is that we are not presented with a 'simple' substitution or exchange of love objects, but rather with a matrix of relations among subjects/objects that are constantly shifting and transforming. It is precisely in this incessant movement between identities, bodies, desires and proper names that the uncanny textual mutability of the story reasserts itself.

The connection between Presbury, Edith and Bennett can also productively be theorised with recourse to the Rosenbergian Conan Doyle Syndrome – an allegorical matrix of 'compulsively linked images, ideas, persons, objects and actions'[111] – and I want to propose a reading based on a 'syndromatic' use and appearance of the word/signifier/image 'box' and its derivative 'case' in the 'Adventure of the Creeping Man', the analysis of which is also useful in understanding the position of the story's main protagonists in relation to Holmes.

The inexplicable change in Presbury's behaviour constitutes, of course, the primary case for Holmes to solve – a case whose true history must be confined to a locked box, for it is so 'strange and suggestive'.[112] This sentiment is carried further still by Watson who, on learning all the details from Bennett's description ('I felt that it was my duty to study his case'[113]), observes that the Professor's conduct 'appears to be a case for an alienist'[114]. As an aside, let us briefly note here that the term comes from the French *aliéné* meaning 'insane' and so plays on the supposed madness of

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[111] Samuel Rosenberg, *Naked is the Best Disguise: The Death and Resurrection of Sherlock Holmes* (London: Arlington Books, 1975), p.68
[112] Arthur Conan Doyle, 'The Adventure of the Creeping Man', op.cit., p.1644
[113] Ibid., p.1642
[114] Ibid., p.1644

Presbury; that is to say, he is posited as, quite literally, *a mental case*, the cyclical nature of his affliction marking him as an example of Richard von Krafft-Ebing's popular theory of 'periodical insanity'.[115] This abundance of various cases sets the scene for an introduction of the mysterious box the Professor brings home from his visit abroad – a visit given as a chronological starting point of the alteration in his behaviour. Thus imbued with sinister qualities, the box is established as a locus of excess and comes to signify – through association with writing, letters, drugs and money – the unstable and volatile nature of Presbury's identity. Bennett's account of his first encounter with the enigmatic box is particularly indicative:

> The Professor brought back a little wooden box from his travels. It was the one thing which suggested a Continental tour, for it was one of those quaint carved things which one associates with Germany. This he placed in his instrument cupboard. One day, in looking for a cannula, I took up the box. To my surprise he was very angry, and reproved me in words which were quite savage for my curiosity. It was the first time such a thing had happened, and I was deeply hurt. I endeavoured to explain that it was a mere accident that I had touched the box, but all the evening I was conscious that he looked at me harshly and that the incident was rankling in his mind.[116]

This somewhat disproportionate reaction of Presbury can perhaps be understood if we reflect that the word 'case' or 'jewel-box' is a slang term for female genitalia.[117] Thus, it is possible to revisit the reading of the relationship between Presbury and Bennett as one of rivalry and argue that the figure of the box functions primarily as an emblematic representation of Edith. The box cannot be touched – even accidentally – by Bennett, for to do

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[115] Richard von Krafft-Ebing, *Psychopatia Sexualis with Especial Reference to Contrary Sexual Instinct, a Medico-legal Study*, trans. Charles Gilbert Chaddock (Philadelphia: F.A. Davis, 1893)
[116] Arthur Conan Doyle, 'The Adventure of the Creeping Man', op.cit., pp.1641-1642
[117] Samuel Rosenberg, *Naked Is the Best Disguise,* op.cit*.*, p.152

so would compromise the union between the Professor and his 'treasure',

revealing the intricate web of heteroglot connections at work. Presbury's

closely guarded secret is therefore double: on the one hand, it is quite simply

the drug-taking; but on the other, it is the libidinal economy of desire through

which his relationship with Edith is mediated and maintained. Bennett's

access to the box/treasure – in all its complex meanings – must be

prevented, allowing the Professor to ceaselessly act out his game of

substitutions and projections. Quite aptly – for Presbury's conduct is, after all,

based on a phantasy – the use of the box thus allows for condensation – in

the same way in which the latent dream content is consolidated – of all the

female characters in the story into one 'treasure-chest', equating their

sexuality with material wealth in the process. 'Professor Presbury was rich,

however, and there was no objection upon the part of the father', runs

Holmes' gloss of Presbury's courtship of Miss Morphy, confining her to a

status of a voiceless object of transaction between two men. The relation of

box/case and money is established early on in the narrative, when Watson –

trying to decipher the contents of Presbury's chest – puts forward a

suggestion that it might contain 'a loan, perhaps, or share certificates'.[118]

Here, the 'syndromatic' nature of the text is referenced once again, playing

upon the connection between identity, enjoyment and loss. From such a

vantage point, the box functions as a perfect substitute – that is to say, it

gives Presbury unmediated access to a source of gratification without the

need for forfeiture, or – to put in differently – a case full of riches suppresses

the realisation that the original – and originatory – 'treasure' is no longer

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[118] Arthur Conan Doyle, 'The Adventure of the Creeping Man', op.cit., p.1644

available. To put it more simply, the conflation or condensation of all female sexuality into the symbolic representation of the box allows Presbury to act out his desire for both Edith and Alice, seamlessly substituting one for the other. Such a scenario, however, must be confined to the realm of the imagination, for – when the box is finally opened – it does not contain any capital. Instead, the contents are revealed as 'an empty phial, another nearly full, a hypodermic syringe, several letters in a crabbed, foreign hand'.[119] The box seems to be placed in the same role as the opium den in the 'Man with the Twisted Lip', that is, as a liminal entity which allows for a certain literalisation and play upon the very idea of transformation. Here, the connection between identity, drugs and writing becomes firmly established yet again, for the papers and letters contained in Presbury's case are discovered to be 'mere invoices […] or receipts to acknowledge money.'[120] The box, therefore, not only does not contain any treasure but, in a perverse twist, attests to the Professor's frequent and sustained *parting* with his money, problematising the now familiar circle of the *fort/da* game even further. Presbury's pleasure is of course, quite simply, predicated on his access to the serum and so on the possibility of creating a different self, which, in turn, could allow him, albeit in a phantasy-based scenario, to disavow the absence of the 'lost' object. The letters, however, bear out the fact that the treasure – as a conflation of Edith, Alice and money – is spent, that is to say, the writing exposes the drugs as, paradoxically, objects through which the experience of loss, alongside that of gain, is played out. Such a reading allows us to see that Presbury's 'established' identity does not

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[119] Ibid., p.1661
[120] Ibid., p.1662

function as *a priori* constructed monolith but rather emerges in a heterogeneous arrangement of varied manifestations which are more precariously balanced than might at first appear. It is vital to reiterate here the importance of an approach which would take into account the complex simultaneity of those subject-positions in reading the Holmes stories where, as my argument goes, it is precisely in the *movement* among the various formations in which the dialogic work of textuality can be encountered. It is especially pertinent here to emphasise the dynamic role corporeal identity plays in this equation. It is not only a passive receptacle of acquired meaning, a *tabula rasa* to be engraved, but rather an effective partner in the exchange of meaning, being inscribed but also, at the same time, actively inscribing.

The multifarious entanglement of enjoyment and loss is played out in the story perhaps most visibly in the final moments of the Professor's 'monkey' stage, immediately before the secret is triumphantly uncovered by Holmes. Here, Presbury's animalistic nature is situated against that of his wolf-hound, Roy:

> The Professor squatted down very deliberately just out of reach of the hound and began to provoke it in every possible way. He took handfuls of pebbles from the drive and threw them in the dog's face, prodded him with a stick which he had picked up, flicked his hands about only a few inches from the gaping mouth, and endeavoured in every way to increase the animal's fury, which was already beyond all control. [He was] goading to a wilder exhibition of passion the maddened hound, which ramped and raged in front of him, by all manner of ingenious and calculated cruelty.[121]

This description of Presbury's conduct is telling for it reinforces the point that, even when under the influence of the serum, the Professor can still

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[121] Ibid., pp.1658-1659

retain some of his defining human characteristics – he is seen here as deliberate and calculating – that is to say, at a remove from the simple animal carnality of Roy, who is 'beyond control'. The encounter leads to an inevitable conclusion:

> And then in a moment it happened! It was not the chain that broke, but it was the collar that slipped, for it had been made for a thick-necked Newfoundland. We heard the rattle of falling metal, and the next instant dog and man were rolling on the ground together, the one roaring in rage, the other screaming in a strange shrill falsetto of terror. It was a very narrow thing for the Professor's life. The savage creature had him fairly by the throat, its fangs had bitten deep, and he was senseless before we could reach them and drag the two apart.[122]

On a certain level it is of course possible to theorise the passage above as a quasi-Manichean actualisation of a symbolic struggle of the human versus the animal elements of Presbury's psyche. Such a reading, however, takes for granted the twofold aspects of identity formation, failing to account for the dispersing movement between the supposed binary poles – a movement whose intricate relationship with identity formation comes to the fore in the finale of the abovementioned struggle:

> The hound was secured, and together we carried the Professor up to his room, where Bennett, who had a medical degree, helped me to dress his torn throat. The sharp teeth had passed dangerously near the carotid artery, and the haemorrhage was serious. In half an hour the danger was past, I had given the patient an injection of morphia, and he had sunk into deep sleep. Then, and only then, were we able to look at each other and to take stock of the situation.[123]

It is of primary importance that Holmes takes advantage of Presbury's unconscious state to open up his 'mysterious box' and finally reveal all its

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[122] Ibid., pp.1659-1660
[123] Ibid., p.1660

secrets. The Professor thus seems to lose his treasure in quite a literal sense – that is, as his access to the drugs and the subsequent pursuit of his goal; but also in a more symbolic or figurative sense, as the various sources of pleasure associated with the serum and mediated through the box/case. What is significant here is the realisation that Presbury does finally achieve, albeit in an aberrant twist, the attainment of the ultimate aim he was striving towards. At the level of language 'morphia' stands – through etymological association – for Miss Morphy, and the deep sleep following the injection of the drug puts the Professor, appropriately enough, in the arms of *Morph*eus, symbolically – or at the level of the imaginary – allowing him the *jouissance* of complete unification. We are forcibly reminded here, however, that there can be no absolute satisfaction, no *fort* without *da* – the experience of pleasure is intrinsically linked with the experience of loss. Thus, Presbury's imaginary fulfilment – imaginary, let us add, in a double sense: fantasmatic and hypnagogic – comes with great bodily injury and, perhaps more importantly, with the revealing of the contents of the box and hence forfeiting access to all the sources of pleasure associated with it. It goes without saying that the complex matrix of gain/loss is not confined to Presbury but encompasses all the characters of the story, creating an intricate web of connections, orbiting around the box/case. In such a reading, at a first glance at least, the Professor seems to be a mirror image of the great detective – after all, Presbury's acquisition of the box gives Holmes access to the case. But, paradoxically, for Holmes to open the Professor's box means to solve the case, that is, to exhaust its possibilities, to return it to the 'locked box' from which it originated and, perhaps – with the ensuing ennui – to turn to yet

another container, a 'neat morocco case', enclosing cocaine.[124] Here, the mirror image becomes inverted – if in relation to Presbury the drugs represent abundant hyper-activity, for Holmes they are a sign of stagnation and unproductivity. It is precisely through this proliferation of cases that the complex interdependence of *langu*(o)r can be realised, providing a link between the linguistic and the bodily economies and allowing us to trace the workings of heteroglot mutability throughout the narrative.

Let us return once again to the Victorian preoccupation with reading bodies delineated at the beginning of the chapter. The obsessive policing of corporeal transgressions to which the modern body was subjected was first and foremost, quite simply, predicated on visual clues; or, to put it differently, 'the basic interaction that qualifies humans as humans is […] judgment about bodies.'[125] It is therefore Presbury's altered appearance – the movement from the upright to the creeping position – that signifies, first and foremost, a change of identity, a movement from the anthropo- to the zoo-logical:

> Now he stepped forward into the drive, and an extraordinary change came over him. He sank down into a crouching position and moved along upon his hands and feet, skipping every now and then as if he were overflowing with energy and vitality. He moved along the face of the house and then round the corner. […] The Professor was clearly visible crouching at the foot of the ivy-covered wall. As we watched him he suddenly began with incredible agility to ascend it. From branch to branch he sprang, sure of foot and firm of grasp, climbing apparently in mere joy at his own powers, with no definite object in view.[126]

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[124] Arthur Conan Doyle, *The Sign of Four*, (London: Penguin, 2001), p.5
[125] Nora Ruck, 'Some Historical Dimensions of the 'Dialogic Body': From Mikhail Bakhtin's Dialogical Grotesque Body to the Monological Body of Modernity', *Psychology and Society*, vol.2 (2010), p.14
[126] Arthur Conan Doyle, 'The Adventure of the Creeping Man', op.cit., pp.1657-1658

Even before this startling observation is made, Holmes is able to detect

and decipher traces seemingly imprinted on Presbury's body by his shifting

identity:

> "But his symptoms are most remarkable. Did you observe his knuckles?"
> I had to confess that I did not
> "Thick and horny in a way which is quite new in my experience. Always
> look at the hands first, Watson. Then cuffs, trouser-knees, and boots.
> Very curious knuckles […] All points in one direction. How could I miss
> seeing the connection of ideas? Those knuckles – how could I have
> passed those knuckles?"[127]

This anthropo-scopical reading of corporeal signification – the treatment of

body as a diagnostic toolkit – echoes the conflation of identity and labour

discussed in relation to TWIS, marking the process of movement between

various identities as work. The fact that this movement needs to be observed

and documented – importantly, in written form, through Bennett's reports –

points towards a preoccupation with policing not only 'proper' body but also

'proper' labour. Here, the echoes of Mayhew's *London Labour and the*

London Poor can be heard once again, putting writing and embodiment into

play and emphasising the importance of visual engagement in the policing of

identities. That such a treatment was common enough can be attested by the

Contagious Diseases Act of the 1860s, which allowed the authorities to

'arrest women suspected of being prostitutes, forcibly examine them for

venereal disease, and incarcerate them for treatment until they were cured –

that is, until the visible signs of infection disappeared.'[128] The solving of the

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[127] Ibid., p.1657
[128] Pamela K. Gilbert, 'Popular Beliefs and the Body' in *A Cultural History of the Human Body. Vol. 5: In the Age of Empire*, op.cit., p.129

case in 'The Adventure of the Creeping Man' thus comes as a direct result of conflating detection with observation:

> If my deductions are correct we should have an opportunity of bringing matters to a head. In order to do so it is necessary to hold the Professor under observation. I would suggest, therefore, that you remain awake and on the lookout. […] It was nearly midnight before we took our station among some bushes immediately opposite the hall door of the Professor. It was a fine night, but chilly, and we were glad of our warm overcoats. There was a breeze, and clouds were scudding across the sky, obscuring from time to time the half-moon. It would have been a dismal vigil were it not for the expectation and excitement which carried us along, and the assurance of my comrade that we had probably reached the end of the strange sequence of events which had engaged our attention.[129]

Although the story follows a now familiar pattern whereby no actual crime has been committed and the matter under investigation is merely a disturbance of bourgeois domesticity, the way in which the narrative culminates is telling, for it presents a fairly unusual anti-climax. The mysterious box is opened, the letters read and the nature of Presbury's strange conduct revealed but, crucially, there is no confirmation or elucidation from the offending party, no ritual confession. Such a finale, especially when viewed in relation to the formalistic requirements of detective fiction, presents a rather striking and, I want to argue, indicative difference. Initially, as with other similarly constructed cases of the canon, the emphasis seems to be on containment and exercising total control:

> "For God's sake, no!" cried Bennett. "At present the scandal is confined to our own household. It is safe with us. If it gets beyond these walls it will never stop. Consider his position at the university, his European reputation, the feelings of his daughter."
> "Quite so," said Holmes. "I think it may be quite possible to keep the

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[129] Arthur Conan Doyle, 'The Adventure of the Creeping Man', op.cit., p.1656

matter to ourselves, and also to prevent its recurrence now that we have a free hand."[130]

It is the fact that Holmes seems content with prevention which separates 'The Adventure of the Creeping Man' from other Sherlockian narratives. Presbury is not called upon to substantiate his identity – or rather, to establish, through the very act of confession, an allegiance to a singular self – on the contrary, he is allowed to remain in the state of blissful, drug-induced sleep – that is to say, ambiguously *amorphous*. The whole case is 'cracked' with the cracking open of the box and reading of the letters –writing is, therefore, not only put forth as having primacy over speech but also, it seems, as signifying in the same way as – and it the place of – embodied subjectivity. To put it more succinctly, the confessional box becomes seamlessly replaced by a 'confession in a box'. This conflation is especially interesting if we consider once again the aforementioned approaches to corporeal identity, orbiting around a tightly governed expulsion of the physical from discursive practice, whereby the bourgeois identity is staged in an opposition to the grotesque, overtly exuberant body Bakhtin ascribes to the Middle Ages and where emphasis is placed on the supremacy of writing as a prime mode of self-expression. Such a staging produces a milieu in which the body is envisioned as the other of language and 'sinks beneath the discursivity of the subject'[131], putting into place a mode of signification in which the corporeal is a mere supplement to the self now realised in, and as, cognitive narration. Thus, to put it more efficiently, 'the bourgeois subject

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[130] Ibid., pp.1660-1661
[131] Ian Burkitt, *Bodies of Thought: Embodiment, Identity and Modernity* (London: Sage, 1999), p.55

substitutes for its corporeal body the rarefied body of the text.'[132] From such a vantage point, Presbury's corporeal absence from the scene of his 'unmasking' substantiates the claim that the 'modern body is not present to the subject as a direct principle of discourse, but merely as residual energy, an absent principle of the textuality in which the new subjectivity articulates itself.'[133] The letters in the box adequately 'confess' what the Professor cannot – that is to say, the textual becomes the ultimate bearer of truth, an ideal expression of the self; or, further still, an almost solipsist *aletheia*. The problem with such an understanding, however, is that it presupposes a binary relation between body and text, with clearly demarcated boundaries which cannot, and should not, be crossed. If the corporeal is to be seen as unruly and disruptive then the linguistic would, of necessity, need to be understood as fully controllable and stable in order to always substantiate the origins of one's identity. However – and this is crucial – in the 'Adventure of the Creeping Man' the letters found in the Professor's box – the letters, let us not forget, used as worthy ancillaries of Presbury's confession – are not in fact his own:

> There was one other envelope, however, in a more educated hand and bearing the Austrian stamp with the postmark of Prague. "Here we have our material!" cried Holmes as he tore out the enclosure.
>
> HONOURED COLLEAGUE, –
> Since your esteemed visit I have thought much of your case, and though in your circumstances there are some special reasons for the treatment, I would none the less enjoin caution, as my results have shown that it is not without danger of a kind.
> It is possible that the serum of anthropoid would have been better. I have, as I explained to you, used black-faced langur because a specimen was accessible. Langur is, of course, a crawler and climber,

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[132] Frances Barker, *The Tremulous Private Body: Essays on Subjectivity* (London and New York: Methuen, 1984), p.62
[133] Ibid., p.64

while anthropoid walks erect and is in all ways nearer.

I beg you to take every possible precaution that there be no premature revelation of the process. I have one other client in England, and Dorak is my agent for both.

Weekly reports will oblige.

Yours with high esteem,
H. LOWENSTEIN.[134]

Presbury's identity thus seems to rest upon a confirmation from a source that is entirely external – both in a sense of subjective and, as the letters come from Prague, national foreignness. What is more, if 'the bourgeois subject narrates both self and the world from a private place', and we take the infamous box to signify the space of ultimate secretiveness, it would seem that at the very core of Presbury's selfhood there is always already something 'other', or – to use a literary metaphor – the writing is not in his own hand. In order to both deny this inherent contamination and preserve the perceived wholeness of the text – here we are once again reminded of Presbury's multiplicity – it becomes necessary to justify the production of a discourse based on constant and tireless policing, observation and surveillance of the corporeal:

> As the privatised subject writes, its text is constrained to say more that it knows itself to say, an excess of signification beyond the self's lived disposition which is incited, paradoxically, by the censorship which is the governing principle of its discourse. The split subject is designed at an abject inner distance from itself and from the ambivalent, supplementary body which has been exiled, in one of its aspects, from the interior consistency of the subject's discourse to a ghostly, insubstantial place at the margins, and in its other phase, to a location outside discourse as one amongst its objects in the world.[135]

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[134] Arthur Conan Doyle, 'The Adventure of the Creeping Man', op.cit., p.1662
[135] Frances Barker, op.cit., p.67

Although it seems to go without saying, let us nonetheless risk the charge of apophasis and draw attention to the fact that the question of privacy – the space of isolation from which the narrated self unfolds – is intimately bound with the question of class; that is to say, the textual, or disembodied, subject is a bourgeois subject. This taxonomy, albeit patent, is nonetheless crucial, for it immediately differentiates between various types of bodies and – what can perhaps amount to the same thing – various types of texts. The working classes, or the poor, were commonly perceived as somewhat more 'embodied' than the middle classes, that is to say, it was not as easy to apply the concept of the ideal 'body without orifices' to the masses, who were 'precisely, massed bodies, filthy and insufficiently individuated. They were too close – sharing space, water, air, sexual congress. These bodies, being too contiguous, became continuous.'[136] The image of the slum – overcrowded with freely intermingling bodies – echoes that of the opium den discussed previously – the destitute, like the habitués of the opium den, do not strictly speaking possess an identity, for 'the conventional understanding of the only proper form of subjectivity requires a clarity of boundaries between self and other, an affective and effective autonomy.'[137] This impossibility of clear demarcation produced a causal link between lack of corporeal control and immorality, with the consequences deleterious not only to those directly in harm's way but also to the society at large. If the singular, if homogenous, bodies of the poor could influence the body of the entire nation it is perhaps not surprising that in the Victorian era the issues of sanitation, hygiene and health – in short, corporeal regimes of regulation – became regarded with

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[136] Pamela K. Gilbert, 'Popular Beliefs and the Body', op.cit., p.132
[137] Margrit Shildrick, *Embodying the Monster: Encounters with the Vulnerable Self* (London: Sage, 2002), p.62

upmost urgency. While various legislative endeavours concerned with those matters cannot be denied a degree of genuine philanthropy, it is interesting to note, after Gilbert, that their focus nonetheless seems to lie in the 'inculcation of domesticity and the performance of privacy.'[138] With this in mind, it becomes possible to explicate the aforementioned proliferation of literary works concerned with the various 'underclasses' as a way of engaging with the question of subjectivity and knowledge production through textuality – understood here precisely as narration. If the account of self 'becomes the ground for all truths, as only the solidity of its textual production can ensure that anything spoken or written about the 'outer' world has a stable foundation in truth'[139], it is not surprising that the middle-class subject – whose identity, let us remember, was predicated both on elevation of writing and demotion of physicality – can authenticate, from its 'private place', the identity of those who are lacking this privilege. On one level, of course, and quite simply, the 'great unwashed' were frequently illiterate, and so had no possibility – in practical terms – to bear out their identity through the medium of writing. On the other hand, however, it can be argued that it was precisely the lack of privacy, the close proximity of insufficiently differentiated bodies, which marked them as *inherently* lacking the possibility of self- description. This tendency can be seen in Henry Mayhew's encounters with the lower strata of London life, where his narrative requires its objects to, quite literally, trade their assumed identity – as is the case of, for example, 'false' beggars he encounters – for coin, as if rights to selfhood could somehow be

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[138] Pamela K. Gilbert, 'Popular Beliefs and the Body', op.cit., p.134
[139] Ian Burkitt, op.cit., p.56

procured.[140] Similarly, in Andrew Mearns' and Charles Booth's seminal studies, the poor are not given – however clichéd this might sound – a voice of their own; their lives are expressed instead through a pseudo-objective inventory of the conditions in which they live, their possessions, morals, education and behaviour. In the case of Presbury, the diversified nature of his altered state – the constant, vivid propinquity of the upper-class human and debased animal – renders his identity to be at a remove from the 'private place' of bourgeois stability. 'His outward shell was there, but it was not really he', states Edith, with Bennett's confirmation that 'it's not he – it's never the man whom we have known.'[141] When creeping – that is to say not *upright*, with all its connotations – the Professor's right to privacy seems suspended, giving the somewhat disturbing stalking behaviour of Holmes and Watson a patina of propriety which could not easily be supported when Presbury conformed to his usual, 'normal' self. As a consequence, the Professor's subjectivity – his confession – must necessarily come from the place of the other and, in an amusingly ironic twist, the body of the 'man of letters' is substituted precisely with a letter, which, in turn, narrates his identity to those who are prepared to trade knowledge for anonymity. It is telling that Presbury plays no role in those proceedings – the active subject depicted at the beginning of the story now turned into a passive object of study and control, the sleeping body of the Professor a direct demonstration of the state of his mind. Let us briefly note here that this change finds its satisfyingly symmetrical counterpart in Holmes, who starts the adventure 'huddled in an

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[140] Henry Mayhew, *London Labour and the London Poor*. Especially interesting in this regard is volume IV.
[141] Arthur Conan Doyle, 'The Adventure of the Creeping Man', op.cit., pp. 1646, 1655

arm-chair', gradually gaining energy to 'steal through the bushes' towards the end of the narrative.[142]

Here we are once again reminded of the supposedly causal link between embodiment and identity, in which, it seems, even when purposefully consigned to the margins, 'the body continues to exercise a disturbing influence even where it is absent.'[143] Indeed, it is of import to note that despite the apparent distancing from all matters corporeal, the belief in the interlinked nature of body and spirit was still widely shared, with the addition that in the nineteenth century the age-old tradition of translating, as it were, bodily traits onto qualities of character gained the credence of science.[144] Starting with the publication of Johann Casper Lavater's *Essays on Physiognomy*, phrenology, physiognomy and palmistry became systematic and reliable methods of reading the corporeal traces in a period concerned with 'the development of teaching about the body and its workings.'[145] The possibility of cataloguing, ordering and typifying the minutiae of physical existence went hand in hand with the newly emergent bourgeois approaches to corporeal economy, providing a guidebook with which to negotiate the 'increasingly complex and perplexing social reality'.[146] The bodies viewed in this way became textual in their instant readability, the visual decoding of traces providing an evaluative model for the understanding of personal, but also collective, character qualities – such a reading made possible, aptly

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[142] Ibid., pp.1637, 1657
[143] Frances Barker, op.cit., p.66
[144] See, for example, Aristotle's *Physiognomonica* for an illustration of an early physiognomic text.
[145] Charles E. Rosenberg, 'Catechisms of Health: The Body in the Prebellum Classroom', *Bulletin of the History of Medicine*, vol. 69, no.2 (1995), p.177
[146] Joshua Brown, *Beyond the Lines: Pictorial Reporting, Everyday Life, and the Crisis of Gilded Age America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), p.80

enough, through the proliferation of written works on the subject, once again

linking the linguistic with the corporeal. As Stephen Rice explains:

> [H]eads, faces, and bodies, along with more mutable gestures and
> postures, came to define clear conventions for representing so-called
> typical Africans, members of the working class, unvirtuous women,
> respectable men, and so on. These conventions […] simplified what was
> an increasingly complex social reality, shifting human multiplicity from
> the level of the individual to the level of the group, and establishing a
> visual order that noted not just difference, but hierarchy.[147]

Bodies, therefore, could denote not only singular but also collective traits,

the reading of which served to establish a highly graded ideology of corporeal

signification. Consequently, the description of Presbury's appearance as a

'portly, large-featured man, grave, tall and with the dignity of bearing [and

eyes] keen, observant, and clever to the verge of cunning' testifies, at the

same time, to his upright standing as a gentleman, his affiliation with the

upper-middle classes and his intellectual prowess as a university Professor.

On a similar note, Nadja Durbach, commenting on the anti-vaccination

movement of the late nineteenth century, talks of the importance of the

visibility of corporeal traces in instituting class identity:

> Public vaccinators were instructed to vaccinate in at least four different
> places on the arm, which left permanent scars that were easily
> discernible to the naked eye on a part of the body that was not
> infrequently exposed to the public gaze. These multiple vaccination
> cicatrices could be so deforming in and of themselves that the middle
> and upper classes generally preferred to pay for the services of a private
> vaccinator and could therefore request a single scar in a more
> inconspicuous bodily location. […] Thus, the nature, placement and
> visibility of vaccination scars themselves literally marked bodies as
> belonging to specific social groups: it was primarily the working classes

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[147] Stephen P. Rice, 'Picturing Bodies in the Nineteenth Century', in *A Cultural History of the Human Body. vol. 5,* op.cit., p.226

who used the free public vaccination stations and so bore the physical trace of this encounter throughout their lives.[148]

It might be of interest and importance to also note here the attitudes regarding the physical body which were based not only on class distinctions but also on attributes associated with quintessential 'Britishness'. The ideal late Victorian British male, in stark contrast to both the ascetic foppishness of the dandy and the Oriental effeminacy and passivity, possessed a body which was 'toughened either by physical labour or physical sport […], healthy, boisterous [and] athletic.'[149] The uneasy marriage of allegedly working-class traits, such as simplicity, strength and anti-intellectualism, with simultaneous rejection of the actual working classes produced a paradoxical milieu in which the 'English' body type was at the same time aspirational and frightening: 'the ideal of the happy Hellenic athlete, in uncomplicated and pleasurable possession of sublime beauty and health, also entailed the suspicion that such a man would be at best childlike and amoral, at worst a dissipated, evil Dorian Gray.'[150] Too much corporeal vitality, it seemed, was a possible source of moral degeneration, substantiating the belief in the intimate relationship of spirit and body. In the case of Presbury – who is, let us reiterate, *overflowing* with energy – this sentiment seems to find its fullest realisation, the excessive nature of the Professor's corporeal behaviour providing a direct and unmediated link to the change in his character and conduct: 'he has actually more energy and vitality than I can ever remember', Bennett explains, 'but it's not he – it's never the man whom we have

[148] Nadja Durbach, 'Smallpox, Vaccination, and the Marked Body', in *A Cultural History of the Human Body. vol. 5,* op.cit., pp.200-201
[149] Pamela K. Gilbert, op.cit., pp.144, 147
[150] Ibid., p.148

known.'[151] The emphasis placed throughout the story on the disproportionate nature of Presbury's deportment – in his courtship of Miss Morphy, the interview with Holmes and Watson, his actions towards Bennett – clearly points to the dangers of identity which is not immediately and obviously readable.

The aforementioned interest in phrenology not surprisingly produced a similar mode of thinking about the entire body, producing a classificatory system of constitutional types according to which a type of physique one would find most often among academics and intellectuals such as Presbury was 'Type Cérébral', characterised by a somewhat stunted growth, lack of musculature and puny appearance – it was a body in which all powers were directed at mental work, incapable of any physical exertion.[152] The Professor's body, therefore, when deciphered in all its permutations, can signify, at the same time, the identity accorded to him by class and social standing, his vocation, professional calling and personality – making any deviations from the corporeal (and so spiritual) norm plainly visible. Here we are once again reminded of the importance of bearing in mind the question of labour in relation to identity formation. If the intellectual and academic work of Presbury could be considered 'proper' – that is to say, producing visible and measurable results but also, crucially, as a discernible and comprehensible process – then his sudden upsurge in vitality would necessarily be marked as 'improper'. The athletic and energetic body of a British male was, after all, to come into being as a result of strenuous physical activity realised through physical work or sport, and preferably some of both. The lack of any visible

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[151] Arthur Conan Doyle, 'The Adventure of the Creeping Man' op.cit., p.1655
[152] Michael Hau, 'The Normal, the Ideal, and the Beautiful: Perfect Bodies During the Age of Empire' in *A Cultural History of the Human Body. vol. 5,* op.cit., p.158

and palpable traces of *work* on the body, as well as the suddenness of

Presbury's change, render his transformation immediately suspect and mark

it, following the logic of corporeal economy, as unproductive, and it is

precisely this unproductivity which is a source of unease. To paraphrase

Jaffe's term discussed in Chapter 1, Presbury becomes the *man who does*

something at night, an almost symbolic figure conflating the problematic

issues of identity, sexuality and labour and referencing the gothic

preoccupation with the 'monster in the shadows.' Another rather startling link

to the project of gothic fiction is provided by the closing paragraphs of the

story, where Holmes freely expresses his views on the nature of Presbury's

conduct:

> The real source [of evil], said Holmes, lies, of course, in that untimely love affair which gave our impetuous Professor the idea that he could only gain his wish by turning himself into a younger man. When one tries to rise above Nature one is liable to fall below it. The highest type of man may revert to the animal if he leaves the straight road of destiny. […] We will have no more trouble. But it might recur. Others might find a better way. There is danger here – a very real danger to humanity. Consider, Watson, that the material, the sensual, the worldly would all prolong their worthless lives. […] It would be the survival of the least fit. What sort of cesspool may not our poor world become?[153]

This 'confession' can be subsumed under what Halberstam claims was a

prevalent *modus operandi* of gothic authors, who 'seemed quite scrupulous

about taking a moral stand against the unnatural acts that produce

monstrosity. Long sentimental sermons on truth and purity punctuate many a

gruesome tale and leave few in doubt as to its morality by the narrative's

end.'[154] It is certainly not difficult to discern echoes of degeneration theory in

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[153] Arthur Conan Doyle, 'The Adventure of the Creeping Man', op.cit., p.1663
[154] Judith Halberstam, op.cit., p.12

the passage cited above, with overt references to Voronoff, Darwin and Lombroso, making it indeed easy to argue that 'detective fiction helps to interpolate its readers into conformity with the hegemony of white, male, middle-class values in Western capitalist-industrial societies.'[155] Such a reading, however, is not easily reconciled with the re-presentations of identity created by the narrative – its incessant movement, multiplicity and mutability provide a vivid opposition to any efforts of affixing and stereo-typing of the corporeal. If that is the case, however, the converse is also true – as much as it would be satisfying to claim, no assertions can be made as to the inherently subversive or transgressive nature of the Holmes stories, for they unarguably contain a level of ideological complicity which cannot simply be glossed over. This tension is, I believe, precisely what makes 'The Adventure of the Creeping Man' open to a truly heteroglot reading – by always engaging the 'twilight zone' of liminality the story ensures that any exaggerated claims as to its powers, whether celebratory or derogatory, will not stand up to close scrutiny. To paraphrase, albeit somewhat grandiloquently, Holmes' pronouncement used as the subheading for my reading of the story, when one tries to rise above the nature of the narrative one is liable to fall below it. It is only in explicitly acknowledging and working with the dialogically conflictual nature of the story that the danger of creating a monolithic or unifying model of reading can be averted.

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[155] Charles J. Rzepka, *Detective Fiction* (Cambridge and Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2005), p.21

❧ Chapter 3 ❧

Empire of Signs: Masculine Identity, National Mythology and the Quest for Knowledge in *The Sign of Four*

Fig.3.1. Richard Gutschmidt, Holmes and Watson from *The Sign of Four*, illustration from *Lippincott's Monthly Magazine*, 1890.

Story Synopsis:

Holmes and Watson receive a visit from Miss Mary Morstan, whose father disappeared in 1878. For the past six years she has been receiving an annual gift of a single lustrous pearl, culminating in an invitation to meet her unknown benefactor. It transpires that Mary is an heiress to an immense fortune, known as the Agra treasure, which came into the possession of her father and a fellow officer, Major Sholto, during their military service in the penal colony at the Andaman Islands. The patron, who is one of late Major Sholto's sons, desires Mary to have her share of the riches, but it turns out that the jewels have been stolen and the other son murdered in inexplicable circumstances. The Agra treasure was taken from an Indian rajah's agent during the Indian Mutiny of 1857 by an Englishman Jonathan Small and three Sikh soldiers. The four were arrested for murder and sent to the Andamans, where Small negotiated his escape with Morstan and Sholto, in return for a share of the treasure. Sholto, however, betrayed his companions, leading to Small's escape from prison and his subsequent return to Britain to reclaim the Agra riches, accompanied by a native Andamander Tonga. After tracking the criminals all over London, Holmes and Watson pursue Small and Tonga in a steam launch down the Thames, the chase culminating in the capture of the former and the death of the latter. The treasure, however, is forever lost, having been thrown overboard by Small. Watson proposes to Mary and leaves Baker Street for marital bliss.[1]

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[1] The story is variously called either 'The Sign of Four' or 'The Sign of the Four'. Although the original publication in *Lippincott's Monthly Magazine* used the longer title, the book version of the same year from which I am citing throughout uses the four-word version to which I decided to adhere.

The story of how *The Sign of Four*, one of the four full-length Holmes novellas and the second publication to feature the great detective, came into being makes for an interesting literary anecdote. To his surprise and delight, Conan Doyle was invited to dine at the Langham Hotel by Joseph M. Stoddard, the editor of *Lippincott's Monthly Magazine*, together with Oscar Wilde, who impressed Doyle immensely. This 'golden evening' culminated in a commission to write a story for the 1890 edition of the magazine, resulting in *The Sign of Four* and *The Picture of Dorian Gray* being penned.[2] Doyle narrates this episode briefly in his autobiography, placing it in between humorous and witty musings on the first meeting with his hero James Pyne ('I waited in awe for the first weighty remark which should fall from his lips. It was that there was a crack in the window') and a description of exuberant delight on completing *The White Company* ('with a cry "that's done it!" I hurled my inky pen across the room').[3] While I do not necessarily wish to suggest that the origin of the story determined or even influenced its narrative structure, Doyle's light-hearted account is nonetheless noteworthy, for it stands in vivid contrast to the numerous literary and textual analyses *The Sign of Four* engendered and which seem overall to follow the dictum that any story dealing with the imperial legacy is, or perhaps should be, a uniformly serious and sombre affair. To use an analogy, John MacKenzie's damning assertion that Edward Said, in his monolithic view of Occidental literature, is unable to cope with irony in what he perceives to be

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[2] Arthur Conan Doyle, *Memories and Adventures* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp.78-79
[3] Ibid., pp.78, 81

hegemonically Orientalist works of fiction[4], could equally be applied to a number of readings of *The Sign of Four* which, to cite Denis Porter's rather Bakhtinian view of *Orientalism*, find it impossible to resist 'finding always the same triumphant discourse where several are frequently in conflict.'[5] Although the plot certainly deals with imperial legacy – most notably through reference to the Indian Uprising of 1857, the importance of which will be explored in subsequent parts of this chapter – to view it simply as a vehicle for the advancement of jingoistic dogma and Doyle as 'one of the great Victorian apologists of empire' whose 'fiction was shaped by imperial values'[6], is to miss the productive ambivalence *The Sign of Four* enacts, not least through the aforementioned recourse to satire, parody and grotesquely gothic imagery. These elements, I want to argue, together with a complex staging of tropes already outlined and examined in previous chapters – identity, purity, interior/exterior – allow us to read *The Sign of Four* syndromatically: not merely as a 'blatant triumph of the British over the foreign'[7] but rather as a complex and often contradictory account of certain aspects, at least, of British imperial history. I am using "British" here in a very particular sense, namely, to indicate that Conan Doyle's engagement with the empire in SIGN is based on, almost exclusively, its *domestic* importance. Put simply, even though the story's overarching theme is founded on the events of the 1857 Mutiny and so directly bound up with the British colonial presence

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[4] John M. MacKenzie, *Orientalism: History, Theory and the Arts* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), p.25

[5] Denis Porter, 'Orientalism and Its Problems' in *The Politics of Theory*, ed. by Francis Barker et al. (Colchester: University of Essex, 1983), p.192

[6] Jon Thompson, *Fiction, Crime, and Empire: Clues to Modernity and Postmodernism* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993), p.68

[7] Jesse Oak Taylor-Ide, 'Ritual and the Liminality of Sherlock Holmes in *The Sign of Four* and *The Hound of the Baskervilles*', *English Literature in Transition, 1880-1920*, vol.48, no.1 (2005), p.67

in India, the real interest and importance of the narrative lies in its treatment

of the influence they exerted on home soil. My reading, therefore, will be

principally concerned, firstly, with the ways in which, through a proliferation of

newspaper articles, travelogues, personal journals, letters and works of

fiction, 'India, or at least an imagined India makes its way into the most

intimate zone of British subjectivity [...] [and] inhabits English interiority in a

pressing and inescapable way'[8] and, secondly, how the story depicts, stages

and re-works this complex issue. I want to posit that the main preoccupation

of *The Sign of Four*, put into play through reference to the events of the

Mutiny and amplified by the act of setting the narrative in 1888 – the year of

the Jack the Ripper murders – is with questions of knowledge and control of

information and their relation to the formation and transformation of national

identity.

The fact that the story takes place in 1888, the year of the Ripper, 30 years

after the Mutiny and only two from the time of its publication, allows us to

trace a distinct homology between the two events – a homology, I want to

argue, based primarily on the similarities in the status they acquired in the

pantheon of national mythology. Joseph Kestner remarks briefly on the

importance of the Ripper case to the overall historical circumstances of the

Holmes stories, but he concentrates his attention on their significance in

terms of the public awareness of crime, especially in view of the inability of

the police force to apprehend the culprit and assuage fears, whereas in *The

Sign of Four* the emphasis is placed more firmly on the issue of managing,

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[8] Don Randall, 'Autumn 1857: The Making of the Indian "Mutiny"', *Victorian Literature and Culture*, vol.31, no.1 (2003), p.12

recording and disseminating information.[9] Although the Ripper reference in

SIGN is confined to the somewhat oblique mention of 1888, the date would

certainly reverberate strongly with Conan Doyle's reading public, for the

gruesome Whitechapel murders 'had caused a social breach and crisis' that

transformed the criminal act of murder into 'a national scandal', with a

'common vocabulary' of violence still traceable in contemporary news stories

and fiction alike.[10] As there are already a number of excellent studies on the

Ripper murders and an engagement with the complexities of the topic is

beyond the scope of this thesis, I will confine myself to a brief sketch of the

most salient points which also have a bearing on the ensuing analysis of the

representations of the Indian Uprising.[11] What is of particular interest in the

reportage surrounding the killings is the role of the press in turning what was

initially perceived as a localised occurrence into a national, and later

international, event. 'All London vibrated yesterday with horror and

indignation', writes the infamous William T. Stead after the double murder of

30 September, 'there is only one topic to-day throughout all England.'[12] The

Ripper case, through a peculiar admixture of gruesome details, mystery and

precious little available facts, became a media event which simultaneously

portrayed, produced and exacerbated social panic. As Judith Walkowitz

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[9] Joseph A. Kestner, *Sherlock's Men: Masculinity, Conan-Doyle and Cultural History* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1997), pp.57-58 It is interesting to note that popular culture often pitted Holmes against the Ripper, for example in an immensely popular video game *Sherlock Holmes versus Jack the Ripper* released by Frogwares Studio in 2009 or Ellery Queen's novel *A Study in Terror* based on a film of the same title. Intriguingly, if perhaps not surprisingly, Arthur Conan Doyle has also been put forward as a likely candidate for the real-life Ripper.

[10] Judith R. Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight: Narratives of Sexual Danger in Late-Victorian London* (London: Virago Press, 1992), pp.196, 201, 228

[11] See, for example, Alexandra Warwick and Martin Willis (ed.) *Jack the Ripper: Media, Culture, History*

[12] William T. Stead, 'The Murders', *The Pall Mall Gazette*, issue 7345 (1 October 1888), p.1

explains, the distinctly literary, non-factual character of the newspaper

articles is noteworthy here:

> Unable to find historical precedents for the Whitechapel "horrors", commentators resorted to terrifying fictional analogues: "to the shadowy and wilful figures in Poe's and Stevenson's novels" or the "stealthy and cunning assassins in Gaboriau and du Boiscobey". Indeed, the events of autumn 1888 bore an "uncanny resemblance" to the literature of the fantastic: they incorporated the narrative themes and motifs of modern fantasy [...].[13]

    Linking the sensational press coverage of the Whitechapel murders to the

expansion of "New Journalism" – the pressure to create 'meaningful stories

from unrelated events' so as to boost circulation figures, Darren Oldridge

argues that one of the most crucial effects this had on the development of the

Ripper myth was the creation of a sustained and ongoing 'narrative of

terror'.[14] The articles were accompanied by a host of official and unofficial

sources, such as maps, diagrams, timelines, woodcut illustrations,

testimonies of victims' friends and families, coroner's reports or medical and

legal experts' letters to the editor, designed to both help make sense of the

events and lend them an air of factual credence, with perhaps the most

electrifying of these supplementary materials coming in the shape of letters

purporting to be written by Jack the Ripper and addressed to 'Dear Boss'.

Although initially dismissed by the police as a 'creation of an enterprising

journalist' they nonetheless 'helped to establish the murders as a media

event by focusing social anxieties and fantasies on a single elusive, alienated

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[13] Judith R. Walkowitz, op.cit., p.196
[14] Darren Oldridge, 'Casting the Spell of Terror: the Press and the Early Whitechapel Murders' in *Jack the Ripper: Media, Culture, History*, ed. by Alexandra Warwick and Martin Willis (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), pp.50, 47, 48

figure.'[15] The murders also engendered a wider debate about the poor of Whitechapel, the nature of crime, degeneration, prostitution and public safety, pointing to 'a massive national concern about disorder in the state.'[16] This, therefore, would be the cultural register the readers of *The Sign of Four* could draw upon in reference to 1888 and which, I want to posit, can be traced in an analogous fashion in the written depictions of the Seppoy Mutiny, used as a historical background of the story, and which it is thus worthwhile to examine in some detail.

Socio-Cultural History: The Indian Mutiny of 1857

The Indian Mutiny – also known as the Seppoy Mutiny, Indian Uprising or, from the perspective of the Subcontinent, The War of Independence – holds a rather peculiar and unique place in British military history. As Christopher Herbert argues, given its geopolitical import, 'empirical scale and its practical consequences, the Mutiny might not seem an outstandingly momentous historical event', especially if we consider it in comparison to the Crimean War which ended only a year earlier.[17] And yet for nineteent- century Britons the significance of the Rebellion appeared immeasurable – so much so that it was deemed by Benjamin Disraeli to constitute 'one of those great events which form epochs in the history of mankind, and which can only be accounted for by considerations demanding the deepest attention from

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[15] Judith R. Walkowitz, op.cit., p.200
[16] Joseph A. Kestner, *Sherlock's Men*, op.cit., p.58
[17] Christopher Herbert, *A War of No Pity: The Indian Mutiny and Victorian Trauma* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2008), p.1

statesmen and nations.'[18] This 'terrible Mutiny', proclaimed General Hope

Grant, 'has shaken British power in India to its foundations'[19] – a sentiment

echoed by Charles Ball in his definitive and comprehensive *The History of the*

Indian Mutiny, contained in two volumes 'illustrated with battle scenes, views

of places, portraits and maps, beautifully engraved on steel' and complete

with an index, glossary of Indian terms and table of distances between all the

major towns and cities. However, perhaps somewhat paradoxically, whereas

Grant's prose – a collection of his private journals – strives for military

precision and more factually dry language, Ball's supposedly scholarly

account opens with an unambiguous appeal to his readers' emotions:

> We shall now proceed to inscribe upon the pages of history the frightful
> details of a series of catastrophes, among which the lavish outpouring of
> innocent blood is the least evil to be deplored; to record acts of atrocity
> that compel manhood to blush for the species to which it belongs, and
> that have indelibly stained the annals of India and its people with crimes
> that disgrace the name of humanity.[20]

   Even some forty years later, in 1897, commenting on the unswerving

influence of the Revolt on British literary and journalistic production, Hilda

Gregg remarked that 'of all the great events of this century, as they are

reflected in fiction, the Indian Mutiny has taken the firmest hold on the

popular imagination', whereas, by comparison, 'the impression made on

imaginative literature by the Crimean War is a very faint one.'[21] Indeed, the

profusion of newspaper articles, books, poems, plays, memoirs, journals, as

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[18] 'News of the Week: Provincial', *The Spectator*, no.1527 (3 October 1857), p.1023
[19] James Hope Grant. *Incidents in the Sepoy War, 1857-58* (Edinburgh and London: William Blackwood and Sons, 1873), p.334
[20] Charles Ball, *The History of the Indian Mutiny vol.1* (London: London Printing and Publishing Company, 1858-1859), p.33
[21] Hilda Gregg, ''The Indian Mutiny in Fiction', *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, vol.161, issue 976 (February 1897), p.218

well as historical, military and medical accounts of the Rebellion – of the novels alone Patrick Brantlinger mentions eighty – indicates the impact with which the events of 1857 brought to bear on the Victorian mind.[22] Consequently, it would perhaps not be too audacious a claim to repeat, after Don Randall, that the Mutiny was of 'foundational importance [...] in British imperial mythology.'[23] Although the Uprising was no doubt of historical and political consequence – it led to the dissolution of the East India Company and extensive re-organisation of British military and administrative operations in India – the real weight of its mythologizing power comes to the fore – especially in relation to *The Sign of Four* – when we study it not so much as a historical but rather a *literary* event. As Herbert elucidates, it is beneficial to read the Mutiny:

> As a story recounted over and over, in one stylistic inflection and literary register after another, in various journalistic media, in the voluminous historical accounts that began appearing before the cannon had fairly ceased firing on the battlefields, in a spate of memoirs and biographies, in pictorial imagery [...] The torrent of blood and tears coursing over the plane of Upper India in 1857-59 was matched, we may say, by the torrent of representations of it, particularly literary representations, that coursed through Britain then and for years afterwards.[24]

The fictional character of the affair can be traced perhaps most vividly not, as one would expect, in the multitudinous poems and novels of the Mutiny, but in the press articles appearing with steady consistency in British newspapers, journals and periodicals of the era, the engagement with which throws into sharp relief the role information and knowledge networks played

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[22] Patrick Brantlinger, *Rule of Darkness: British Literature and Imperialism, 1830-1914* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1988), p.199
[23] Don Randall, op.cit., p.3
[24] Christopher Herbert, op.cit., p.3

in the creation and propagation of the Mutiny legend. Jerry Don Vann and Rosemary VanArsdel posit that 'the circulation of periodicals and newspapers was wider and more influential than books in Victorian society' and it was certainly the press which first provided news, speculations and depictions of the Uprising that later came to influence writers of more weighty literary materials on the topic.[25] The situation in the wake of the Uprising was however a rather unusual one, for as Randall astutely observes '1857's news of India imposes itself as urgent and unignorable, yet sets itself entirely at odds with English expectation. It is *not* new, *never* new.'[26] Although the very recent developments in telegraphic technology considerably shortened the waiting period – which, for seaborne and overland dispatches, could take up to three months – access to fresh information was still impeded by several weeks. Thus, the news of the outbreak of the Rebellion in Meerut, which took place in mid May, did not reach British shores until the very end of June.[27] The telegraphic messages were also exasperatingly sparse when it came to detailed descriptions of the events, often creating a need for substantial revisions in later publications, as an early editorial in *The Times* makes clear:

> For several days the intelligence from the North-West told of nothing but revolt and murder. As was to be expected, much thus reported has since turned out to be untrue. Stations said to be disturbed are found to be perfectly quiet and eminent public servants asserted to have fallen victims to the soldiery are preserved to their families and to the State. [...] I will endeavour to digest into a continuous narrative as much of the fragmentary intelligence that has been day by day rushing down from Agra as has been proved, or may be reasonably conjectured to be true.[28]

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[25] Jerry Don Vann and Rosemary VanArsdel (eds.) *Periodicals of Queen Victoria's Empire: an Exploration* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), p.3
[26] Don Randall, op.cit., p.4
[27] Ibid.
[28] 'The Mutiny in the Indian Army', *The Times*, issue 22719 (29 June 1857), p.8

A similar sentiment is expressed by *The Illustrated London News* a few

months later:

> Thus it happens not infrequently that the telegrams tell one story, and
> that the newspapers and private correspondence received a few days
> afterwards contradict, or put a different interpretation upon it. Hence it is
> often necessary to suspend our judgement upon events until full details
> are before us. In the meantime the public is justified in making as much
> as possible of the good news which the telegraph conveys.[29]

What is particularly striking about both passages is, firstly, the calm tone of

the reporting, with emphasis on optimistic rationality, lacking racially

motivated cries for vengeance that were soon to become a staple of the

Mutiny coverage in the British press and, secondly, the sense that in the case

of this particular happening a 'reasonable' conjecture holds as much value as

information which has been verified. In the name of narrative continuity and

hopeful optimism respectively, the reading public are invited to view the

Mutiny as an event of collective fantasy, one which can be theorised,

processed and thus produced in lieu of the available facts.

The instability and uncertainty of the events in India, as they unfold in the

national press and hastily penned histories and journals, is not something, as

Randall claims, English readers are initially 'thoroughly alerted to'.[30] The lack

of verifiable and accessible information means that, in the words of Sir Colin

Campbell, 'the story of the mutiny has reached us in so fragmentary a

manner, at such uncertain intervals, and accompanied by a host of details so

ill-digested, doubtful, and contradictory that the public have at present a very

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[29] 'The News from India', *The Illustrated London News*, issue 881 (3 October 1857), p.329
[30] Don Randall, op.cit., p.5

confused idea of the progress of the revolt.'[31] Yet despite this confusion a

clear pattern seems to emerge in the depictions of the Mutiny events, based

primarily on the supposed first-hand accounts of the unspeakable atrocities

committed by the mutineers against the British. Thus, despite his invocation

to remedy the misinformation about the uprising, Campbell – a distinguished

officer who took part in the first Opium War and the Crimean campaign,

becoming Commander-in-Chief during the Mutiny – has no qualms about

presenting a host of unverified and wild tales as common knowledge of

universal appeal, playing upon the patriotic feelings of his readers:

> No man or woman can be misled as to the feeling in Great Britain who
> has read of the unspeakable atrocities committed on our betrayed
> countrymen, and their women and children – of these latter being
> facetiously tossed in the air and caught upon bayonets – of their flesh
> being cut from their bodies and forced into the mouths of their parents –
> of a daughter made to drink her father's blood – of English mothers and
> wives driven naked through the streets, and then given up to the
> wretches bounding after them. These awful stories (and some even
> worse are whispered) will not be forgotten as long as England exists.[32]

   In a similar fashion Reverend Alexander Duff, a prominent missionary who

played a large part in the development of educational policy in India, in a

collection of private letters promptly published in a number of periodicals and

later turned into a book, puts forward that the Sepoy soldiers were

responsible for 'scenes of dishonour and torture too hideous to be narrated!'

Nonetheless, for the purpose of fidelity to facts (one can only assume) he

goes on to depict the supposed events at Jhansi in great detail:

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[31] Sir Colin Campbell, *Narrative of the Indian Revolt from Its Outbreak to the Capture of Lucknow* (London: George Vickers, 1858), p.2
[32] *Ibid.*

In other cases, where father and mother have been killed, and little children have made an effort to run away, they had been caught and thrown into the flames of the burning houses! [...] In another well-authenticated case, the European servant of a mess was seized and slowly cut up into small pieces, and portions of his flesh forced down the throats of his children, before they were themselves cruelly destroyed! [...] Elsewhere the sepoys took up living children by the legs, with the heads hanging downwards, and tore them up in two.[33]
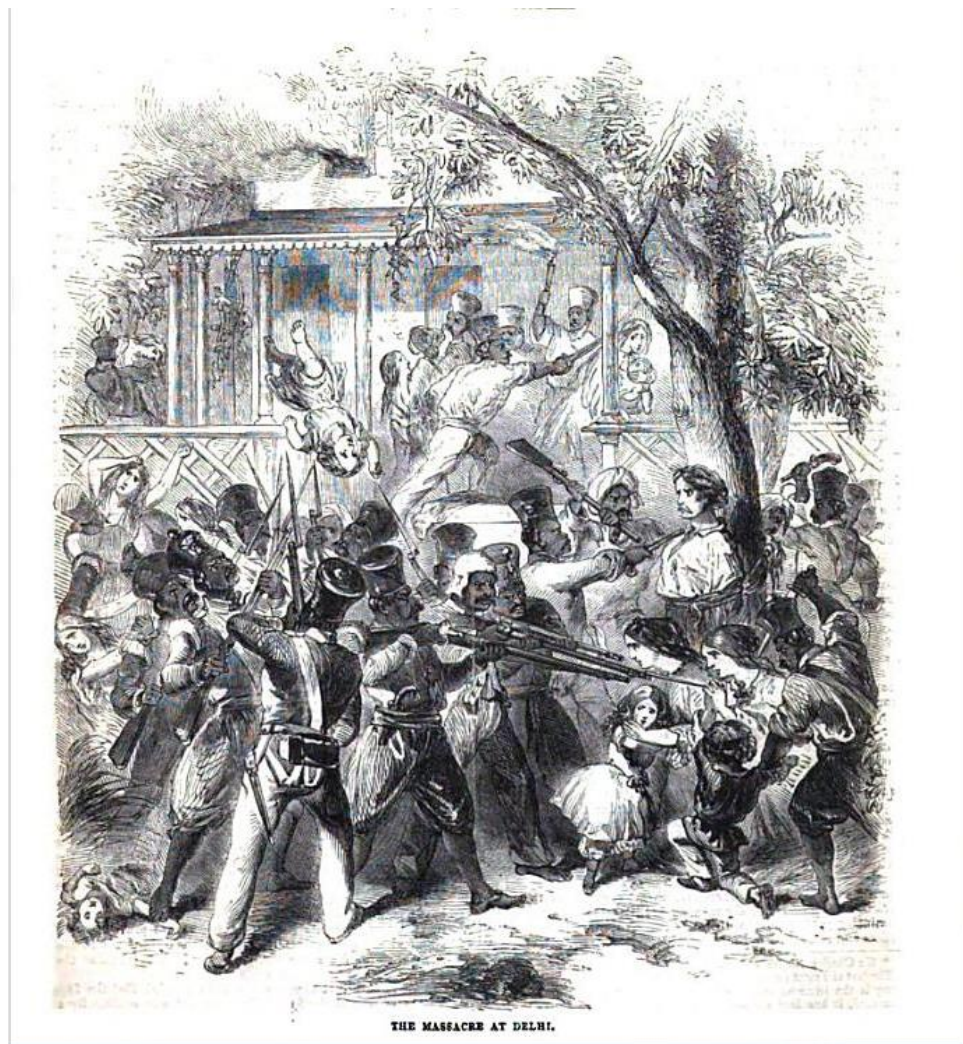

THE MASSACRE AT DELHI.

Fig.3.2. 'The Massacre at Delhi', from Sir Colin Campbell, *Narrative of the Indian Revolt from Its Outbreak to the Capture of Lucknow*.

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[33] Reverend Alexander Duff, *The Indian Rebellion: Its Causes and Results* (New York: Robert Carter and Brothers, 1858), p.63

Fig.3.3. 'Massacre at Cawnpore' from Charles Ball, *The History of the Indian Mutiny vol.1*.

The extremity of the horrors described by Duff is echoed by Ball in his fantastic depiction of the siege at Delhi, where, 'delicate women, mothers and daughters, were stripped of their clothing, violated, turned naked into the streets, beaten with canes, pelted with filth, and abandoned to the beastly lusts of the blood-stained rabble.'[34] The emphasis placed on the atrocities commited against women and children is epecially noteworthy, reaching its culmination with the infamous 'Well of Cawnpore', where British men were shot after safe passage onboard boats was promised and the women hacked to death and their bodies supposedly thrown into a well. This betrayal, as Brantlinger claims, moved and enraged the Britsh public more than any other event of the rebellion, prompting unprecedented demands for vengance and

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[34] Charles Ball, op.cit., p.75

retribution.[35] Yet despite the promulgation of eye-witness statements, letters and articles all attesting to the horrific desecration of British womanhood by the rebels, the authorities charged with investigating these crimes found no real evidence of widespread torture, rape or mutilation[36], demonstrating how a systemic production in the realm of literary representation can impact on the durability of certain tropes in the cultural register. Thus, in a memorandum of enquiries into the alleged 'dishonour' of European females, superintended by Sir William Muir, lieutenant governor of the North-West provinces, although we find repeated references to the brutality and cruelty of the mutineers, there is a univocal rebuttal of any claims pertaining to sexual violence against British women:

> In the massacres perpetrated with this object the demon of cruelty was let loose, and barbarity in every human shape indulged. The set of passions, however, called into play was, I conceive, distinct from those which would have tempted to the commission of the suspected practices. There was cold and heartless bloodthirstiness, at the farthest remove from the lust of desire. [...] I believe the taking of life at once was all that was though of [...], violation was not added to the other atrocities here as regards Europeans. [...] I have not heard of any such horrible case as that of violation preceding murder.[37]

'To a culture that held women in a special position of vulnerability', Robert Johnson remarks, 'the violation or murder of them was felt to be indicative of the lowest forms of barbarity', providing proof of the inherently debased

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[35] Patrick Brantlinger, *Rule of Darkness*, op.cit., p.201
[36] Jenny Sharpe, *Allegories of Empire: Figure of Woman in the Colonial Text* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), p.2
[37] William Coldstream (ed.) *Records of the Intelligence Department of the Government of the North-West Provinces of India During the Mutiny of 1857, vol.1* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1902), pp.369, 374, 378

nature of Asiatic races.[38] Thus, drawing on a whole lineage of historical precedents, *The Times* explains that the Mutiny:

> Is eminently a barbaric movement. It is such as what we call civilized States have always been liable to from the ruder nations whom they held in subjection [...] The Asiatics were always especially barbaric, and they are now much what they were thousands of years ago. So the precedents of this rebellion are antique, rude, and fabulous. It is the rebellion of a pampered soldiery, the oldest incident of Asiatic history and the worst feature of Rome when it declined into a barbaric empire.[39]

The aged brutality and lack of civilizational progress of the inhabitants of India is, interestingly, concurrently given as the almost inevitable cause of the rebellion, the means of justification for the colonial rule and the background against which British superiority can shine ever so brightly:

> The barbaric element is one of inevitable weakness and is the very reason of our dominion in the East. A handful of us rule over those 200,000,000 subjects because we are open in our dealings, because we abstain from wanton cruelty and malicious vengance, because we insult no religion, because we keep order – because, in a word and on the whole – we give these many nations and diverse religions greater peace and toleration than they would be likely to obtain from one another.[40]

Despite this profession of amiability, the numerous reports of the atrocities committed against British troops, and the news of the massacre of women at Cawnpore in particular, seemed to stir such hatred in 'ordinarily calm and humane men at home, who one and all join in the cry for vengeance, we may imagine their maddening effect upon the soldiery in India, and upon officers who hear of the foul murders of the wives, daughters and infants of their

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[38] Robert Johnson, *British Imperialism* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), p.34
[39] 'The Indian Mutiny is eminently a barbaric...', *The Times*, issue 22774 (1 September 1857), p.6
[40] Ibid.

friends and comrades.'[41] Desire for retribution, Ball asserts, 'seemed to pervade all hearts and nerve all arms' because 'the blood of their slaughtered countrymen, of their martyred women and children, came welling up before their mental vision', not only in Britain but 'throughout the British empire.'[42] According to the *Illustrated London News*, retaliation for the ferocities brought upon women and children, 'compared to which murder were mercy', could elicit only one response – 'to avenge them a thousandfold.' This bloodlust was not only 'the feeling of young men excited to frenzy by the atrocities perpetrated on the helpless. Stern and unhesitatingly superior officers are doing the dread work wherever the mutineers are found, and gibbet and cannon are avenging our slaughtered women and children.'[43] Although more moderate views, calling for punishment which would not overstep the boundaries of justice, could also be heard, they were not only greatly outnumbered but also often discredited as unpatriotic or motivated by personal gain. Thus, Disraeli's impassioned speech at Newport Pagnell, during which he declared that 'the religious feelings of Englishmen have undergone some sudden change [so that] instead of bowing before Jesus we are preparing to revive the worship of Moloch', had been dismissed by *The Times* as 'ill-judged effusion, which only shows how subjection of all a man's faculties to party spirit prevents him from rising to the level of patriotic feeling.'[44] In a similar fashion, Ball, moving dexterously from the local to the global register, puts forward that 'the man who should counsel half measures, or any measure short of the most stern and unrelenting justice, ought to be

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[41] 'Notes of the Week', *Illustrated London News*, issue 875 (22 August 1857), p.195
[42] Charles Ball, op.cit., p.648
[43] 'Notes of the Week', *Illustrated London News*, issue 872 (8 August 1857), p.135
[44] 'Two of the Tory leaders have favoured the world...', *The Times*, issue 22801 (2 October 1857), p.6

deemed an enemy to this country and to the human race.'[45] Instead, the

press exacerbated the bellicose public mood, publishing editorials which

called for vengeance 'unparalleled in the history of retribution'[46], hoping that

> The barbarities of the insurrection have been faithfully avenged, and that the miscreants who took refuge in Delhi have found it their tomb. [...] We may be well assured that little mercy will be shown in the hour of carnage, or rather that the truest mercy will be shown in the ruthless slaughter of monsters who should be extirpated from the face of the beautiful land they polluted with innocent blood now crying from the ground.[47]

Public terror and calls for *dies irae* found perhaps their fullest articulation in

the figure of Nana Sahib, the Rajah of Bithoor, one of the leaders of the

Mutiny who took charge of the Sepoy soldiers during the siege of Cawnpore

and who was thus held responsible for the deaths of women and children that

so incensed the British public. According to *The Times*, 'he is quite an

accomplished gentleman; he speaks English fluently and well; he was a

constant visitor at Cawnpore; a great friend of the officers; a companion in

their field sports; often invited to their picnics.'[48] This apparent Anglicisation

was perhaps one of the reasons why his conduct was viewed as a pinnacle

of treachery and why he subsequently became vilified as a figure of almost

mythical savagery and evil – to use Jules Verne's phrase, he was the 'Demon

of Cawnpore' who 'figures again and again in Victorian writing about India as

a treacherous monster who deserves no quarter.'[49] By the turn of the century,

according to Brantlinger, Nana Sahib, a 'Satanic locus of all oriental

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[45] Charles Ball, op.cit., p.648
[46] 'Notes of the Week', (8 August 1857), op.cit., p.153
[47] 'Notes of the Week', (22 August 1857), op.cit., p.195
[48] 'The Indian Mutiny is eminently a barbaric...', *The Times*, op.cit., p.6
[49] Patrick Brantlinger, *Rule of Darkness*, op.cit., p.200

treachery, lust, and murder, was one of the most familiar villains in novels and melodramas, and by far the most familiar Indian character. His evil visage peers out of countless texts, the miragelike product of the projective mechanism [...].'[50] The aforementioned *Times* editorial places him firmly in the lineage of primeval evil that has always plagued the Indian subcontinent, perpetuating anew unsubstantiated rumours of the Cawnpore massacre:

> The type of the revolt is NENA SAHIB. He is the true barbaric ideal. It is he and his predecessors who have kept Asia down since the beginning of the world, and made her the property and prey of any stronger race. Yet in a sense this man is Young Asia and we see what we are to expect from communicating European art and accomplishments to Hindoos without our religion or our manly character. [...] Some of the women he sold openly in the bazaars to his soldiers. About thirty he kept for himself. All that is known of their subsequent fate is that [...] he brought out these thirty Englishwomen to the front of his army and struck off their heads.[51]

The betrayal at Cawnpore figures prominently in both historical and fictional sources, functioning as a reductionist synecdoche for the entire Mutiny. In William Fitchett's *The Tale of the Great Mutiny*, the story of the Uprising is told exclusively through the events at Cawnpore, Lucknow and Delhi, which serve to demonstrate beyond any doubt 'the Imperial genius of the British race.'[52] By contrast, the Indians are a nation of criminals, governed by unreasonable passions and superstitions, with 'the petulance and the ignorance of children' – all 'clear enough' causes of the Mutiny.[53] Nana Sahib, an amplified culmination of all these traits, emerges from Fitchett's account as a barely human figure of mythic proportions – a man of 'subtle and evil

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[50] Ibid., pp.204-205
[51] 'The Indian Mutiny is eminently a barbaric...', *The Times*, op.cit., p.6
[52] William Fitchett, *The Tale of the Great Mutiny* (London: Smith, Elder & Co, 1909), p.22
[53] Ibid., p.11

genius', 'consumed with hate of the British name and power' who, being a true 'epicure of cruelty', 'enjoyed toying with his unconscious victims' and 'over the gorgon-like visage of murder hung a smiling and dainty mask.'[54] Interestingly, Fitchett employs a biblical metaphor to talk of Nana Sahib's demise, which later turns into a distinctly gothic depiction of ever-present evil: 'he was, like Cain, a fugitive on the face of the earth. In what disguises he hid himself, through what remote and lonely regions he wandered, where he died, or how, no man knows. His name has become an execration, his memory a horror.'[55] Similarly, in George Trevelyan's *Cawnpore*, 'probably the most popular and influential of the Victorian histories'[56], one campaign comes to stand as the epicentre of the whole Uprising, providing readers with an almost minute-by-minute account of the battle in chapters unambiguously titled 'The Treachery' or 'The Massacre'. Here, as in the *Times* editorial, Nana Sahib's betrayal is made worst by the fact that he appeared to be thoroughly Anglicised – fabulously wealthy, educated, a great reader and a sportsman pronounced by the British officers to be a 'capital fellow', who nonetheless 'did never for an instant forget the grudge which he bore our nation.'[57] The causes of the mutiny are neatly reduced to a set of Nana Sahib's perverse impulses, 'ruffled pride and disappointed greed', and the 'Well of Cawnpore' opens an unbreachable chasm between the Christians and the Hindus, the story of which 'would more fitly be told in the wild and mysterious rhythms of the old Greek drama than in sober English prose.'[58] Just how strong the

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[54] Ibid., pp.91, 110, 140
[55] Ibid., p.147
[56] Patrick Brantlinger, *Rule of Darkness*, op.cit.,p.202
[57] George Otto Trevelyan, *Cawnpore* (London and Cambridge: Macmillan & Co, 1866), pp.56, 57
[58] Ibid., p.57

public loathing of the Rajah was can be attested by the reception received by an immensely popular play *Jessie Brown; or, the Relief of Lucknow* written by Dion Boucicault. The drama, although full of historical inaccuracies – Nana Sahib is mysteriously turned into a follower of Islam and transported from Cawnpore to Lucknow – enjoyed great success, not least because of its treatment of the Rajah, who was portrayed as a bloodthirsty sexual predator, consumed with yearning for a Mrs. Campbell, widow of an honoured army officer. It is interesting to note that Boucicault's eponymous heroine, Jessie, learns about the massacre at Cawnpore from *The Calcutta News*, illustrating the role of the press in the dissemination of news and views about the Mutiny.[59] Nana Sahib's reasons for the sacking of Lucknow are presented here as guided purely by desire and at a remove from any political or national concerns – the ordered slaughter of British children will be called off if Mrs. Campbell surrenders and becomes Nana's mistress – thus conflating barbaric savagery of the Mutiny with an eroticised spectacle of the East and the amoral lasciviousness of the Indian. This portrayal resonated so strongly with the play's audiences that they repeatedly pelted actors who performed the role of Nana Sahib with rotten fruit and broken umbrellas, forcing the author of the show to take on the part of the villain.[60] The figure of Nana Sahib, just like that of Jack the Ripper some thirty years later, thus allowed for the fears and terrors of a complex historical and cultural event to be consolidated into a single image of pure evil, onto which disquiet and fantasy could be displaced in equal measure.

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[59] Dion Boucicault, *Jessie Brown; or, the Relief of Lucknow* (New York: Samuel French, 1858), p.18
[60] Patrick Brantlinger, *Rule of Darkness*, op.cit., p.206

As Herbert astutely observes, several generations of scholars seemed to have accepted the assumption that the 'British responses [to the Uprising] can only be portrayed, root and branch, as expressing the morally distorted dehumanizing logic of imperialism itself'[61], so that, for example, Brantlinger can authoritatively declare, evoking Said, that 'Victorian writing about the Mutiny expresses in concentrated form the racist ideology [of] Orientalism. [...] The texts concerned are instances of "the nineteenth century academic and imaginative demonology" [...] that calls for the total subjugation of India.'[62] Although the Victorian views on the Mutiny were certainly, on the whole, hostile and, as can be glimpsed from the selection of sources presented here, the immediate response of the various written media was to glorify the heroism of the British soldiers and vilify the Indian rebels, such a view cannot simply be presented as an expression of a uniform and coherent ideology of imperialism, for the newspaper articles, histories and works of fiction dealing with the Mutiny are rife with internal contradictions which the presence of unambiguously racist or Orientalist content throws into ever sharper relief. What is of particular significance here is not only the coexistence of a variety of opposing or differing sources in the public arena, such as, for example, the staunchly anti-Indian *Illustrated London News* and the somewhat more restrained *Spectator*, but also, more importantly, the paradoxical divergence of opinions present *within* works consistently analysed and read as homogeneously jingoistic. Thus, the aforecited Ball, among the graphic depictions of terrors perpetrated by the mutineers, writes of the 'stern purpose of retributive justice' to be brought by 'a noble band of

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[61] Christopher Herbert, op.cit., p.6
[62] Patrick Brantlinger, *Rule of Darkness*, op.cit., pp.199-200

avengers' in the shape of the British army, guided as they are by 'rational and benevolent faith', in contrast to the 'exterminating ferocity of the rebel hordes'.[63] This 'retributive justice', however, takes the form of such heinous annihilation and carnage that it not only becomes difficult to afford any moral superiority to the actions of the British soldiers but even to distinguish with any certainty between oppressor and victim. A substantial part of Ball's *magnum opus* is in fact filled with letters and witness statements reciting in minute detail the brutality of imperial reprisal, as is the case with this testimony of a medical officer describing 'blowing from guns' :

> The grouping of the men's remains in front of each gun was various and frightful. One man's head was perched upon his back, and he was staring round as if looking for his legs and arms. All you see at the time is a cloud like a dust storm composed of shreds of clothing, burning muscle, and frizzing fat with lumps of coagulated blood. Here and there a stomach or a liver came falling down in a stinking shower. One wretched fellow slipped from the rope by which he was tied to the guns just before the explosion, and his arm was nearly set on fire. While hanging in his agony under the gun, a sergeant applied a pistol to his head; and three times the cap snapped, the man each time wincing from the expected shot. At last a rifle was fired into the back of his head, and the blood poured out of the nose and mouth like water from a briskly handled pump. This was the most horrible sight of all. I have seen death in all its forms, but never anything to equal this man's end.[64]

The irony of Ball's stance is not lost on Herbert, who dryly remarks that 'one could imagine a no doubt perverse counterreading of the book as an antiwar manifesto of a strikingly post-Victorian style, camouflaged in the sheep's clothing of militaristic jingoism.'[65] In a painstakingly detailed account of the Mutiny penned by Thomas Rice Holmes, another of the Uprising's great histories, although we find depictions of atrocities committed by the

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[63] Charles Ball, op.cit., pp.185, 372, 644, 530
[64] Ibid., vol.2, p.145
[65] Christopher Herbert, op.cit., p.156

rebels – especially, and perhaps not surprisingly, in the chapter on Cawnpore – there is also a sense of rational restraint permeating the pages. Holmes explains in the preface that his approach is to concentrate on highlighting the probable causes of the Mutiny, with particular reference to 'what sort of men the chief actors in the struggle were, and to realise what they and their comrades *and opponents* did and suffered.'[66] This purposeful attempt at objectivity is certainly striking, for it departs quite sharply from the mode of reading which would see the British response to the Mutiny as a uniform stream of apologia for imperialism. Describing the notorious case of greased cartridges as one of the possible causes of the Mutiny (a cause, let us add, now widely discredited), Holmes is at pains to explain the importance of the episode to the British public:

> [The Sepoy was told that] the Government was busy manufacturing cartridges greased with the fat of cows and swine, and the sepoys would have to bite the forbidden substance before loading. It is hard to convey to the mind of an English reader an adequate idea of the force of the shock beneath which the imagination of that Brahmin must have reeled when he heard these words. [...] It must be remembered that not faith, not righteousness, but ritual was the essence of his religion. For him to be told that he was to touch with his lips the fat of the cow was as appalling as it would have been to a mediaeval Catholic to listen to the sentence of excommunication.[67]

Here, the outbreak of the Rebellion is not attributed to the unreasonable fancies of the idolatrous Hindus but rather, importantly, to the lack of understanding, adequate information and communication exhibited by the British government in India. Early warnings of disquiet which the rumours of

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[66] Thomas Rice Holmes, *A History of the Indian Mutiny: And of the Disturbances which Accompanied It Among the Civil Population* (London and New York: Macmillan & Co, 1904), p.viii, emphasis added
[67] Ibid., pp.79-80

the cartridges might cause were apparently ignored and 'it was the Military Board that neglected it; and on the Board the chief blame must lie', for 'official routine hindered the prompt action which might possibly have nipped the evil in the bud', exposing 'how easily the Governor-General could be led by his advisers'.[68]

The view that the Mutiny was not simply wrought on the benevolent rulers by a military fraction of rebels but rather amounted to a national uprising in response to the British conduct in India was also forcibly championed by Disraeli who, in his speech to the House of Commons, repeatedly stressed that 'the mutineers in the Bengal native army were not so much the avengers of their own individual injuries as exponents of general discontent', enumerating various causes of the Uprising as 'the forcible destruction of native authority in India by our Government', 'the disturbance of the settlement of property' and 'tampering with the religion of the people'.[69] It is worth mentioning that a number of Disraeli's speeches are reproduced in Ball's *History*, together with other Parliamentary papers which denounce British conduct on the Subcontinent and which, when read alongside his calls for remorseless and bloody justice to be served, perversely seem to provide a direct condemnation of the rhetoric pervading the book. To document this point with one more source, in the letters of Reverend Duff – who, as a Christian missionary, is unable to view the Hindu and Muslim religions as anything other than ' huge congeries of falsities and lies'[70] and whose work could easily be positioned at an extremity of imperialism – we find a

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[68] Ibid., p.81, 83
[69] 'London, Tuesday, July 28, 1857', *The Times*, issue 22744 (28 July 1857), p.9
[70] Reverend Alexander Duff, op.cit., p.355

remarkably frank and bitter summary of his thoughts on the topic of the

relations between the natives and the British Government:

> The real truth is, that the people of Bengal are proverbially passive, with a capacity for enduring wrongs without resistance more wonderful than that of the Russian serf or American slave. But even with such a people there may be a limit beyond which wrongs may not be tolerated. That there is a feeling of discontent [...] no one who mingles freely with the people can possibly deny. This is a feeling, however, which the Government officials are usually the very last to discover or to believe. Their object very naturally is to have it proclaimed that all is quiet – all right; that all are contented, all satisfied, all happy; since such a state of things would redound to their own credit, flatter their self-complacency, and earn for them at once promotion and renown.[71]

Further, Duff's analysis is even more damning:

> The people, finding the burden of their wrongs to be intolerable, may one day suddenly rise en masse, and take the redress of their grievances into their own hands. [...] At present, the position of the Government, or its apparent aspect towards the people at large, is deplorable in the extreme. [...] The Government too much and too often, appears towards them in the attitude of a severe, unrighteous and inexorable tyrant.[72]

It is important to note at this stage a curious appropriation which can be

observed in the rhetoric of the apologist of the empire, who supported the

view of the Mutiny as solely a military uprising restricted to disgruntled

soldiery. While denying that the Rebellion was an event of national

importance for India it was at the same time positioned, remarkably, as a

national event for Britain, and one which forcibly put into question the very

nature of the imperial project. Nowhere is this paradox more evident than in

the 'Proclamation for a Day of Solemn Fast, Humiliation and Prayer' issued

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[71] Ibid., p.293
[72] Ibid., p.295

by Queen Victoria to take place on 7 October together with a series of accompanying sermons to be delivered all over the British Isles. What is of particular significance in this edict is that, far from the supposed moral, racial and cultural superiority of the British, what it in fact expresses, in distinctly religious terms, is an assertion – or perhaps implication – that Britain bears responsibility for the Mutiny:

> We, taking into our most serious consideration the grievous mutiny and disturbances which have broken out in India, and putting our trust in the Almighty God that He will graciously bless our efforts [...] hereby command that a Public Day of Solemn Fast, Humiliation, and Prayer be observed [...] that so both we and our people may humble ourselves before Almighty God, in order to obtain pardon for our sins.[73]

These sins, thunders Charles Spurgeon, one of the most popular Victorian preachers, in his Crystal Palace sermon delivered to 24,000 listeners, are, firstly, 'the sins of the government of India' and they 'have been black and deep.'[74] Spurgeon's sermon is a remarkably ambiguous piece of public address, for although it unequivocally denigrates the Hindu faith, blaming the terrors of the Mutiny on the inherent barbarity of Indian religion, it also, at the same time, recognises the role deficiencies of the British colonial rule played in the uprising. Consequently, although the rebellion is not 'a revolt of a nation' but merely a result of 'lust and ambition', 'he who has heard the shrieks of tormented natives, who has heard the well-provoked curses of dethroned princes, might have prophesised that it would not be long before

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[73] 'A Proclamation for a Day of Solemn Fast, Humiliation, and Prayer', *Daily News*, issue 3547 (28 September 1857), p.4
[74] Charles Haddon Spurgeon, *Spurgeon's Fast-day Sermon: Fast-day service held at Crystal Palace, Sydenham, on Wednesday, October 7th, 1857* (New York: Sheldon, Blakeman and Co,1858), p.27

God would unsheathe his sword to avenge the oppressed.'[75] Further, the distinctions between the Government in India and the British subjects become subtly but steadfastly obscured, so that although Spurgeon calls upon the nation to 'weep for the deeds thy governors have not yet strength of mind to stop', it is 'our sin that has brought [the Mutiny] on us.'[76] What is perhaps most noteworthy here, is the ease with which the sermon's focus shifts from meditations on the Mutiny to the enumeration of misdeeds and sins that are much closer to home and which, according to Spurgeon, are a great deal more grievous and 'the most likely to have brought this visitation upon us':

> We have long been allowing the infamous nuisances of Hollywell –
> street [where pornography is sold]; bless God they are pretty well done
> for! [...] In the Haymarket and in Regent-street [...] is the sin of allowing
> infamy to walk before our eyes thus publicly. [...] Lords and ladies of the
> land, have sat in playhouses, and listened to plays that were a long way
> from decent [...]. But, my friends, I am inclined to think that our class
> sins are the most grievous. Behold this day the sins of the rich. How are
> the poor oppressed! How are the needy down-trodden! [...] Mark, again,
> the sins of merchants. [...] It is impossible for me to-day to enter into all
> the sins of illiberality, of deceit, of bigotry, of lasciviousness, of carnality,
> of pride, of covetousness, and of laziness which infest this land. [77]

On the 'Day of Solemn Fast, Humiliation, and Prayer' the Indian Mutiny thus curiously functions as a statement on the morality and integrity of British home rule. What occurs, as Randall remarks, is 'an appropriation of Indian situations and events: the Indian uprisings have no real meaning for India; they are the Almighty's means of elaborating England's meaning for the

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[75] Ibid., pp.23, 24, 27
[76] Ibid, pp.30-31
[77] Ibid., pp.31-36

edification of Englishmen.'[78] Put differently, the Mutiny is a British national cause which comes to be expressed and experienced in both communal and private terms – as the *Daily News* reports, 'it is by such private exercises that men nerve themselves for the duties of private life; it is by such public and social exercises that nations nerve themselves for their mightier undertakings.'[79] What the Mutiny highlights for Britain, therefore, and what perhaps goes some way towards explaining its enduring cultural presence and its profoundly traumatic status, is a question of national, imperial, but also personal identity – through India, or rather through imagined India, the exotic now bears upon the British interiority in a pressing and inexorable way. This complex interrogation of identity, especially in relation to the questions of knowledge and information, takes us back to the aforementioned moral panic created by Jack the Ripper, typologically linking the events of the Mutiny with the murders of 1888. Both happenings take on mythical status in the pantheon of Victorian imagination and both expose the role of writing – in the form of literary fiction, factual histories and, perhaps most palpably, press editorials – in the perception, creation and dissemination of what comes to be regarded as accurate knowledge, highlighting the complex proximity and interdependence of fact and fiction. *The Sign of Four*, by playing upon the interconnectedness of the two events, allows us to engage with the historical, the social and the literary discourses of Victorian imperialism in a way which brings to light their dialogic and heteroglot nature, departing from a more monolithic and unified model.

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[78] Don Randall, op.cit., p.10
[79] 'London, Thursday, Oct. 8', *Daily News*, issue 3556 (8 October 1857), p.4

Literary Influences: Adventure Romance

'It is a romance!', cries Mrs Forrester – Mary Morstan's employer and friend in *The Sign of Four* – on listening to Watson's narrative of the singular events in which he took part, 'an injured lady, half a million in treasure, a black cannibal, and a wooden-legged ruffian. They take the place of the conventional dragon or wicked earl.'[80] This summary presents perhaps the most succinct and accurate description of the novella's literary structure for, I want to argue, *The Sign of Four* – in composition, plot and content – both embodies and queries the tenets of adventure fiction, especially the quest romance so popular in the late Victorian period. For a supposedly simple piece of popular fiction the story seems to have engendered a remarkable number of readings which trace its literary heritage to a wide variety of sources and it would be possible to claim that it is a curiously multi-genre creation, where the adventure romance category is supplemented by evocations of and references to romantic or erotic fiction, gothic novel, poetry and satire, with the mystery or the detective element playing a somewhat subordinate role. Thus, for Stephen Arata, *The Sign of Four* is heavily indebted to Wilkie Collins' *The Moonstone*, both in its thematic interest and 'influential elaborations of detective paradigms.'[81] He enumerates a number of plot and structure commonalities between the two stories, claiming that since Conan Doyle 'shamelessly lifted' the main intrigue of the narrative from Collins' piece, both works establish 'lines of connection between imperial politics and trouble at home', adding more contentiously that 'after protracted

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[80] Arthur Conan Doyle, *The Sign of Four* (London: Spencer Blackett, 1890), p.164
[81] Stephen Arata, *Fictions of Loss in the Victorian Fin de Siècle* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p.133

dalliances with exoticism and decadence, each finally celebrates the power of reason and science to master the world.'[82] These similarities, however, underscore important differences between the two texts, exposing variations in topic as well as inflections in genre – *The Moonstone* 'moves squarely within the mainstream of Victorian domestic realism' and is an example of how to use 'an imperial indiscretion to tell a tale of domestic turmoil', whilst *The Sign of Four* 'operates within the purlieu of the male romance', utilising 'an instance of domestic mystery to tell a tale of imperial crime.'[83] Interestingly, for Arata the Victorian realist novel works to create and contain issues of class and gender, whereas adventure romance is markedly more ambivalent and his reading of *The Sign of Four* gestures towards the possibility, at least, of a critique of imperialism. Although that is not something Arata elaborates on, one would assume, if Doyle's tale is indeed simply a reworking of Collins' idea, that some traces of domestic realism would also find their way into its structure, perhaps problematising his claims as to the subversive nature of the novella's imperial engagement.

The Moonstone is also referenced as Conan Doyle's principal literary influence by Benjamin O'Dell, albeit the conclusions he reaches oppose those of Arata. For O'Dell, *The Sign of Four* 'departs from the tradition of overconfident adventurism prominently featured in earlier novels of imperial conquest', playing instead with 'images of narcotic drug use, domestic purity and foreign invasion' and warning against 'the dangers of English hubris towards horrific sublimity' that are also to be found in such texts as *Dracula*

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[82] Ibid., pp.133-134
[83] Ibid., p.134

and *Heart of Darkness*.[84] In a sweeping statement which seems to wilfully ignore the complexity of Jonathan Small's Mutiny-influenced confession, O'Dell posits that the apparent lack of an articulate colonial subject or a representation of a colonial space outside of London bars 'any notion that *The Sign of Four* is a novel directly informed by imperial conflict.'[85] He sees Collins' writing about empire as more 'favourable' to the subaltern voices – mostly, it seems, by virtue of his depiction of the three Hindu Brahmins – but reads Doyle's text as 'in essence revealing itself as the actualization of the imperial perspective Edward Said has called Orientalism.'[86]

An entirely different literary tradition is evoked by Diana Barsham who, concentrating on the poetic elements of the story, reads the death of Tonga and the disappearance of the jewels as an invocation of 'that earlier tale of colonial oppression and lost fathers – Shakespeare's *The Tempest*.'[87] The name of the steam launch aboard which Small and Tonga try to make their escape – *The Aurora* – suggests Tennyson's poem 'Tithonus', a mythological lament about the passing of time and marriage, reference to which allows Barsham to posit *The Sign of Four* as a 'masculine adventure whose dark, opposing double is the concept of the heterosexual marital home.'[88] Taking up a different part of the story, Lawrence Frank also briefly mobilises reference to the poetic, paring the exotic opulence of Thaddeus Sholto's apartment with De Quincey's Oriental dreams in *Confessions*.[89]

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[84] Benjamin O'Dell, 'Performing the Imperial Abject: The Ethics of Cocaine in Arthur Conan Doyle's *The Sign of Four*', *The Journal of Popular Culture*, vol.45, no.5 (2012), p.983
[85] Ibid., p.984
[86] Ibid., pp.983, 984
[87] Diana Barsham, *Arthur Conan Doyle and the Meaning of Masculinity* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000), p.122
[88] Ibid.
[89] Lawrence Frank, 'Dreaming the Medusa: Imperialism, Primitivism and Sexuality in Arthur Conan-Doyle's *The Sign of Four*', *Signs*, vol.22, no.11 (Autumn 1996), p.63

On the other side of the literary spectrum, Joseph Kestner reads SIGN as an unambiguous portrayal of Doyle's 'masculine agenda', which draws on Robert Louis Stevenson's *Treasure Island*, allowing for the text to be theorised as part of 'male adventure narratives' and 'male literary tradition', with emphasis on comradeship and heroism.[90] Here, the overt references to Stevenson's work – the prominence of damaged male bodies and the playful antonymic transformation of Long John Silver into Jonathan Small, for example – create an intertextual palimpsest that also gestures towards a preceding Holmes story, *A Study in Scarlet*. In Kestner's view, although masculine adventure narratives undoubtedly contributed to the evolution of the detective story, *The Sign of Four* 'transcends the acknowledgment of literary tradition to become a recognition of the exploration of masculinity in a male tradition of the 1880s.'[91]

The forging of a direct link between adventure fiction and masculinity – both at the level of form and content – seems to be supported by a dictionary definition which states that it comprises a story

> addressed for the most part to boys, in which a hero or group of heroes engages in exotic and perilous exploration. It is a masculinized variety of romance, one in which the erotic and religious dimensions common to other types are subordinated to or completely replaced by an emphasis on vigorous outdoor activity and the practical arts of survival amid unexpected dangers, along with a cultivation of such virtues as courage and loyalty. Marvellous events may be witnessed, but usually within a context provided by modern scientific knowledge.[92]

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[90] Joseph A. Kestner, *Sherlock's Men*, op.cit., pp.58-59
[91] Ibid., p.60
[92] 'Adventure Story' in *The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*, ed. by Chris Baldick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p.4

In a similar fashion, John G. Cawelti posits adventure as one of the 'simplest fantasy archetypes', a formulaic literary style based on a hero 'overcoming obstacles and dangers and accomplishing some important mission.' Often, the quest involves interplay with a villain and a romantic entanglement, but 'the true focus of interest in the adventure story is the character of the hero and the nature of the obstacles he has to overcome.'[93] The archetypal nature of the story is worth stressing, for 'it can clearly be traced back to the myths and epics of earliest times and has been cultivated in some form or other by almost every other society.'[94] Creating a historical genealogy, Robert Fraser posits the masculine romance of the 1880s as an extension of the medieval epic tales, most notably the legends of the Arthurian cycle – a connection hinted at by Mrs. Forrester in her invocation of a dragon and a wicked earl – consequently enumerating major components of the genre as 'the common code of chivalry; the quest for a fabled source of wisdom; forbearance; virility; fighting.'[95] Such a perspective seems to be shared by Victorian writers and critics, who also look for antecedents of contemporary romance fiction in literary production of the earlier periods, listing myths, legends and fairy tales as influential in the development of adventure. In these accounts romance often emerges not simply as a literary genre but rather cultural form more akin to orature, whose lineage can be traced to prehistoric times, were storytelling supposedly played a ritualistic function. For Henry Rider Haggard, one of the most popular adventure writers,

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[93] John G. Cawelti, *Adventure, Mystery, and Romance: Formula Stories as Art and Popular Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976), pp.39-40
[94] Ibid., p.40
[95] Robert Fraser, *Victorian Quest Romance: Stevenson, Haggard, Kipling and Conan Doyle* (Plymouth: Northcote House, 1998), p.7

The love of romance is probably coeval with the existence of humanity. So far as we can follow the history of the world we find traces of it and its effects among every people, and those who are acquainted with the habits and ways of thought of savage races will know that it flourishes as strongly in the barbarian as in the cultured breast. In short, it is like the passions, an innate quality of mankind.[96]

In his article 'Realism and Romance', Andrew Lang echoes Haggard's sentiments, employing anthropological terminology to argue that romance literature appeals to 'the savage within us' and that artifices of civilization do not dim the 'love of adventure, and of mystery, and of a good fight [which] lingers in the minds of men and women.'[97] What is significant in Lang's critique, and what persistently comes to be expressed in literary debates of the 1880s, is the articulation of disparity between adventure romance and realist novel, with the former presented as embodying the virtues of healthy British maleness – a sentiment striking in its apparent acknowledgment that to engage with a more genuinely British masculinity required recourse to a savage Other. Thus, although Lang concurs that 'what is good, what is permanent, may be found in fiction of every genre', his preference is for the romantic narrative which expresses 'the joy of adventurous living', whereas the novels, especially of the foreign kind, 'have an almost unholy knowledge of the nature of women.'[98] While Lang is able to overlook their 'laboured workmanship in language' and 'mixed style', his main objection seems to stem from the fact that the subject matter 'makes one feel uncomfortable in

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[96] Henry Rider Haggard, 'About Fiction', *Contemporary Review*, vol.51 (February 1887), p.172
[97] Andrew Lang, 'Realism and Romance', *Contemporary Review*, vol.52 (November 1887), pp.690, 692
[98] Ibid., pp.685, 689, 688

the reading, makes one feel intrusive and unmanly.'[99] Linking the novels of Zola to the development of degenerate eroticism full of 'lewd' and 'unmanly' topics, Haggard puritanically hopes that 'this naturalistic school of writing will never take firm root in England, for it is an accursed thing', adding an ingenious elucidation on the nature of the domestic novel in Britain:

> [In England] we are at the mercy of the Young Person, and a dreadful nuisance most of us find her. […] But French naturalism is one thing, and the unreal, namby-pamby nonsense with which the market is flooded here is quite another. […] Why do *men* hardly ever read a novel? Because in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred it is utterly false as a picture of life; and, failing in that, it certainly does not take ground as a work of high imagination. The ordinary popular English novel represents life as it is considered desirable that schoolgirls should suppose it to be.[100]

Although Haggard's description of the novel might seem somewhat uncharitable, if not blatantly chauvinistic, there can be no doubt that the 1880s brought a revival of adventure romance which, in terms of sales at least, contributed to the gradual decline of the classical three-volume narratives. The reasons for this phenomenon are multifaceted and complex, bringing together discourses of imperialism, the question of personal and national degeneration exposed in preceding chapters, as well as transformations of literary market and readership. After the Indian Mutiny, British colonial rule suffered from a succession of similar 'disloyalties', most notably the Zulu War, the First Boer War and the occupation of Egypt with another highly significant event in the pantheon of national mythology, the death of General Gordon at Khartoum. Kestner adds 'anxiety about the imperial attitudes of Germany, the economic challenges posed by the United

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[99] Ibid., p.688
[100] Henry Rider Haggard, op.cit., p.176, 177

States, and concern about the physical deterioration of the English male' as important factors contributing to the need for, on the one hand, escapist literature which would provide comfort and reassurance in a midst of crisis and, on the other, supply a host of culturally and historically significant images and imprints of masculinity to emulate. Put simply, in Kestner's view, adventure romance flourished because it responded to a deep-seated 'crisis of masculinity', compensating, with renewed vigour, for a growing lack of confidence in the imperial project.[101]

Although such a reading is no doubt plausible, it does not adequately explain how adventure narratives, as mere vehicles for official dogma without high literary merit, came to occupy a place of such cultural significance, supplanting the novel as a site for elucidation of certain national values. It is somewhat curious for a literary genre so thoroughly steeped in myth and folklore to exert such a powerful appeal over the reading public, wielding influence so immediate in its application. If we cast our mind back to the definition of adventure proposed by Cawelti, an interesting paradox seems to emerge between, on the one hand, the universal, almost a-historical appeal of adventure tales and, on the other, Cawelti's assertion that hero quests, as examples of formulaic fiction, 'are very closely tied to particular cultures and audiences', necessitating a creation of 'different heroes for different audiences.'[102] Similarly, after expounding the historical and the mythological, Fraser stresses the contemporary elements of adventure fiction, claiming that 'probably the most common way in which the Victorians thought about quest romance was as a narrative prose form which retained the shape and

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[101] Joseph A. Kestner, *Masculinities in British Adventure Fiction, 1880-1915* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), pp.4, 5
[102] John G. Cawelti, op.cit., p.40

trajectory of epic or myth, while keeping in touch with the modern world through its physical context, its characterization, and its dialogue.'[103] Far from being uniformly monologic, therefore, adventure romance emerges as a genre marked by internal contradictions – timeless yet contemporary, mythic but scientifically sound – and, as Fraser remarks, Victorian adventure tales actively explore and negotiate this paradox, staging an 'ambiguous, versatile relationship between believability and fact.'[104] As such, they can be read as complex sites of contestation between a variety of masculine paradigms, at the same time producing and querying the idealised conception of personal masculine identity, so intimately bound with the dominant versions of national identity. This ambiguous nature of adventure romance, I want to argue, in agreement with Nicholas Daly, allows us to theorise it not only as an archaic form fulfilling the need of a narrative drive but also an integral and essential part of fin de siècle modernity. As Daly contends, romance literature provided a type of 'narrative theory of social change' that 'enabled the late Victorian middle-class culture to successfully accommodate certain historical changes, notably modernizing processes.'[105] One such process, which is markedly present in *The Sign of Four* and which provides a direct link to the issues of knowledge and information expounded previously, is the rise of professionalism and the professional ethos. Writing about travel adventures, Fraser notes that 'though the adventurers are usually amateurs – indeed often pride themselves on being such – the nature of their enquiries has to do with the harnessing of technical and exclusive disciplines [...]. In most

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[103] Robert Fraser, op.cit., p.12
[104] Ibid., p.13
[105] Nicholas Daly, *Modernism, Romance, and the Fin De Siècle: Popular Fiction and British Culture, 1880-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp.5, 24

instances, the consummation of the quest consists of the verification of some factual, as opposed to moral, truth.'[106] Here, the link with detective fiction and Holmes stories in particular seems obvious – the oft emphasised unofficial status of the great detective coincides with his immense knowledge on a wide array of esoteric topics. As Daly states, 'the romance, insofar as it can be linked to a specific class or class fraction, embodies the fantasies of the emerging professional group, whose power is based on their access to and control of certain forms of knowledge.'[107] What I now hope to show is how the questions of knowledge production, acquisition and dissemination highlighted in relation to the historical background of the story, together with the relationship between public and private identity, hinted at in my reading of the Fast Day sermons, and, finally, the engagement with masculinity put into play through the genre of adventure romance, all come to be articulated in *The Sign of Four* in a way which brings into light how they reinforce and query each other in a difficult yet rewarding reciprocity.

"When You Have Eliminated the Impossible, Whatever Remains, However Improbable, Must Be the Truth": *The Sign of Four*

By tracing the workings of imperial and national history, knowledge and identity *The Sign of Four* works to illuminate their ambiguous and complex interdependency. Here, as is frequently the case in the Holmesian narratives, the vital clues as to the themes and issues with which the story is concerned

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[106] Robert Fraser, op.cit., pp.16-17
[107] Nicholas Daly, op.cit., p.8

can be found in its opening paragraphs. The scene of Holmes' cocaine injection, so often expunged from filmic renditions of the tale, together with the subsequent exposition on the nature of detection culminating in the spectacular reading of Watson's watch, although narratively speaking almost entirely ornamental, are nonetheless vital in instituting a whole matrix of intricately linked tropes – or, to syndromatically reference the title of the story, *signs* – including the questions of imperialism, commodity culture, knowledge and professionalism. The novella opens, perhaps appropriately enough for a story so keenly concerned with familial arrangements, with a scene of simple domesticity – a velvet-lined chair, a mantelpiece – only to degenerate almost immediately into a seemingly more sinister and disturbing scenario:

> Sherlock Holmes took his bottle from the corner of the mantel-piece 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 arm-chair with a long sigh of satisfaction.[108]

The way in which Watson describes the scene is instructive, for the language used here is not one of a close friend or even a medical advisor but rather a scientifically detached observer, evoking depictions from anthropological or ethnographic studies and the scene certainly has overtones of ritual or – to reference De Quincey – liturgical symbolism about it. Just like the scientists who researched the customs of the Andaman Indians, Watson professes himself to be repulsed by the strange spectacle

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[108] Arthur Conan Doyle, *The Sign of Four*, op.cit., pp.1-2

before him, which he had witnessed 'three times a day for many months', and yet there is also captivated fascination present in the report. After all, he recounts it at the very beginning of the story, waiting for the conclusion of the practice before raising objections 'as a comrade [...] and as a medical man.'[109] Although ostensibly presented at the opposite ends of a spectrum – the respectable, middle-class doctor and the decadent drug addict – Holmes and Watson are linked here, in a creation of the first of many pairs of doubles which populate the story, by *habit*. When Holmes' eyes 'rest thoughtfully' on his arm, the gesture is mirrored by Watson's gaze and then repeated, in lingering detail, in the act of writing. Referencing Laura Mulvey, Kestner argues that the male gaze in SIGN functions primarily as a reaffirmation of 'gendered empowerment', especially when the object of the gaze 'is engaged in heroic action.'[110] Consequently, he sees Watson's depiction of Holmes as a way to construct 'a kind of heroic paradigm' which works to 'reinforce the heroism' of both characters.[111] It is telling that the injection scene is absent from Kestner's reading, for it certainly does not follow the logic of which he speaks – to the contrary, it is a rare picture of the great detective's vulnerability, one which sits somewhat uneasily amidst the subsequent narrative developments. To stay with Mulvey, one could claim, however, that there is something intensely *erotic* about Watson's look, a certain scopophilic pleasure gained from 'looking at another person as an erotic object.'[112] For Joseph McLaughlin, the scene, with its deeply masturbatory imagery, presents an unambiguous case of homoerotic fascination: 'there is foreplay

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[109] Arthur Conan Doyle, *The Sign of Four*, op.cit., pp.2, 4
[110] Joseph A. Kestner, *Sherlock's Men*, op.cit., p.69
[111] Ibid.
[112] Laura Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', *Screen*, vol.16, issue 3 (Autumn 1975), p.17

and striptease [...], there is a naked object and a lingering gaze [...], and there is climax and luxuriant relaxation.'[113] Reading the complexity of visual erotics – the simultaneous revulsion and pleasure – as an allegory for the ambiguous status of imperial interaction, McLaughlin posits that the opening scene allows us to consider *The Sign of Four* as a narrative concerned with *invasion*. Such a reading works on several levels, linking the more one-dimensional analysis which would see the crux of the story to be the racially-motivated fear of all things foreign, with the invasion envisioned as 'romancing the exotic commodity or living in the romantic midst of a rapidly changing imperial/material culture.'[114] Here, Holmes' cocaine – kept, let us observe, in a 'morocco case' – exists precisely as one such commodity, an almost archetypal colonial product which 'traces an arc from raw substance originating on the ill-defined periphery of empire to the imperial centre where it is refined and sold for profit in the domestic marketplace.'[115] The nineteenth century discourse of drug use has been expounded in Chapter 1 in relation to opium and the approaches to cocaine broadly follow the same path. Watson's laconic question, 'which it is today? morphine or cocaine?', establishes a link between the two drugs, placing them within the same category of oriental vices, despite differences in geographical ,medical and bio-chemical status. Thus Watson, nerved by a glass of French wine he took with his lunch – yet another foreign substance the overuse of which could bring disastrous consequences – voices his wholehearted disapproval of Holmes' addiction:

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[113] Joseph McLaughlin, *Writing the Urban Jungle: Reading Empire in London from Doyle to Eliot* (Charlottesville and London: University Press of Virginia, 2000), p.53
[114] Ibid., p.55
[115] Christopher Keep and Don Randall, 'Addiction, Empire, and Narrative in Arthur Conan Doyle's *The Sign of the Four*', *NOVEL: A forum on Fiction*, vol.32, no.2 (Spring 1999), p.210

"But consider!" I said, earnestly. "Count the cost! Your brain may, as you say, be roused and excited, but it is a pathological and morbid process, which involves increased tissue-change and may at last leave a permanent weakness. You know, too, what a black reaction comes upon you. Surely the game is hardly worth the candle. Why should you, for a mere passing pleasure, risk the loss of those great powers with which you have been endowed? Remember that I speak not only as one comrade to another, but as a medical man to one for whose constitution he is to some extent answerable."[116]

For Holmes, however, cocaine is not a route to 'mere pleasure' but rather a necessary substitute for work:

"Perhaps you are right, Watson," he said. "I suppose that its influence is physically a bad one. I find it, however, so transcendently stimulating and clarifying to the mind that its secondary action is a matter of small moment." [...] "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."[117]

This view of labour gestures towards the professional ethic developed in TWIS, where Holmes' work comes to be presented precisely as habit, a form of colonising excess. It is a sign of the ironic ambiguity of Holmes' character that lack of crime drives him towards a type of behaviour Watson considers to be criminal. McLaughlin argues that cocaine functions here as a 'ticket to romance', providing Holmes with 'access to exotic pleasures' but, paradoxically, for the great detective periods of extreme mental stimulation do not constitute a way to escape the 'mundane London existence' – on the contrary, they are, in all their unique strangeness, what Holmes desires as

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[116] Arthur Conan Doyle, *The Sign of Four*, op.cit., pp.3-4
[117] Ibid., pp.3, 4-5

his commonplace.[118] This profoundly personal dimension combines here with a state concern, for when Watson exclaims 'count the cost' he echoes the objections to the drug trade voiced by those who would see it a strain on the moral constitution of the entire nation.

The body of Holmes, invaded, as it were, by the drug, in its allegorical signification gives us yet another point of departure for the theorisation of the link between private and national identity. The scene certainly constitutes the narrative's beginning but, crucially, it is not the moment from which the story originates – as will become apparent in the unfolding of the tale, there is a direct link between the strange happenings in London and the events of the Indian Mutiny some 30 years earlier. The influence behind the text is, therefore, historical, mobilising the syndromatic quality of the titular *sign of four*, which references here a particular occurrence, a bond between four men who, were in not for the Mutiny, or perhaps even for the colonial expansion, would never come together as a 'band of brothers' united by most solemn oaths. 'Black or blue, they are in with me and we all go together', invokes Small, unknowingly playing d'Artagnan to his improbable three Sikh musketeers.[119] This importance of history, of temporal engagement, comes to be expressed from the outset by the 'innumerable' puncture marks on Holmes' arm. Here, the body becomes a site of history, marking the passage of time spent without work, which Watson's narration fixes both in its tri-diurnal and monthly habitual repetition. Again, the global repercussions of the sign of four are hinted at and alluded to by the private *signs on the fore-arm* that mark, both literally and symbolically, the significance of times passed.

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[118] Joseph McLaughlin, op.cit., p.56
[119] Arthur Conan Doyle, *The Sign of Four*, op.cit., p.268

Put differently, they are the 'signs of (be)fore'[120], scoring the *tabula rasa* of Holmes' arm with a network of visual clues to be detected (interestingly, by Watson), read and deciphered, in a manner reminiscent of the colonial mapping out of the foreign *terra incognita*.

Yet another complex personal-national history comes to be added to the equation through the figure of Watson who, when mockingly asked by Holmes whether he would care to try the seven-percent solution, answers brusquely that his 'constitution has not got over the Afghan campaign yet' and that he 'cannot afford to throw any extra strain upon it.'[121] Here, Watson of course refers to the wound he received during his military service, explaining that he 'had a Jezail bullet through it [his leg] some time before and, though it did not prevent me from walking, it ached wearily at every change of weather.'[122] Jesse Oak Taylor-Ide reads the doctor's scar simply as an omen of the dangers lurking in foreign lands[123], but its significance is much more far reaching, for it presents one more instance of a marked male body, allowing us to draw a connection not only between Holmes and Watson but also Watson and Small – the one-legged ruffian – as returned colonials whose lingering lack of corporeal integrity is also a comment on the veracity of the imperial project. The exposition of different Anglo-Indian types the story so forcibly compares and contrasts will bear further scrutiny; what is of prime interest here, however, is the fact that Watson's wound seems to have migrated – in *A Study in Scarlet*, where his history is first recounted, it is not

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[120] Joseph McLaughlin, op.cit., p.54
[121] Arthur Conan Doyle, *The Sign of Four*, op.cit., p.3
[122] Ibid., p.7
[123] Jesse Oak Taylor-Ide, 'Ritual and the Liminality of Sherlock Holmes in *The Sign of Four* and *The Hound of the Baskervilles*', *English Literature in Transition, 1880-1920*, vol.48, no.1 (2005), p.58

located in his leg but rather the shoulder.[124] For Kestner, the emphasis placed on physically damaged male bodies indicates a preoccupation with querying the 'literal impotence' of masculinity[125], but Watson's *wandering wound* also brings to mind, at least linguistically, the wandering womb of hysteria. Such a reading creates yet another double, this time between the good doctor and Thaddeus Sholto, whose hysterical – at the same time frenzied and comical – agitation might at first seem antithetical to Watson's outward calmness, whilst insinuating the ambiguity of normative maleness the narrative – in its guise of adventure romance – supposedly presents.

It would of course be easy to argue that the wounded male body simply enacts the basic tenets of the genre, serving only to reinforce the heroic quality of the adventurer – Watson, after all, is able to overcome the crippling pain in his leg during the physical exertions of the chase. Despite his war ordeal, Watson can thus become reintegrated into the circle of 'proper' middle-class masculinity and this rehabilitation extends to encompass his profession – as a doctor, he is charged with healing the wounded bodies of others, restoring wholeness. But it is precisely the lingering nature of his injury, the indelible trace left on the body that puts into question the simplicity of such a reading. The residual and itinerant pain hints not at valiant and intrepid heroism – adventure romance, after all, culminates either in glory or death – but rather at a certain surplus of corporeality that cannot be erased and which returns, again and again, as a reminder of the persistence of memory and the multifarious link between private and national history.

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[124] Arthur Conan Doyle, *A Study in Scarlet* (London and New York: Street and Smith, 1895), p.6
[125] Joseph A. Kestner, *Sherlock's Men*, op.cit., p.59

The initial exposition on reading the signs of the body is immediately followed by a masterly demonstration of Holmes' deductive (or rather, if one wanted to be exact, abductive) abilities presented in the analysis of Watson's watch, intended as an amusing lesson to temper Holmes' somewhat dogmatic tone. Certain of the impossibility of the task, Watson proposes:

> I have heard you say that it is difficult for a man to have any object in daily use without leaving the impress of his individuality upon it in such a way that a trained observer might read it. Now, I have here a watch which has recently come into my possession. Would you have the kindness to let me have an opinion upon the character or habits of the late owner?[126]

After careful and meticulous examination Holmes is able to correctly interpret the minute data of the watch, including engravings, scratches and pawnbroker's markings, to arrive at the conclusion, 'correct in every particular', that the watch belonged to Watson's older brother who

> was a man of untidy habits – very untidy and careless. He was left with good prospects, but he threw away his chances, lived for some time in poverty with occasional short intervals of prosperity, and finally, taking to drink, he died. That is all I can gather.[127]

This short scene neatly illustrates not only Holmes' faculty as a reader of signs but also, by association, introduces and reinforces a number of salient issues the story will be concerned with. According to Douglas Kerr, it is a 'classic configuration of the scene of consultancy', an insight into how the amateur detective operates – the case is proposed and accepted, confirming the superiority of the referee and the suppliant position of the referrer, 'while

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[126] Arthur Conan Doyle, *The Sign of Four*, op.cit., pp.13-14
[127] Ibid., p.16

also absolving him of responsibility for the problem.'[128] But it is also possible to view it, perhaps more symbolically, or syndromatically, as an extension of the opening cocaine scene. Here, the intimate act of *watching* is played out in reverse, the gaze of Holmes now following the marks Watson's brother left on the family heirloom, linking, through one mundane possession, the historical with the personal. (After all, could there be an object more temporal than a watch?) It also hints at, through the notion of family inheritance, the importance of hereditary transmission and the concomitant issue of re/de-generation, explored in Chapter 2. As both Morstan and Sholto are deceased, we gain insight into their character and conduct only from rather credulous narratives told by their respective children, Mary and Thaddeus, subsequently tempered by Small's eye-opening tale. If we also consider that Small initially joins the army and starts for India not from any sense of patriotic duty but rather because he 'got into a mess over a girl'[129], the story emerges as a tale of missing fathers, whose absence haunts the text – and others in the canon – like a ghostly leitmotif. It is certainly a recurring theme in all the stories under examination here – Neville St. Clair quite literally disappears in TWIS and Professor Presbury's medical experiments in CREE slowly turn him into a different 'person', unrecognisable to his family.

If we return to the opening scene once again, it is important to observe that immediately after the cocaine injection Holmes' hand wanders to the shelf to pick up an 'old black-letter volume'. Here, we are forcefully reminded of the connection between drugs and knowledge in the form of writing – in Holmes' world both are stored within arm's reach and both are immediately

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[128] Douglas Kerr, *Conan Doyle: Writing, Profession, and Practice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p.43
[129] Arthur Conan Doyle, *The Sign of Four*, op.cit., p.227

accessible. If the cocaine, however, functions as a substitute for the habit of work, the same cannot be said for knowledge and I would disagree with McLaughlin again, in his claim that the two are interchangeable as stimuli for the alleviation of boredom, lifting the commonplace to the level of the exotic.[130] Rather, I want to posit that far from being discretionary, knowledge constitutes an intrinsic quality of the science of detection. Put simply, access to and manipulation of a great archive of information is a fundamental quality of Holmes' professionalism. As the only unofficial consulting detective he pronounces a specialist's opinion 'as an expert', but, significantly, prefers to stay outside of the knowledge network, for his name 'figures in no newspaper', although he contributes to it in profusion, being 'guilty of several monographs' upon subjects ranging from tobacco ashes to the tracing of footsteps.[131] He is also a master of criminal history, able to recall analogous cases, seemingly from all over the globe and across the ages – when helping a French colleague, who 'has the power of observation and that of deduction. He is only wanting in knowledge', Holmes directs him to an incident 'at Riga in 1857 and in St. Louis in 1871.'[132] In grateful appreciation, the French detective takes it upon himself to translate Holmes' monographs into French, thus extending the knowledge system even further. Similarly, later on in the narrative Holmes is able to correctly identify Tonga as the culprit in the murder of Bartholomew Sholto because 'parallel cases suggest themselves from India, and, if my memory serves me, from Senegambia.'[133] *Nihil novi sub sole* for the great detective.

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[130] Joseph McLaughlin, op.cit., p.73
[131] Arthur Conan Doyle, *The Sign of Four*, op.cit., pp.5, 9-10
[132] Ibid., pp.9, 8
[133] Ibid., p.93

Holmes' knowledge, therefore, is not only profound but also esoteric and without topographical or temporal boundaries, its scope truly encyclopaedic. One has to ask, however, precisely how such an extensive network of information can come into existence and be sustained. If Holmes' expert status is dependent on immediate and unrestrained access to information then *The Sign of Four* – with its particular reliance on anthropological and ethnographical discourses – could be said to exemplify the link between colonial expansion and the growing field of specialist knowledge together with the concomitant rise of the expert. The aforementioned advances in telegraphic technology, prolific travel literature and daily press editorials allowed for ordering and consolidation of information flowing from the colonial periphery into the metropolitan heart of the empire. In this respect, *The Sign of Four* is a distinctly modern text, one which makes use of Holmes' placement in the centre of the vast knowledge network created, at least in part, as a result of imperial endeavours. However, as can plainly be seen from the accounts of the Indian Mutiny, or more immediately for Doyle's reading public, the Jack the Ripper case, the line dividing fact from fiction could in certain cases be very thin indeed, presenting unverified and often simply preposterous accounts as objective or scientific truths. Passing judgement on Watson's literary production describing their previous case, Holmes pronounces it inferior because 'you have attempted to tinge it with romanticism, which produces much the same effect as if you worked a love-story or an elopement into the fifth proposition of Euclid', adding – in a charge which seems like a direct rebuke of the Mutiny or Ripper editorials – 'some

facts should be suppressed, or at least a just sense of proportion should be observed in treating them.'[134]

The novella, I want to suggest, persistently queries its own dictum, put forward by Holmes in the opening paragraphs of the story, that 'detection is, or ought to be, an exact science' and as such responds to and makes use only of a set of substantiated truths.[135] This paradox is in evidence perhaps most visibly in the scene which has Holmes theorise about who Small's strange partner in crime could possibly be. After observing a set of diminutive footmarks in Major Sholto's house, Holmes is able to mobilise his anthropological knowledge to reject the notion that the culprit comes from India, for 'the Hindoo proper has long thin feet. The sandal-wearing Mohammedan has the long toe separated from the others because the thong is commonly passed between them'[136], evoking, through recourse to a definite set of corporeal and racial characteristics, the classificatory systems of criminal phrenology and physiognomy. This confident, if deductively absurd, reading is supplemented by a bulky volume for which Holmes stretches his hand from the fireplace armchair, echoing the cocaine scene and linking, yet again, the excessive nature of drugs and writing. Opening up the first volume of his gazetteer, which 'might be looked upon as the very latest authority', Holmes reads out the entry on the Andaman Island Aborigines:

> The aborigines of the Andaman Islands may perhaps claim the distinction of being the smallest race upon this earth, though some anthropologists prefer the Bushmen of Africa, the Digger Indians of America, and the Terra del Fuegians. The average height is rather

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[134] Ibid., p.6
[135] Ibid.
[136] Ibid., p.157

below four feet, although many full-grown adults may be found who are very much smaller than this. They are a fierce, morose, and intractable people, though capable of forming most devoted friendships when their confidence has once been gained. […] They are naturally hideous, having large, misshapen heads, small, fierce eyes, and distorted features. Their feet and hands, however, are remarkably small. So intractable and fierce are they that all the efforts of the British official have failed to win them over in any degree. They have always been a terror to shipwrecked crews, braining the survivors with their stone-headed clubs, or shooting them with their poisoned arrows. These massacres are invariably concluded by a cannibal feast.[137]

The above passage is certainly striking in its unambiguous depiction of the Andaman Indians as a race of degenerate savages and Tonga seems to rarely deviate from type, obeying the discourse which defines him. However, it is remarkable that the information given in the gazetteer entry appears to contradict, to a large extent, contemporary sources on the topic and constitutes, in John McBratney's forceful proclamation, 'the rankest tissue of popular stereotypes, crude sensationalism, and bare-faced fabrication.'[138] Although I do not believe it is quite possible to claim ethnographical accounts of the Andamanese differed from Doyle's description in every particular – one has only to consult the first volume of the 1881 *Imperial Gazetteer of India* to see a number of the sentiments repeated almost verbatim – there is nonetheless a sufficient degree of ambiguity in the reports to problematise the issue, in the manner reminiscent of the Mutiny writings.[139] If we consider, for example, William Henry Flower's well known anthropological studies, we will discover a sustained effort to rationally explain certain aspects of the

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[137] Ibid., pp.157-159

[138] John McBratney, 'Racial and Criminal Types: Indian Ethnography and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's *The Sign of Four*', *Victorian Literature and Culture*, vol.33, no.1 (2005), p.154

[139] 'Andaman Island' in *The Imperial Gazetteer of India*, vol.1, compiled by W.W. Hunter (London: Trubner and Co, 1881), pp.194-198. It is interesting to observe that McBratney uses the 2nd edition of the Gazetteer published in 1885 to point out the discrepancy between Doyle's description and contemporary knowledge.

natives' behaviour in a manner which not only does not refer to their inherent savagery but also apportions blame onto the white colonisers. Thus, although the Indians have a reputation for ferocious and brutal barbarity,

> It is fair to mention that this hostility to foreigners, which for long was one of the chief characteristics by which the Andamanese were known to the outer world, found much justification in the cruel experiences they suffered from the mal-practices, especially kidnappings for slavery, of the Chinese and Malay traders who visited the islands in search of *bêche de mer* and edible birds'-nests.[140]

Further, although the lives of the Andamanese are 'primitive and unsophisticated', Flower regrets that their customs and habits have been 'so ruthlessly broken into and destroyed by the exigencies of our ever expanding empire', while the contentious issue of cannibalism is decidedly denied, having 'never been practiced by them.'[141]In a similar manner Edward Thomas Man, in his minutely detailed paper, dispels notions of the islanders' ferocity, stating that 'much mutual affection is displayed in their social relations, and, in their dealings with strangers, the same characteristic is observable when once a good understanding has been established.'[142] Even more remarkably, when describing Andamanese marriage customs and familial arrangements, Man notes that 'the fact of our allowing first cousins to marry seems to them highly objectionable, and immoral, which is turning the tables on us with a vengeance', adding, 'the consideration and respect with which women are treated might with advantage be emulated by certain classes in our own

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[140] William Henry Flower, 'The Pygmy Races of Men'in *Essays on Museums and Other Subjects Connected with Natural History* (London: Macmillan and Co, 1898), p.295
[141] Ibid., p.300
[142] Edward Thomas Man, 'On the Aboriginal Inhabitants of the Andaman Islands', *The Journal of the Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland*, vol.12 (1883), p.93

land.'[143] Once again, the question of antropophagia is dismissed as entirely fantastic: 'no lengthened investigation was needed to disprove the long credited fiction, for not a trace could be discovered of the existence of such a practice in their midst, even in far-off times.'[144]

It is of course possible, if all too easy, to view the discrepancy in the portrayal of Tonga and the status of knowledge about the Andaman Islanders simply as an example of Doyle's xenophobia, a reflection of a host of concepts underlying the study of anthropological types which would locate the racially other Andamanese as threatening and inferior. While I do not deny such a reading a degree of accuracy, I want to argue that it can also be productive to consider this inconsistency as an instance of textual rupture, casting doubt not only on the unified venture of imperial knowledge but also on Holmes' expert status. We are reminded here once again about the influence of the Mutiny writings and the ease with which unsubstantiated rumours can take on the mantle of scientific authority. The importance of this distinction cannot be overestimated, especially in the world where 'the pursuit of knowledge is the vanguard, not the rearguard, of the pursuit of power' and where the imperial project itself depended on management of a vast archive of information presupposed to be epistemologically unified.[145] Thomas Richards goes as far as to argue that 'in a very real sense' the Victorians created 'a paper empire', where knowledge was not 'a supplement of power but its replacement in the colonial world.'[146] The primary function of the editorials therefore, as was the case with the various disciplines of criminal

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[143] Ibid., pp.135-136, 327
[144] Ibid., p.113
[145] Thomas Richards, *The Imperial Archive: Knowledge and the Fantasy of Empire* (London and New York: Verso, 1993), p.5
[146] Ibid., p.4, 5

typology, was not an unrestricted dissemination of information but rather its totalising containment, a creation of an all-encompassing system able all the more easily, for its ubiquitous and naturalised presence, to insinuate itself into everyday life under the guise of technical objectivity. In a similar fashion, the gazetteer on which Holmes depends for his knowledge of Tonga is an 'eclectic collection where entries are related to each other by nothing more than alphabetical propinquity' and which represents 'such a loose intellectual order of things that one is tempted to say that there is no form of knowledge, no intellectual system here at all, only a jumbled collection of facts.'[147] Put simply, the vast network of information Holmes has at his disposal is systemically flawed, for it is based on the assumption that professional knowledge will always have universal appeal and that signs – of bodies and objects – can always be deductively, rather than abductively, readable.

The failure of expert knowledge is also exposed and amusingly satirised in Watson, who, in a somewhat disturbed state of mind, when probed for medical advice by hypochondriac Thaddeus Sholto, cautions him 'against the great danger of taking more than two drops of castor-oil', while recommending 'strychnine in large doses as a sedative.'[148] It is also ironically apt that it is Jonathan Small, a vagrant murderer and escaped convict, who emerges as the only person in possession of all the facts pertaining to the story and who also manages to learn Tonga's native tongue, a notoriously difficult language to master, mirroring, or perhaps even surpassing, Holmes' expertise. He also ingeniously makes use of the historically familiar wisdom which would equate any racially other 'savage' with a cannibal, 'exhibiting

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[147] Lawrence Rothfield, *Vital Signs: Medical Realism in Nineteenth-Century Fiction* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992), p.143
[148] Arthur Conan Doyle, *The Sign of Four*, op.cit., p.70

poor Tonga at fairs and other such places as the black cannibal.'[149] The

question of cannibalism is of wider significance to the story, not least

because to the Victorian mind it constitutes 'the nadir of savagery, the

complete antithesis of civilization'[150], posing, as McLaughlin argues, an

'allegorically violent threat to individual and national integrity [...], the

consumption of the consumer by the consumed.'[151] If such a threat exists,

however, it does so only insofar as it is present in Holmes' gazetteer, or as

material of popular imagination, for the narrative does not offer as much as a

hint of Tonga's anthropophagic proclivities. To the contrary, we are told that

Tonga merely *masquerades* as a cannibal, conforming to a pre-existing type

which allows him and Small to stage a spectacle of excessive identity in

exchange for monetary gain – echoing, or rather gesturing towards since

SIGN precedes it, a similar display by Neville St. Clair in 'The Man with the

Twisted Lip.'

Apart from casting Tonga as an exemplar of a certain racial or ethnic 'type'

– a classification paradoxically based on imagined factuality – the story also

presents a different taxonomical system in its portrayal of what I want to

propose constitutes three distinct classes of Anglo-Indian characters. I am

using the term Anglo-Indian as a synonym for returned colonial, true to its

nineteenth-century denotation of a British person domiciled in India, not

necessarily of mixed ancestry but rather somebody who was directly touched

by imperial otherness and who, therefore, could no more adequately be

described as simply 'British'. The ambiguity of this class – for they were

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[149] Ibid., pp.276-277
[150] Patrick Brantlinger, *Taming Cannibals: Race and the Victorians* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2011), p.66
[151] Joseph McLaughlin, op.cit, pp.67, 68

numerous enough to constitute a distinct social group – already hinted at by the linguistic doubleness, is explored in *The Sign of Four* by way of comparing and contrasting those characters of the story directly marked by colonialism, creating what might at first appear to be a straightforward hierarchy. Consequently, Major Sholto – and to some extent Morstan – as distinguished army officer of considerable wealth, would be located at the top of the scale; Watson, an invalided army doctor and paragon of bourgeois propriety a close second, with Jonathan Small, a vagabond convict and ex-soldier, at the bottom. Such a reading, however, would be merely perfunctory, for the status of the returned colonials in British society was a much more complex issue and it might be of use to examine it in some detail, especially in relation to the question of London's topography.

Yumna Siddiqi argues that Doyle's stories consistently depict two distinct types of Anglo-Indians: the 'physically ravaged characters who threaten the peace' and 'their respectable counterparts who attain social status by virtue of their colonial wealth.'[152] If Major Sholto, a retired army officer and prison master with an expansive suburban villa, ostensibly belongs to the latter category, whilst Small, an escaped prisoner convicted of murder, can unambiguously be assigned to the former, the story problematises this clear-cut distinction when we learn that Sholto's wealth is ill-gotten, a direct result of his betrayal not only of Small and his Sikh associates but also, more troublingly, his bosom friend, Captain Morstan. The distinctly criminal aspect of Sholto's personality, diverging so strongly from his outward respectability is noteworthy here, for it evokes a much earlier, eighteenth-century figure of a

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[152] Yumna Siddiqi, 'The Cesspool of Empire: Sherlock Holmes and the Return of the Repressed', *Victorian Literature and Culture*, vol.34, no.1 (2006), p.236

returned colonial – that of a nabob, whose affluence, it was feared, was a result of foreign corruption and immoral practices which would, upon return to Britain, become transplanted onto home soil. The threat was not only spiritual but also political, as the nabobs allegedly used their amorally acquired riches to purchase seats in the parliament thus gaining real power and influence over domestic affairs. As Tillman Nechtman summarises, the nabob 'exposed the potential dangers of the theologies inherent in the very fibres of Britain's imperial order.'[153] Towards the end of the nineteenth century, however, such a view has been, to a degree, modified and – perhaps owing to the sheer number of retired army men returning to London, especially after the Mutiny – it was more common to view the 'suburban sahibs' as incomprehensible and foreign, more Indian than British in customs and manners, without, however, the distinctly sinister quality of the nabob. As one correspondent to *The Times* complains:

> After more than eight years' service in India, I have spent upwards of a year's furlough in England, and have often been astonished and amused at the general tone of criticism to which we Anglo-Indians are subjected. At first I often found myself a source of much perplexity to hospitable friends, by reason of a fear that I should not be able to eat ordinary food, as if we could enjoy nothing but the most outlandish dishes. Some of my friends were surprised that I had not become copper-coloured [...], others, because I presented neither a bibulous nor jaundiced appearance, had much difficulty in believing that I had been to India at all. [...] Mr Oscar Wilde [...] has been pleased to term us vulgar.[154]

In the first decades of the twentieth century, the retired Indian army officer became an almost archetypal figure, frequently depicted in literary fiction of all genres. Significantly, the Anglo-Indian character was now satirised,

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[153] Tillman W. Nechtman, *Nabobs: Empire and Identity in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p.91
[154] 'An Anglo-Indian's Complaint', *The Times*, issue 33439 (25 September 1891), p.6

portrayed not as a national hero of imperial conquest, nor even a slightly

perplexing and orientalised other, but rather a crashing bore and scourge of

all dinner parties, with a degree of cunning replacing intellectual prowess.

(Agatha Christie's Major Barry from *Evil Under the Sun* or P.G. Wodehouse's

Captain Selby from *Jill the Reckless* are two excellent examples.) The more

sinister and menacing qualities of the nabob, who threatened the very fabric

of British society, were entirely absent from those accounts, replaced by faint

amusement and exasperated indulgence. It is significant that Doyle chose to

portray Major Sholto as more akin to the culturally distant typology of Anglo-

Indians, for it once again points towards the importance of historical

perspective in the narrative, forging links between colonial presence in India

and criminality in a way which arraigns economic and class superiority as

parts of the masculine code. Sholto can re-establish himself in London as a

respectable denizen due to his wealth but, as we learn from Small's narrative,

this respectability rests on secret corruption – a motif, according to Kestner,

emphasised throughout the Canon.[155] Moreover, Sholto is shown to be

innately lacking in virtue, for during his time in the Andamans his gambling

habit took him to the brink of bankruptcy and he was 'drinking a deal more

than was good for him.' Although in his last moments Sholto acknowledges

that 'cursed greed [...] has been my besetting sin throughout life', his only

regret is 'my treatment of poor Morstan's orphan' – he suffers no pangs of

conscience over his conduct towards Small and his Sikh companions, despite

living in perpetual – and farcically grotesque – fear of one-legged men.[156]

The dishonesty of Major Sholto, the story seems to suggest, is as much

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[155] Joseph A. Kestner, *Sherlock's Men*, op.cit., p.67
[156] Arthur Conan Doyle, *The Sign of Four*, op.cit., pp.262, 57

'Anglo' as it is 'Indian' – not only a product of the corrupting influence of Oriental climates but also a systemic quality of a particular type of British character. My argument, therefore, runs counter to the reading of the story proposed, among others, by Jesse Taylor-Ide, who claims that 'this novel demonstrates the blatant triumph of the British over the foreign.'[157] Rather, *The Sign of Four* dismantles the very idea of unified national identity, by placing the exotic within the boundaries of the domestic and engaging the seemingly opposite categories in a reciprocal, if conflictual, exchange. The depiction of Thaddeus Sholto's apartment serves as an illustration of this textual heterogeneity, mixing, but never obliterating, the foreign and the familiar in a way which points to their mutual interdependency.

At the beginning of the night's adventure Holmes, Watson and Mary find themselves driven in a four-wheeler through a labyrinth of South London streets, arriving finally at a 'questionable and forbidding' suburb'. The location is in itself unusual in comparison with other stories of the Canon which, as Franco Moretti points out, take place almost exclusively in the West End and the City and 'as for the East End, Holmes goes there exactly once in fifty-six stories.' For Moretti, the South – both of London and on a larger scale, England – as an integral part of 'invasion literature' of the period, is where foreign criminals, troops, or (in Well's case) Martians land and 'march on the capital (whereas Dracula, in his superior wisdom, lands in the North-East).'[158] The streets with 'interminable' lines of brick houses to Watson's mind conjure an image of 'monster tentacles which the giant city was throwing out into the

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[157] Jesse Oak Taylor-Ide, op.cit., p.67. See also Jon Thompson's *Fiction, Crime and Empire*.
[158] Franco Moretti, *Atlas of the European Novel, 1800-1900* (London: Verso, 1998), pp.134, 137

country.'[159] This fantastic and somewhat fanciful picture is immediately striking, not only in its zoomorphically gothic metaphorisation of London but also because it is applied to a suburban neighbourhood, 'a territory of domestic bliss.'[160] Lynne Hapgood's view that Doyle exemplified a type of novelist who 'constructed idealised versions of the suburbs in response to clashes of contemporary opinion about the future direction of urban development'[161] seems directly challenged here, presenting instead a slightly nightmarish vision of fog and darkness. 'I lost my bearings', Watson admits during the journey; Holmes, however, 'was never at fault [...] and he muttered the names [of the streets] as the cab rattled through squares and in and out by torturous by-streets.'[162] It is again Holmes' knowledge, this time of the city's cartographic dimension, which is emphasised here and it is significant that London affords him such a degree of transparency for it is precisely its inherent connectedness – of people, institutions and information systems – which allows the great detective to read it. In contrast, the suburbs' seclusion is, paradoxically, more menacing, because, as Todd Kuchta observes, 'their privacy and isolation, their traditional associations with crime, and their reputation for dubious morality disrupt any neat distinctions between city and countryside.'[163] Thaddeus Sholto's abode, 'a third-rate suburban dwelling house' with 'a sordid and common passage, ill lit and worse furnished', seems to defy classification, existing at a nexus between the city, the country and the slum, transforming the relationship between centre and periphery into one

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[159] Arthur Conan Doyle, *The Sign of Four*, op.cit., p.44
[160] Lynne Hapgood, *Margins of Desire: The Suburbs in Fiction and Culture 1880-1925* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2005), p.43
[161] Ibid., p.40
[162] Arthur Conan Doyle, *The Sign of Four*, op.cit., p.43
[163] Todd Kuchta, *Semi-Detached Empire: Suburbia and the Colonization of Britain, 1880 to the Present* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2010), p.63

of problematic mutability.[164] The sense of incongruity is heightened when the door of the house is opened by a 'Hindoo servant, clad in a yellow turban, white loose fitting clothes and a yellow sash' – neatly referencing Mary Morstan's headwear of 'a small turban of [...] dull hue, relieved only by a suspicion of white feather in the side.'[165] The encounter re-enacts, as Frank, observes, the meeting with the Malay in De Quincey's *Confessions*, lending the whole scene a dream-like quality[166], but it also emphasises the liminality of the tale – located on the threshold between exterior and interior, the Indian servant functions as a meeting point, or an interchange, between the foreign and domestic, familiar and exotic, colonial and national. Stepping through the door of Thaddeus' residence is thus akin to stepping through a kind of portal, transporting the visitors from the realm of sordid reality to the opulent 'oasis of art':

> We were all astonished by the appearance of the apartment into which he invited us. In that sorry house it looked as out of place as a diamond of the first water in a setting of brass. The richest and glossiest of curtains and tapestries draped the walls, looped back here and there to expose some richly-mounted painting or Oriental vase. The carpet was of amber-and-black, so soft and so thick that the foot sank pleasantly into it, as into a bed of moss. Two great tiger-skins thrown athwart it increased the suggestion of Eastern luxury, as did a huge hookah which stood upon a mat in the corner. A lamp in the fashion of a silver dove was hung from an almost invisible golden wire in the centre of the room. As it burned it filled the air with a subtle and aromatic odour.[167]

Spinning his entrancing yarn in semi-darkness filled with vapours of smoke Sholto seems to play the role of a fantastic Scheherazade, narrating the tale of colonial greed that will later be repeated, albeit in more prosaic

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[164] Arthur Conan Doyle, *The Sign of Four*, op.cit., p.45, 46
[165] Ibid., pp.45, 21
[166] Lawrence Frank, op.cit., p.63
[167] Arthur Conan Doyle, *The Sign of Four*, op.cit., pp.47-48

surroundings, by Small's confession. We are reminded here of the ritualistic

role attributed to adventure fiction, its status as mythical orature passed on

through generations and it is certainly apt that Mary learns of her father's fate

from the son of his betrayer.

Just like Holmes, Thaddeus is a drug user, puffing on his hookah pipe

throughout the interview. Unlike Holmes' tightly regulated cocaine injections,

however, his addiction – precisely because it has no connection to work, on

the contrary, it signifies freedom from labour acquired through wealth – is out

of control. The masterful, omnipotent masculinity of Holmes finds its reversed

double in Sholto, whose appearance and behaviour are distinctly grotesque:

> [T]here stood a small man with a very high head, a bristle of red hair all
> round the fringe of it, and a bald, shining scalp which shot out from
> among it like a mountain-peak from fir-trees. He writhed his hands
> together as he stood, and his features were in a perpetual jerk, now
> smiling, now scowling, but never for an instant in repose. Nature had
> given him a pendulous lip, and a too visible line of yellow and irregular
> teeth, which he strove feebly to conceal by constantly passing his hand
> over the lower part of his face. In spite of his obtrusive baldness, he
> gave the impression of youth.[168]

Yet despite the obvious differences, Holmes and Sholto are brought together

firstly, by their shared affiliation with the ideal of a gentleman which, as

James Eli Adams remarks, brings together the dandy and the professional

through an appeal to the concept of disinterestedness; and, secondly,

through their relationship with the materiality of objects.[169] As Holmes'

knowledge collected in the monographs suggest, he is a reader of traces,

able to discern, at a glance, the innate qualities of things – to use Benjamin's

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[168] Ibid., pp.46-47
[169] James Eli Adams, *Dandies and Desert Saints: Styles of Victorian Manhood* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1995), p.192

apposite phrase, he is a 'physiognomist of the world of objects.'[170] Thaddeus Sholto, in his orientally furnished apartment, the very existence of which depends on the complex connection between colonial expansion, consumer culture and domesticity, exemplifies another figure whose expertise lies in the reading of things – that of a collector, whose knowledge of objects – like that of a detective – is encyclopaedic. Collection, just like detection, is an exercise in management, ordering and valuation, placing the chaotic materiality of things within a rational framework. But a feeling of security which might come from such an endeavour is deceptive, for 'there is in the life of a collector a dialectical tension between the poles of disorder and order.'[171] It is precisely this tension which allows for a certain slippage, an excessive heterogeneity to emerge – in re-constructing the histories of and from objects there is no such thing as a last trace, the work of a collector, just like that of a detective, is never done. This re-tracing is hinted at in the reading of Watson's watch – a family heirloom belonging to at least three generations – and later underscored again during Small's confessional narrative, where the proliferation of stories within stories seems to create a textual lineage stretching back *ad infinitum*.

Sholto's oxymoronic exotic interior marks the erosion of distance between East and West, periphery and centre, transforming the space of the house into something more akin to a museum. (Parenthetically, let us note that in another story by Conan Doyle, 'The Ring of Thoth', this relationship is reversed – the main hero, an ancient Egyptian under the guise of a Louvre attendant, turns one of the museum's rooms into his home.) The assortment

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[170] Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, trans. by Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), p.60
[171] Ibid.

of exotic objects in the midst of a British household forges a direct link between the growing consumer culture and imperial expansion, an example of the aforementioned 'politics of invasion' which permeates the story. Put simply, 'if imperialism brought the forces of modernization to bear on the remotest parts of the globe, imposing the stamp of British culture on often recalcitrant nations, Britain itself seems to have felt the cultural recoil.'[172] McLaughlin reads this commodity spectacle through a negatively tainted lens, maintaining that Sholto's portrayal signifies oriental dangers, all the more menacing because they come to be experienced not from a safe distance but in the midst of familiar surroundings. Sholto's constant jerking, writhing movements are a sign of his drug-induced degeneration which, coupled with the eastern opulence of his abode, indicate the conjoined threat of decadence and loss of proper British masculinity – 'Sholto has been engulfed by a feminized Eastern luxury.'[173] As was the case with Major Sholto, however, it could be argued that Thaddeus's behaviour is as much a product of his foreign proclivities as it is a response to a facet of British urban life, whereby, as Hapgood claims, the suburban environment had a distinctly effeminising effect, producing a model of maleness 'completely at odds with the discourse of masculinity constructed by Britain's imperial vision.'[174] Furthermore, if we look to Pramrod K. Nayar's explication on the cosmopolitan nature of Victorian taste, it becomes possible to somewhat subversively position Sholto as an epitome of late nineteenth century British identity. For Nayar, far from remaining at the periphery of the empire, India was at the very heart of the British realm, entering into the homes of English

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[172] Nicholas Daly, op.cit., p.100
[173] Joseph McLaughlin, op.cit., pp.59-61
[174] Lynne Hapgood, op.cit., p.42

people in a multitude of products and commodities, the sheer volume of which served to *colonize* British culture. He sees collection and possession of Indian artefacts as an essential part of imperial culture of bourgeois domesticity, arguing that it was indicative of a rarefied, cosmopolitan taste that came to be associated with Britishness. In short, the cultural mobility of colonial objects effected change in the very notion of what it meant to be British and an engagement with the 'empire of things' was an essential part of this identity.[175] Although Nayar's reasoning is at times unjustifiably assumptive – he does not, for example, at any point question the exploitative nature of the imperial trade, nor does he see any ideological bases in the British responses to India – it is nonetheless interesting to apply his hypothesis to our understanding of Sholto's aestheticism, for it allows us to read the story slightly against the grain, as it were, complicating and enlarging the very notion of British national identity. Sholto is also, despite his supposedly wicked oriental vices, the only one of his family not marked by incessant greed and, unlike his twin brother, ready to relinquish the Agra treasure. It is also of import to note briefly that the figure of Thaddeus is undoubtedly modelled on Oscar Wilde, both in his outward appearance (the crooked teeth and pendulous lip), artistic tastes and penchant for witty epigrams ('there is nothing more unaesthetic than a policeman'). As such, the characterisation of Sholto could also be seen as a highly satirical act of obeisance and Samuel Rosenberg, in his customary manner, proposes that Thaddeus exists in the story so that Doyle can make an elaborate joke about Wilde's sexuality ('there cannot be the slightest doubt about the [painting of]

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[175] Pramrod K. Nayar, *Colonial Voices: The Discourses of Empire* (Chichester and Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), pp.230-232

Bouguereau. I am partial to the *French* school') – a reading which would perhaps throw a different light on the supposedly decadent or threatening traits of his personality.[176]

If the eastern splendour of Thaddeus' dwelling is skilfully (or perhaps deceptively) concealed behind a facade of squalid anonymity, the Sholtos' ancestral home in Upper Norwood immediately displays its colonial connections, presenting a more ambiguous site of suburban domesticity. Located south-east of the river, Norwood contrasts sharply with Thaddeus' place of residence, for it is a salubrious and affluent district, described in a contemporary guide to the capital's boroughs as among 'the fairest and most "winsome" of all the suburban dependencies of London.'[177] The ability to settle in this particular neighbourhood is certainly a mark of Major Sholto's wealth and a reaffirmation of his status as a retired Anglo-Indian officer who, as we learn from his son, 'prospered in India and brought back with him a considerable sum of money, a large collection of valuable curiosities, and a staff of native servants.'[178] The house, located in close proximity to the Crystal Palace – the place of Spurgeon's Fast Day address as well as the Great Exhibition of 1851 – bears the name of Pondicherry Lodge, immediately suggesting a direct link to the colonial presence on the Subcontinent. The town of Pondicherry, located in the Bay of Bengal, in a straight line west of the Andaman Islands, was the capital of the French settlement in India, lending an air of ambiguous multi-nationalism to the Sholto estate. The naming of the house after a town from the imperial outpost

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[176] Samuel Rosenberg, *Naked is the Best Disguise: The Death and Resurrection of Sherlock Holmes* (London: Arlington Books, 1975), p.134
[177] Percy Fitzgerald, *London City Suburbs as They Are To-day* (London: The Leadenhall Press, 1893), p.204
[178] Arthur Conan Doyle, *The Sign of Four*, op.cit., p.54

reverses, in McLaughlin's view, 'the typical imperial practice of naming conquered cities after places in Britain', transposing the colonial periphery onto the periphery of London.[179] A similar, if opposite, gesture is performed by Small, for whom India on the wake of the Mutiny lies 'still and peaceful, to all appearances, as Surrey or Kent.'[180] Let us add that this complex ambiguity seems to be curiously mirrored by a change in Holmes – in *A Study in Scarlet*, Watson compiles a list of Holmes' attributes, among which knowledge of literature and philosophy score 'nil'. In *The Sign of Four*, however, Holmes quotes Rochefoucauld in French and Goethe in German, displaying intimate knowledge of Richter and Carlyle, of whom he is entirely ignorant in the previous book.[181] It is almost as if Holmes' knowledge grows exponentially in response to the growth of the Empire, the case depending on his truly protean abilities.

If Doyle indeed believed in the 'suburbs' positive contribution to the quality of life'[182], we find none of this philosophy in the depiction of Pondicherry Lodge, which

> stood in its own grounds, and was girt round with a very high stone wall topped with broken glass. A single narrow iron-clamped door formed the only means of entrance. [...] Inside, a gravel path wound through desolate grounds to a huge clump of a house, square and prosaic, all plunged in shadow save where a moonbeam struck one corner and glimmered in a garret window. The vast size of the building, with its gloom and its deathly silence, struck a chill to the heart.[183]

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[179] Joseph McLaughlin, op.cit., pp.62-63
[180] Arthur Conan Doyle, *The Sign of Four*, op.cit., p.230
[181] Arthur Conan Doyle, *A Study in Scarlet*, op.cit., pp.30, 18
[182] Lynne Hapgood, op.cit., p.48
[183] Arthur Conan Doyle, *The Sign of Four*, op.cit., pp.70, 75

The house, with its almost military level of protection and stronghold-like appearance, certainly points towards Sholto's paranoid fear, emphasising the feeling of entrapment and anxiety. We are far removed here from the idyllic *rus in urbe* environs the suburbs were supposed to represent in their common association with health and regeneration. The journalist and historian Sidney Low, in his study of metropolitan life, sharply contrasts – in a language steeped in colonial imagery – the degenerate and debilitating conditions of life in the urban jungle with the restorative properties of the suburban existence. Lamenting the fate of country people now dwelling in the East London slums – 'the children, who should have pulled the honeysuckle in the lanes and hunted for birds' nest in the hedges, will tumble in the gutter outside a public-house' – Low prophetically predicts that in the near future the centre of population will shift 'from the heart to the limbs.'[184] The move from the 'Brazilian forest of houses, this Sargasso Sea of asphalt and paving' into the 'urban sanitary districts' of the suburbia will have an invigorating effect on the 'feeble, anaemic urban' populace, who, now sound of body and mind, 'could make up a regiment which would hold its own on a battlefield against a *corpse d'élite* selected from any army in the world.'[185] In Doyle's depiction of Pondicherry lodge and, to an extent, Thaddeus' house, we find none of this vision's cheery optimism – to the contrary, it is a nightmarishly gothic, or, to use Frank's apt expression, phantasmagoric, picture of fears and anxieties.[186] The regenerative properties of suburban life become here ironically reversed, since Thaddeus is a hypochondriac with a weak heart and Major Sholto, his

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[184] Sydney Low, 'The Rise of the Suburbs', *The Contemporary Review*, vol.60 (October 1891), pp.548, 550
[185] Ibid., pp.551, 553, 554
[186] Lawrence Frank, op.cit., p.64

son Bartholomew and Captain Morstan all find untimely death at Pondicherry Lodge.

An unexpected consequence of the aforementioned drive towards privacy and isolation was a development of the idea that suburban houses were particularly susceptible to crime. Their large, sprawling grounds or, on the other hand, small plots of land trying to accommodate ostentatious villas of ill-planned construction full of strange passages and inconvenient spaces, gave rise to a condition where 'parts of the suburban home could be unknowable not only to outsiders but also to its very inhabitants', underscoring their vulnerability.[187] Letters complaining of the encroachment of the undesirable urban types – vagrants, thieves and miscreants – on the tranquillity of the suburban neighbourhoods abound in press editorials of the late nineteenth century. To cite one eloquent example from *The Times*:

> Most of the male inhabitants of Lewisham are absent during the day on business; the private houses [...] are consequently left in charge of ladies and servants. The men's departure leaves the field open to a host of tramps and vagrants, who are present doing an uninterrupted and thriving trade in the neighbourhood, and they immediately commence operations. [...] I will start with the woman who plays the triangle; she stands close against the breakfast-parlour window, taking careful inventory of everything in the room [...]. Next comes a man with a folded paper [...] then a woman with a baby [...]. She is followed by a clergyman [...]. A monthly nurse [...] is the next applicant. After her a journeyman carpenter [...]. Then a woman with bobbins and net-work [...]. All these people enter your front garden as though it was their own. If the street door is open to them they insert one foot. They all (except the clergyman) ask for bread and water, and they all (clergyman equally, though more periphrastically) swear roundly if you do not give them something.[188]

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[187] Todd Kuchta, op.cit., p.65
[188] 'Suburban Quiet', *The Times*, issue 28141 (23 October 1874), p.9

Perhaps not surprisingly, the siege mentality of the suburban dwellers, taking the need for ultimate privacy and isolation to its logical, if extreme, conclusion, was a subject ripe for ridicule. As *Punch* mercilessly satirised, in a quasi-helpful article on suburban safety:

> Have the kitchen and other back doors nailed up and grating affixed to all the ground-floor windows. Greater security may be attained by covering the latter with a net-work of electric wire, which may be advantageously continued in enlarging circles, a foot from the ground, all around the house, and may communicate with a gong on the roof. [...] If you have a gold-fish pond on your lawn, and your wife has not lost all her jewellery long ago in various robberies, place what is left of it in an iron box at the bottom of the water, and covering the treasure thus secured with a couple of torpedoes, watch it from a convenient window with a loaded rifle. [...] If, in spite of all your precautions, your house is again attacked [...] write a cheery letter to the *Times*.[189]

As Kuchta observes, the depiction of suburbia in *The Sign of Four* suggests that 'the real threats to the suburb were those living within its very neighbourhoods and homes' and so to concentrate merely on external dangers is to overlook an important aspect of the story.[190] Pondicherry Lodge, I want to suggest, offers the most ambivalent and complex site of the novel, tirelessly moving between and engaging the opposite poles of the binary spectrum – centre and periphery, India and England, colony and home. Although the house is indeed invaded by the savage Tonga and the degenerate Small, proving itself pervious to the hazards it so desperately tries to keep at bay, this invasion is only an extension, or an almost natural consequence, of Sholto's earlier conduct during his colonial adventures. It perhaps shouldn't be surprising that it is Bartholomew who is struck dead by

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[189] 'Suburban Safety', *Punch* (19 January 1878), p.16
[190] Todd Kuchta, op.cit., p.66

Tonga's dart, since, as his twin brother remarks, he is 'a little inclined to my father's fault.'[191] Here we are once again reminded of the importance of history and, if we recall Spurgeon's sermon, responsibility – both national, through the colonial association, and personal, in the form of hereditary corruption. The huge, ominous house with its dark staircases, numerous rooms and hidden spaces recalls both the Agra Fort and the Andaman Prison. This connection is amplified when we learn that the Sholto brothers, in their frantic search for the hidden treasure, 'dug and delved in every part of the garden' so that the grounds were covered in 'great rubbish-heaps', leading Watson to remark that he had 'seen something of the sort on the side of a hill near Ballarat' – an Australian town where substantial quantities of gold were discovered during the gold rush of the 1850s – a link to yet another colonial location.[192] The obsessive search for the riches, carried out over a period of six years, is an echo of the search Major Sholto performed when he stole the fortune from its hiding place in the Agra Fort. But the excavation of the grounds of the ancestral home also references, more symbolically, the digging of an escape tunnel in an attempt to flee from the infamous Black Water prison on the Andaman Islands where Sholto was the officer in charge. The complexity of the relationship between colonial and domestic periphery can be truly felt here – Sholto not only prospers in India but is able to lead a life of relative leisure, for according to Small's narrative his main occupations consist of gambling and drinking. It is thus not the threateningly exotic India which ensnares him (as was the case with, for example, Kurtz's Africa in *The Heart of Darkness*) but rather the familiar London suburb which turns him into

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[191] Arthur Conan Doyle, *The Sign of Four*, op.cit., p.64
[192] Ibid., pp.64, 77, 78

a prisoner in his own home, affording him a life which, despite his affluence, seems but a pale simulacrum of the existence he was able to lead in the colonies. Even if it is true, as Joseph Childers suggests, that on return to England, 'the Major's wealth is tacitly legitimated', the lingering traces of criminality – the constant fear, the suburban fortress, the hereditary transmission of vices – certainly problematise the claim that in *The Sign of Four* 'pollution of national character is essentially ignored.'[193]

The insides of Pondicherry Lodge prove to be as menacing as its grounds, for Holmes and Watson discover, after slowly creeping up three flights of stairs carpeted with 'cocoa-nut matting' and along a dark passage 'with a great picture in Indian tapestry', a locked door behind which Bartholomew Sholto is supposedly hiding. Peering through the keyhole, Watson instantly recoils in horror:

> Moonlight was streaming into the room, and it was bright with a vague and shifty radiance. Looking straight at me, and suspended, as it were, in the air, for all beneath was in shadow, there hung a face – the very face of our companion Thaddeus. There was the same high, shining head, the same circular bristle of red hair, the same bloodless countenance. The features were set, however, in a horrible smile, a fixed and unnatural grin, which in that still and moonlit room was more jarring to the nerves than any scowl or contortion. So like was the face to that of our little friend that I looked round at him to make sure that he was indeed with us. Then I recalled to mind that he had mentioned to us that his brother and he were twins.[194]

The grotesque, disembodied head of Bartholomew evokes Small's face pressed against the window in the moment of Major Sholto's death, linking the two in a gesture which also encompasses Thaddeus, creating yet another

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[193] Joseph W. Childers, 'Foreign Matter: Imperial Filth' in *Filth: Dirt, Disgust and Modern Life*, ed. by William A. Cohen and Ryan Johnson (Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 2005), p.209
[194] Arthur Conan Doyle, *The Sign of Four*, op.cit., p.83

paring of incongruous doubles and reinforcing the liminal quality of the story –

the keyhole, just like the window pane, are threshold entities problematising

the easy opposition of inside and outside. The frozen immobility of the

hanging head contrasts sharply with the incessant twitching mobility of

Thaddeus, recalling an image of a body hanged in execution – a ghastly

retrospection of the Andaman prison, or perhaps a foretelling of the

murderer's fate. On examining the body, Holmes discovers 'a long, dark thorn

stuck in the skin just above the ear', which he immediately identifies as

poisoned and 'not English.' We are once again recalled back to the opening

scene of the story, for Holmes' cocaine injection is paralleled here by the

puncture left by the thorn dipped in foreign toxin. The drugs, according to

McLaughlin, serve here to demonstrate the danger of all things inherently

alien to British culture, escalating in severity with every instance – the morbid

effects of cocaine hinted at in the case of Holmes, amplified in Thaddeus'

oriental and smoke-filled apartment, in relation to Bartholomew are realised in

the ultimate horror of death.[195] But if we read this scene with ears open to its

syndromatic qualities, the drugs, far from being merely auxiliary to the

narrative structure, emerge here, following the logic of the *pharmakon*, as a

kind of necessary addi(c)tion that is at once a component of and a

replacement for knowledge. 'This is all an *insoluble* mystery to me', proclaims

the abstemious Watson, while Holmes – fortified by the 7% solution – can

confidently declare that it in fact 'clears every instant.'[196]

  After scanning the room for clues, working on his knees like 'a trained

blood-hound', Holmes discovers a number of traces left by the pair of culprits,

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[195] Joseph McLaughlin, op.cit., p.64
[196] Ibid., pp.86-87

including a strange selection of objects – a coil of rope, a stone hammer and

a piece of paper with 'the sign of four' written on it – as well as marks of

bodily presence, most notably two sets of footprints – muddy shoe marks

belonging to Small on a windowsill and a diminutive naked foot mark of

Tonga in the thick layer of dust covering the floor of the concealed attic room

from which the treasure was stolen. Those traces are a material articulation

of the symbolic preoccupation with boundary maintenance which defines both

bourgeois domesticity and imperial policy. As Anne McClintock observes, the

Victorian fixation with demarcating limits came to be expressed in a fetishistic

engagement with threshold objects – such as windowsills – that uphold 'the

boundary between public and private' and so need to be kept scrupulously

clean to retain their 'exhibition value as class markers'. She identifies boots

as particularly liminal objects, 'carrying traces of streets, fields and markets

into polished interiors, confusing public with private, work with leisure,

cleanliness with dirtiness.'[197] Small's footprint on the windowsill is thus a

literal and allegorical mark of criminal dirt entering, or invading, the suburban

fortress of Major Sholto, a mark which embodies the Major's deepest

anxieties and fears, for it is also possible to distinguish a sign of a wooden

stump near the one left by the boot. If we contend that Small's boot, with its

'coarse, square-toed sole, with an iron band around the heel'[198] indicates, as

Kuchta argues, that the owner is unmistakably 'a member of the urban

underclasses'[199], the wooden stump adds a distinctly foreign dimension,

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[197] Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (New York and London: Routledge, 1995), pp.170, 171
[198] Arthur Conan Doyle, *The Sign of Four*, op.cit., p.106
[199] Todd Kuchta, op.cit., p.73 Small is undoubtedly a member of an underclass, since he is a begging vagrant, but I would dispute the claim that he is in any way 'urban' – he hails from a

conjuring the spectre of colonial past and turning Small into a figure whose liminal incongruity could rival that of Thaddeus' Hindu servant framed in the door of a suburban house. Tonga's naked footprint is perhaps even more disturbing, for it signifies, even if only for a brief moment, an excess of meaning that is outside of Holmes' knowledge – it is a grotesque *sign of the foreign* which baffles the great detective, creating an instance of rupture that could, in its temporal subversion, be termed carnivalesque. It is also significant that this alien trace is discovered imprinted in the 'accumulated dust of years', for its work is, therefore, *cleansing* – unlike the dirt of Small's boots which sullies the windowsill, Tonga's naked foot removes the signs of pollution that already exist within the house, leaving in their place a fleeting memento of presence past. In this regard, the footmark corresponds to Watson's throbbing wound, since both simultaneously enact and erase history, acting as *pharmakon*, 'that dangerous supplement that breaks into the very thing that would have liked to do without it.'[200]

After the shock and horror of Sholto's death, the story takes a rather different turn with the arrival of the official police force, led by Athelney Jones. (Parenthetically, let us observe that the unusual name of the Scotland Yard inspector could come as a reference to the Isle of Athelney in Somerset, an area known to have been a great swampy marsh – an apt etymology, since the policeman hopelessly muddies the waters of the investigation). The ensuing dialogue between Holmes and the Inspector is an exercise in, on the part of the former, acerbic wit and detached irony, and blundering discourtesy

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small town in Worcestershire and spends his entire adult life in rural India and the Andamans.

[200] Jacques Derrida, 'Plato's Pharmacy' in *Dissemination*, trans. by Barbara Johnson (London: The Athlone Press, 1981), p.110

on the part of the latter. After labelling the police as 'regulars' and himself and
Watson as the 'auxiliary forces' – an interesting designation since it suggests
that the detective sees himself as farther removed from the Scotland Yard
officials than from the group of slum-dwelling children who form the Baker
Street Irregulars – Holmes decides to, quite literally, follow the traces left by
the intruders who, as luck would have it, managed to step into a puddle of
foul-smelling creosote. Engaging the services of Toby – 'a queer mongrel
with a most amazing power of scent'[201] – the two adventurers track their
villainous counterparts in a scene which, although often treated as marginal
in the various analyses of the story, through deployment of parody and satire
disrupts the narrative and typological unity of the text.

Cawelti posits detective fiction as a genre which is distinctly 'noncomic',
placing it in a group of similar literary formulas such as the spy story or gothic
romance.[202] 'The Episode of the Barrel' chapter, I want to argue, contradicts
this claim, for it works to satirise both Holmes' expert knowledge and the
popular tropes of adventure literature, most notably the theme of a chase or
quest. If the first journey of the story followed a route from centre to periphery
– from the midst of the 'urban jungle' to the deceptively sedate fringe of the
suburbs – here the movement is reversed, for Toby takes us on a six-mile
trudge from Pondicherry Lodge to the Thames docks, traversing a maze of
streets in a manner which mirrors the initial cab ride to Thaddeus' abode. The
setting for the quest is certainly sombre, for Holmes on finding Tonga's
poisoned darts remarks that they are 'hellish things' and that he would

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[201] Arthur Conan Doyle, *The Sign of Four*, op.cit., p.109
[202] John G. Cawelti, op.cit., p.39 This pronouncement has frequently been disproved, most
notably by Edmund Crispin's wonderfully whimsical Professor Gervase Fen or, more
recently, A.C. Beaton's Agatha Raisin or Reginald Hill's superb Dalziel and Pascoe.

'sooner face a Martini bullet.' We are left in no doubt that the endeavour will be a dangerous one, since Holmes is armed with a revolver and Watson with a heavy stick. Violence is anticipated and Holmes grimly proclaims that if Tonga turns nasty he will shoot him dead.[203] The adventure element of the undertaking is also emphasised by the heroic stance of Watson who, although wounded, stays true to the bonds of masculine comradeship and decides to follow Holmes on the quest. On smelling the creosote, 'like a connoisseur sniffing the bouquet of a famous vintage', Toby immediately picks up the scent and 'with his nose on the ground and his tail in the air', follows the trail at top speed.[204] Toby, who is an expert in his 'profession' and whose role as a sniffer dog is *detection*, is here a canine version of Holmes – whom Watson earlier likened to a bloodhound – since both follow, one metaphorically, the other literally, their noses to solve the case. In the tracking of the criminal pair through a maze of London streets, populated with 'slatternly women', 'rough-looking men' and 'strange dogs', the tension is palpable and the sense of speed and urgency adds to the feeling of impending danger. A moment of confusion – 'Toby ceased to advance, but began to run backwards and forwards [...] then he waddled round in circles' – which leads Holmes to exclaim 'they surely would not take a cab, or go off in a balloon', only heightens the expectation, for soon Toby darts away 'with an energy and determination such as he had not yet shown' and there is a gleam in Holmes' eye which tells Watson that 'we were nearing the end of our journey.'[205] Indeed, breaking into a run, Toby:

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[203] Arthur Conan Doyle, *The Sign of Four*, op.cit., pp.122, 134
[204] Ibid., p.123
[205] Ibid., pp.134-136

raced through sawdust and shavings, down an alley, round a passage, between two wood-piles, and finally, with a triumphant yelp, sprang upon a large barrel which still stood upon the hand-trolley on which it had been brought. With lolling tongue and blinking eyes, Toby stood upon the cask, looking from one to the other of us for some sign of appreciation. The staves of the barrel and the wheels of the trolley were smeared with a dark liquid, and the whole air was heavy with the smell of creosote. Sherlock Holmes and I looked blankly at each other, and then burst simultaneously into an uncontrollable fit of laughter.[206]

It would be difficult, I believe, to find a scene of such anti-climax in another story of imperial adventure. The passage creates an atmosphere of tense anticipation, amplified by the previous allusions to impending danger, only to turn it into a parody of a colonial quest – instead of a treasure chest we get a malodorous barrel; instead of tracking the prey to their, as Holmes terms it, lair, the expert hunter is himself conquered. But significantly, what outwits Toby, and so Holmes, is an excess of commodities – the sheer volume of creosote 'carted about London in one day' can confuse even the most expert of detectives. The ubiquity and wide application of creosote – also medicinal, despite its fairly high toxicity – reference the late nineteenth-century application of cocaine, once again linking drugs with knowledge, albeit this time in an instance, however momentary, of failure.

Utilising his informal network of information in the shape of the Baker Street Irregulars, whose knowledge of London rivals that of Holmes, the great detective at long last manages to track Small and Tonga before their escape on the steam launch *Aurora*. The ensuing pursuit down the Thames is a more sombre reiteration of the Toby chase, one which ends up in the capture of Small, the death of Tonga and the loss of the Agra treasure. Not surprisingly,

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[206] Ibid., p.137

this scene came to be read by the text's critics as a moment of narrative and symbolic closure – the final expulsion of the threatening foreign element from the British shores which works to master the confusing disorder through exertion of courage and rationality. For Thompson, the story simplifies the compound mystery 'rooted in the murderousness and treachery of the Indian Mutiny' through 'strategies of exclusion' which symbolically vanquish 'the exotic but violent element of the Orient within England.'[207] Taylor-Ide comes to a similar conclusion, proclaiming that 'the danger arises from the Empire' but, in a 'blatant triumph of the British over the foreign', the threat is annihilated when 'the British service revolver triumphs over the heathen blow-pipe as Tonga is shot down [...] and disappears into the ever-so-British Thames.'[208] Yet this exultant foreclosure, I want to argue, is not as successful as the above accounts would suggest, for the text continues to be permeated by the excessiveness of its colonial origins that always eludes containment, providing syndromatic clues which prohibit a finite reading. If the Thames is indeed 'ever-so-British', its status curiously depends on a mode of exchange with the foreign that Taylor-Ide would see expelled. The river acts a threshold of the empire; it is a place where the trade from the colonies, including cocaine, first enters the British Isles. As such, it is a link between the metropolitan centre and the colonial periphery, mirroring Thaddeus' apartment as a kind of portal in and through which disparate strands of the domestic and the exotic can come together. The banks of the Thames, a 'wild and desolate place, where the moon glimmered upon a wide expanse of

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[207] Jon Thompson, op.cit., pp.72, 73
[208] Jesse Oak Taylor-Ide, op.cit., p.67

marsh-land, with pools of stagnant water and beds of decaying vegetation'[209]
– a description which, as Frank notices, bears a striking resemblance to De
Quincey's Asia[210] – echo Watson's curious proclamation from *A Study in
Scarlet*, where he bitterly terms London to be a 'great cesspool into which all
the loungers and idlers of empire are irresistibly drained.'[211] This scatological
metaphor aptly describes the story's preoccupation with purity but it also hints
at an impossibility of containment, the excessiveness of dirt which eludes
regulation. The magnetism of the cesspool is, after all, irresistible and it is
perhaps unavoidable that Tonga sinks into the muddy waters of the Thames
whilst Small is immobilised at its banks when his wooden leg sinks into the
sodden soil. But it is also suggestive that the final moments of Tonga
correspond so closely to the scene of Holmes' cocaine injection, since
Watson's narrative once again lingers over the foreign body:

> He whirled round, threw up his arms, and with a kind of choking cough
> fell sideways into the stream. I caught one glimpse of his venomous,
> menacing eyes amid the white swirl of the waters. [...] Somewhere in the
> dark ooze at the bottom of the Thames lie the bones of that strange
> visitor to our shores.[212]

What is particularly noteworthy in this remarkable passage is the sudden,
and single, change of grammatical tense – the episode is narrated fully in the
preterite and yet Tonga forever *lies* in the dark ooze of the river, merging with
its incalculable, indeterminate foundation, not so much a visitor but a native
part of its makeup. His lingering, or as Randall and Keep eloquently put it,
submerged presence haunts the story, placing him in the category of colonial

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[209] Arthur Conan Doyle, *The Sign of Four*, op.cit., p.204
[210] Lawrence Frank, op.cit., p.77
[211] Arthur Conan Doyle, *A Study in Scarlet*, op.cit., p.7
[212] Arthur Conan Doyle, *The Sign of Four*, op.cit., p.203, 205-206

traces, together with Watson's wound and Small's wooden leg, that always rupture any attempts at easy unification. To put it differently, he is a hero of imperial adventure who, even though sunk safely out of sight, will continue to re-surface as an excessive bodily memento. The apparent threat mixes here with fascination in a moment of display that enacts the eroticised visions of the orient, once again bringing into mind De Quincey's opium-drenched dreams. The familiarity of the domestic London environment is 'de-familiarised and rendered foreign and then visually consumed as an 'exotic' spectacle.'[213] But it is also a moment when the gaze is fleetingly reversed in an instance which signifies the ominous realisation of subjectivity, activating, as Tom Gunning elucidates, 'the complex dialectical optics of modernity.' This occurrence is not based merely on 'the visual mastery of surveillance but also on the uncanny experience of transformed vision, glimpsing a presence where it is not, a space where it does not belong, and triggering a frisson of possible recognition.'[214] In the last, silent but eloquent, act of resistance Tonga thus eludes recuperation, remaining in circulation as a 'venomous and menacing' *pharmakon*.

Although Small managed to escape from the infamous Andaman prison with the help of his wooden leg, with which he clubbed the guard, the same leg now contributes to his capture when it gets stuck in the sticky mud of the Thames' bank. (It is a strange act of poetic justice, since the Andaman prison was known as Black Water). It is once again a river which renders Small immobile, since he first lost his limb to a crocodile when swimming in the

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[213] Rob Shields, 'Fancy Footwork: Walter Benjamin's Notes on Flânerie' in *The Flâneur* ed. by Keith Tester (London: Routledge, 1994), p.74
[214] Tom Gunning, 'The Exterior as *Intérieur*: Benjamin's Optical Detective', *boundary 2*, vol.30, no.1 (Spring 2003), p.127

Ganges. If Small is a colonial adventurer his encounter with the empire greatly diverges from the experiences of other 'imperial boys' who, as heroes of adventure novels, according to Brantlinger, 'venture into desert or jungles, bag incredible number of tigers and hostile natives, and return home unscathed and unchanged.'[215] Just like Watson, Small is profoundly marked by his colonial past and the *sign of the foreign* is now an intrinsic part of his corporeality, in a manner which once again references the necessary supplementarity of the trace, for, paradoxically, to take away the mark of colonial violence on the body is to become motionless, trapped.

Although the case is solved and the culprit apprehended the narrative needs to account for the loss of Tonga and it is Small's confession which bridges the gap in knowledge, substituting itself 'for the unrecuperated aspect of the case' as an 'enriching addition [...] that tacitly acknowledges its lack.'[216] This role of confession – although it is perhaps misleading to call Small's story a confession, since he in fact admits no wrongdoing – is an unusual one, departing from the more frequently enacted model where – as we have seen in 'The Man with the Twisted Lip' – it serves merely as confirmation, not exposure of truth. The title of the chapter – 'Strange Story of Jonathan Small' – references Robert Louis Stevenson's famous novella, intimating preoccupation with spaces of domesticity, identity and change. The story is, as Barsham observes, one of 'mythic adventure', full of wondrous happenings 'combining elements of horror and of fairy story.'[217] The importance of history is once again brought into view by the events of the Mutiny but there is also a

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[215] Patrick Brantlinger, *Victorian Literature and Postcolonial Studies* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), p.129
[216] Christopher Keep and Don Randall, op.cit., p.218
[217] Diana Barsham, op.cit.,p.120

profoundly personal dimension added to the national concerns, underscored by the fact that Small begins the narrative not in India but with the story of his own origins in rural Britain. The chapter traces Small's transformation from a young boy to a military man invalided out of the army, an escaped convict and finally an imperial vagrant, in a gesture which positions him as the true adventurer of the tale and his ripping yarn spun around a fire once again highlights the ritualistic function of romance fiction and its link to oral history. The location for the telling of the story is suggestive, for Holmes insists that the interview takes place in his Baker Street rooms, prompting the closure of the circuit of imperial information first opened up in a moment of the cocaine injection. This is a task, however, that not even the great detective will be able to accomplish, because the narrative economy which guides the tale ensures that the gap of knowledge can never be sutured, that it remains, in fact, the very condition of the text's coming-into-being. Speaking about his experience of the Mutiny, Small remarks: 'Of course you know all about it, gentlemen – a deal more than I do, very like, since reading is not in my line.'[218] Here, the first-hand knowledge of history is rendered subordinate and secondary to the written accounts, to understanding gained from *literary* encounters – it is a vision of hi-*story* which recognises its importance precisely as narrative. Small's confessional tale has, after all, no means of verification – it is a singular voice among many similar pronouncements which will now come to stand as the only version of truth. The mythologised tale of the Indian Mutiny serves here as a synecdoche for the entire imperial project, linking the question of knowledge to the need for legitimisation of

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[218] Arthur Conan Doyle, The Sign of Four, op.cit., p.230

colonial management through incessant telling and re-telling of its own

history. The complexity of this project is apparent in the ambiguous nature of

the Agra treasure, whose existence, it seems, is intimately linked with a

proliferation of stories speaking of greed and avarice. Although Holmes and

Watson seem to unquestioningly accept Mary's claim to the riches, we learn

from Small's account that he and the three Sikh soldiers, as well as Major

Sholto and his sons, the Indian and British governments and, perhaps most

of all, the rajah from whom the chest was stolen, could all claim similar rights.

In the face of such narrative excess the story thus fails to accomplish what

Arata terms 'one of detective fiction's prime functions: affixing ultimate

guilt.'[219] Narrative record, therefore, is not simply a by-product of historical

evidence but rather a necessary supplement which, just like Holmes' cocaine,

signifies a slippage of meaning beyond unification. But if the story recounts

the narrative persistence of history it does so again, textually, when it returns

to its own opening at the very moment of conclusion. Watson announces his

engagement to Miss Morstan – whose name, with its etymology (Latin *mors*,

meaning death), aptly enough signifies the end of masculine adventure and

the replacement of comradeship with domesticity – asking regretfully: 'you

have done all the work in this business. I get a wife out of it, Jones gets the

credit, pray what remains for you?' Holmes replies from his armchair: 'For me,

there still remains the cocaine bottle. And he stretched his long white hand up

for it.'[220] It is a moment of Nietzschean return which points to the cyclical

nature of both history and story, once again enacting the beginning at an

instance of closure. Through this twofold gesture the familiar interior – of

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[219] Stephen Arata, op.cit., p.141
[220] Ibid., p.283

home and country – becomes displaced, or rendered exotic, thus confirming, rather than ultimately correcting, as Keep and Randall note, 'the unsettling, double logic of the *pharmakon*.'[221] But it is important to note that although the coda of the story echoes its opening paragraph, it is nonetheless cut short at the very moment of reaching for the cocaine bottle, the hand of Holmes forever hovering in mid-air. If the great detective is still addicted to work for the reader the spell, or addiction, of and to the narrative is broken – we are left only with a memory, a textual outline, of the lingering eroticised gaze that first followed the signs on Holmes' forearm. 'The trace', Benjamin writes, 'is appearance of a nearness, however far removed the thing that left it behind may be.'[222] By tracing the workings of imperial and national history, knowledge and identity *The Sign of Four* thus works to illuminate their ambiguous and complex interdependency.

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[221] Christopher Keep and Don Randall, op.cit., p.219
[222] Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. by Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge, MA and London: Belknap Press, 1999), p.447 (M16a,4)

ೞ Conclusion ೞ

'Nothing Clears Up a Case so Much as Stating It to Another Person': Reading Sherlock Holmes

> *If a man will begin with certainties, he shall end in doubts;*
>
> *but if he will be content to begin with doubts, he shall end in certainties.*[1]

This thesis has traced the precariously multi-voiced construction and representation of various guises of identity portrayed in three canonical Holmesian stories. Arguing against the time-honoured view of classic detective fiction as literature of conformism which merely reflects and sanctions the normative values commonly associated with the Victorian middle-classes, it highlighted the tensions and contradictions inherent in the very structure of the genre, while contentiously positing Holmes's method as abductive rather than deductive. My research has been inspired by Bakhtin's strongly articulated belief in the power of literature to re-shape and influence social reality, prompting an inter- and con-textual engagement with the cultural and historical milieu of the tales, as well as their literary antecedents. Making use of a methodology broadly based on the concepts of dialogism and heteroglossia, it was my intention to depart from the model of simply 'applying' theory to the text, as if the two were in a straightforward relation of hierarchical correspondence, concentrating instead on a more embedded, diffusive bond in which all parts, while given equal value, are nonetheless

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[1] Francis Bacon, *The Advancement of Learning*, 5th edition, ed. by William Aldis Wright (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1900), p.41

fundamentally irreducible to unity. I proposed the term 'syndromatic reading' to indicate the type of engagement my thesis would follow, a heteroglot neologism bringing together 'symptom' and 'syndrome' with all their etymological, philological and theoretical connotations, traversing the textual and the cultural in a dynamic reciprocity. While syndromatic reading, when employed in the Holmes stories, is in one regard a way to productively intersect and put to work the various approaches to the tales, it is also, more broadly, a response to the *unheimlich* qualities of language, an articulation of the peculiar feeling that the text is 'haunted' by a certain slippage of meaning that endlessly persists, especially, although by no means exclusively, when reading in a tongue which is not one's own. Since such a relation to language is born not of necessity but rather adopted preference, it allows for an engagement not only from the position of an active participant but also, simultaneously, a more detached observer; making use of the deeply personal relation to the text without the need for the somewhat wearisome anecdotal interpolations often understood as de rigueur part of such a method. To approach writing in this way, as if always encountering a translation, is to probe what lies 'behind the text', spurred by the feeling that there always remains a hidden, yet to be uncovered, layer of elusive meaning which will perhaps emerge when given careful and sustained attention – a feeling, in short, that there is no such thing as a finite interpretation. In other words, it is a reading which strives to defamiliarise the habitual, the ho(l)me(s)ly, tracing the intersections of one's own and the other's words, thus responding to Bakhtin's declaration that 'the discourse lives, as it were,

on the boundary between its own context and another, alien, context.'[2] In yet another turn of phrase, it is a reading always mindful of the Derridean call: 'I have only one language and it is not mine; my "own" language is, for me, a language that cannot be assimilated. My language, the only one I hear myself speak and agree to speak, is the language of the other.'[3]

My thesis adds its voice to a prolifically populous field, since the discipline of Holmesian scholarship is ever flourishing, with several new titles on the great detective, as well as various aspects of Doyle's life and work, published frequently. Different facets of the canonical narratives are still scrutinised, both in more monographic works (Kelvin Jones, *The Criminological Sherlock Holmes*, 2015) and encyclopaedic compendia (Leslie S. Klinger, *The Sherlock Holmes Book*, 2015; Lucy Worsley, *The Art of the English Murder*, 2014). However, it seems that the most prevalent tendency among Sherlockian – or more generally detective fiction – scholars is to concentrate on the modern and modernised adaptations of the stories, analysing their relevance in relation to cultural theory (Nadine Farghaly, *Gender and the Modern Sherlock Holmes*, 2016), literary theory (Stephen Knight, *The Politics of Myth*, 2015), audience participation (Tom Ue, *Fan Phenomena: Sherlock Holmes*, 2014) and – perhaps most prominently – the transformations and revisions of the literary Holmes in film and television (Nikki Stafford, *Investigating Sherlock*, 2015; Matt Hills, *Sherlock: Detecting Quality Television*, 2016; Jean Anderson and Carolina Miranda, *Serial Crime Fiction*, 2015). In view of this development, the importance of closely following the

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[2] Mikhail Bakhtin, 'Discourse in the Novel' in *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Michael Holquist and Caryl Emerson (Austin and London: University of Texas Press, 1981), p.284
[3] Jacques Derrida, *Monolingualism of the Other; or, The Prosthesis of Origin*, trans. by Patrick Mensah (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), p.25

make-up of Doyle's stories emerges as a matter of some exigence, since there is a danger they will become either reverently immobilised as a mythical point of origin or, obversely, dismissed as a bygone irrelevance. With this modernising trend in mind, it is also interesting to note that video games featuring the great detective have not yet registered on the scholarly radar, despite the fact that they have been appearing for a number of years, with new titles developed annually (the first, albeit very rudimentary, Sherlock Holmes computer game was published in 1984). Although the reluctance to engage with the medium can perhaps to some extent be explained by the relative absence of fully articulated games theory and so the lack of academic tools with which to tackle the question, it is nonetheless conspicuous, especially given that gaming is fast becoming not only one of the most lucrative but also widely consumed forms of entertainment, with casual detective-based games its most popular sub-genre. This, therefore, is one of the directions Holmesian scholarship could perhaps take, exploring not only the tropes already highlighted by the studies concentrating on other modern media but also expanding on the bourgeoning field of fan-fiction and audience involvement, for which the participatory qualities specific to gaming are especially well suited. Here, Bakhtin's theories of social interaction and identity formation can come particularly useful, allowing us, for example, to theorise the game-oriented incarnations of Holmes – with their emphasis on temporality and mutability of character development – as subversive instances of contemporary folk culture or the carnivalesque, which 'celebrated temporary liberation from the prevailing truth and from the

established order.'[4] The Bakhtinian theoretical framework, utilised in analysing contemporary media, can help us make an oblique argument for a renewed urgency of literary-cultural analysis in general, providing a basis for an engagement mindful of the dialogically complex relations not only among various genres but also historical and social epistemes, opening a possibility of reading Holmes in different media syndromatically.

The titular vicissitudes of identity, the movements of which this thesis have traced throughout the Holmes stories – in their historical, social and cultural milieu and through their characters, setting and language – are, aptly enough, an oxymoronic entity, since their etymological basis is rooted in an unresolvable contradiction (Latin 'idem', the same and 'vicissim', changeable). Their relationship, in its productive tension, intimates the inherently dialogic quality of language which seeks to proliferate rather than reduce the conflicted multiplicity of the textual weave. My aim here was therefore simply to highlight, detect, un(sher)lock the questions generated by this passage, without arriving at a final, confidently uncovered last word. I could repeat after George Perec that

> It matters little to me that these questions should be fragmentary, barely indicative of a method, at most of a project. It matters a lot to me that they should seem trivial and futile; that's exactly what makes them just as essential, if not more so, as all the other questions by which we've tried in vain to lay hold on our truth.[5]

<p align="center">The game is afoot!</p>

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[4] Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World* [1965], trans. Hélène Iswolsky (Bloomington:Indiana University Press, 1984), p.7
[5] George Perec, 'Approaches to What?' in *Species of Spaces and Other Pieces*, ed. and trans. by John Sturrock (London: Penguin, 1999), p.211

❧ Appendix ❧

List of title abbreviations for the Sherlock Holmes stories

ABBE: 'Abbey Grange'
BERY: 'Beryl Coronet'
BLAC: 'Black Peter'
BLAN: 'Blanched Soldier'
BLUE: 'Blue Carbuncle'
BOSC: 'Boscombe Valley Mystery'
BRUC: 'Bruce-Partington Plans'
CARD: 'Cardboard Box'
CHAS: 'Charles Augustus
Milverton'
COPP: 'Copper Beeches'
CREE: 'Creeping Man'
CROO: 'Crooked Man'
DANC: 'Dancing Men'
DEVI: 'Devil's Foot'
DYIN: 'Dying Detective'
EMPT: 'Empty House'
ENGI: 'Engineer's Thumb
FINA: 'Final Problem'
FIVE: 'Five Orange Pips'
GLOR: 'Gloria Scott'
GOLD: 'Golden Pince-Nez'
GREE: 'Greek Interpreter'
HOUN: *Hound of the Baskervilles*
IDEN: 'Case of Identity'
ILLU: 'Illustrious Client'
LADY: 'Lady Frances Carfax'
LAST: 'His Last Bow'
LION: 'Lion's Mane'
MAZA: 'Mazarin Stone'
MISS: 'Missing Three-Quarter'

MUSG: 'Musgrave Ritual'
NAVA: 'Naval Treaty'
NOBL: 'Noble Bachelor'
NORW: 'Norwood Builder'
PRIO: 'Priory School'
REDC: 'Red Circle'
REDH: 'Red-Headed League'
REIG: 'Reigate Squires'
RESI: Resident Patient'
RETI: 'Retired Colourman'
SCAN: 'Scandal in Bohemia'
SECO: Second Stain'
SHOS: 'Shoscombe Old Place'
SIGN: *Sign of Four*
SILV: 'Silver Blaze'
SIXN: Six Napoleons'
SOLI: 'Solitary Cyclist'
SPEC: 'Speckled Band'
STOC: 'Stock-Broker's Clerk'
STUD: *Study in Scarlet*
SUSS: 'Sussex Vampire'
THOR: 'Thor Bridge'
3GAB: 'Three Gables'
3GAR: 'Three Garridebs'
3STU: 'Three Students'
TWIS: 'Man with the Twisted Lip'
VALL: *Valley of Fear*
VEIL: 'Veiled Lodger'
WIST: 'Wisteria Lodge'
YELL: 'Yellow Face'

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