

**Arthur Conan Doyle and British Cosmopolitan Identity: Knights, Detectives, and
Mediums**

by

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Abstract

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle embodies dual identities in most critical discussions of his works: 1) as the creator of Sherlock Holmes, a character whose influence far outspans his creator, and 2) as a staunch imperialist who tends to demonize the Other in favor of his white male heroes. While these critical approaches are valid, given Sherlock Holmes's popularity and the imperial nature of many of Conan Doyle's writings, a great deal of his work has been marginalized in critical discussions. Not only did Conan Doyle have an extensive literary output that included historical romances and writings about war and spiritualism, but his approach to Britain's place in global politics also is more complex than is commonly represented. Through the period of increased globalization in the *fin de siècle* and early twentieth century, Conan Doyle works to redefine and transform British masculine identity into more sustainable and recuperative modes, using cosmopolitanism as a way to navigate the tensions between national identity and international relations. While using colonial villains as an example of destructive forms of British masculine identity, he presents the chivalrous heroism of Sherlock Holmes, medieval knights, soldiers serving in the Second Boer War, and athletes in the Modern Olympics as examples of cosmopolitan British identities. Through his fictional and non-fictional works, Conan Doyle tries to navigate a cosmopolitan approach to relations with other nations, reflecting an evolving pattern of global outreach that culminates in his

writing on spiritualism, wherein he forms a diverse cosmopolitan commonwealth of the afterlife.

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Chapter 1: Conan Doyle and Cosmopolitan British Identity

In his short story “The Adventure of the Greek Interpreter” (1893), Arthur Conan Doyle introduces Sherlock Holmes’s elder brother, Mycroft. He initially presents Mycroft as a brilliant, unambitious recluse who does not stray from his own lodgings and the Diogenes Club. Holmes describes the Diogenes Club:

There are many men in London, you know, who, some from shyness, some from misanthropy, have no wish for the company of their fellows. Yet they are not averse to comfortable chairs and the latest periodicals. It is for the convenience of these that the Diogenes Club was started, and it now contains the most unsociable and unclubable men in town. No member is permitted to take the least notice of any other one. Save in the Stranger’s Room, no talking is, under any circumstances, allowed, and three offences, if brought to the notice of the committee, render the talker liable to expulsion. My brother was one of the founders, and I have myself found it a very soothing atmosphere. (1: 684-85)¹

Mycroft and his fellow club members are in many ways like the Stoic philosopher Diogenes of fourth century BCE, for Diogenes was also famously “unsociable and unclubable.” Diogenes eschewed social mores, as Plutarch’s *Lives* illustrates in one of the most often repeated anecdotes about Diogenes: After Diogenes does not attend or congratulate Alexander the Great over a political triumph, Alexander tracks him down and finds Diogenes lying in the sun: “when he kindly asked him whether he wanted anything, ‘Yes,’ said he, ‘I would have you stand from between me and the sun’”

¹ All citations from the Sherlock Holmes stories will come from the two-volume collection *Sherlock Holmes: The Complete Novels and Stories* (2003).

(Plutarch, par. 22). Mycroft's unsociability seems derived straight from Diogenes. In contrast to his relatively social brother Sherlock, Mycroft displays an unwillingness to use his genius (which Sherlock Holmes claims outstrips his own) to help people, as he detests leaving his own set routine. However, Conan Doyle's reference to Diogenes is also ironic. Diogenes is the philosopher who coined the term "citizen of the world," which serves as the underpinnings of cosmopolitanism, a philosophy that hinges on one's relation to the rest of the world. Mycroft himself is deceptively cosmopolitan. In his first appearance, he helps solve a case involving the exploitation and torture of Greek citizens and a Greek translator in London. In his second appearance in "The Adventure of the Bruce-Partington Plans" (1908), Sherlock further elaborates on the cosmopolitan nature of Mycroft's role:

occasionally he *is* the British government. [...] Well, his position is unique. He has made it for himself. [...] He has the tidiest and most orderly brain, with the greatest capacity for storing facts, of any man living. The same great powers which I have turned to the detection of crime he has used for this particular business. The conclusions of every department are passed to him, and he is the central exchange, the clearinghouse, which makes out the balance. (2: 400)

While not a detective, Mycroft has chosen to serve as a sort of supercomputer for the British government. What Mycroft really does, though, is to take disparate, individual pieces of information and rearticulate them into a transformed and more comprehensible whole. Just as he creates his own identity by making his vocation for himself (in much the same way Sherlock created the vocation of the "consulting detective"), Mycroft also

uses that newly-formed identity for world-transforming purposes. Not as overtly heroic as his younger brother, Mycroft represents a complex negotiation of identity construction: he reconstructs the world around him in order find better forms of social involvement. As a character first introduced in the fin de siècle and later fleshed out after the turn of the century, Mycroft reveals Conan Doyle's larger social project throughout his body of work: to transform British masculine identity in a more sustainable form for an increasingly globalized world.

Conan Doyle's literary career, from 1882 to his death in 1930, spans over a key moment of transition in British identity. The period encompassing the fin de siècle and the early twentieth century represents a time when the British Empire was at its largest and most powerful, with Britain controlling over three quarters of the globe by World War I; however, the time of High Imperialism was waning, and people knew it. Claims of racial superiority were fraught with fears of degeneracy. Imperial idealism was tarnished by imperial abuses like the Belgian Congo and imperial wars like the Second Boer War. At a time in which easier travel and quicker communication was creating a smaller, more interconnected world, the British were becoming more aware of Empire not as an ideal, but as a messy reality, one that seemed increasingly unstable and unsustainable. As British identity was largely defined as imperial, defining and redefining that identity became particularly important. While it's true that Britain had been preoccupied with self-identity construction throughout the nineteenth century, and really since the Act of Union in 1800, the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries saw a shift in terms of identity construction in response to increased globalization: increasingly, Britain, with its

ever-increasing colonial holdings, came to be seen as in need of definition in relation to other countries.

At the same time, the Victorian British identity is not something easily-defined or stable, even within a shifting worldview. In the nineteenth century, the term “British” refers to the combination of England, Wales, and Scotland, with the colonial holding of Ireland tenuously included. As Robert Young (1995) puts it: “Englishness is itself also uncertainly British, a cunning word of apparent political correctness invoked in order to mask the metonymic extension of English dominance over the other kingdoms with which England has constructed illicit acts of union, countries that now survive in the international arena only in the realm of football and rugby” (3). Already, the solidity of “British” identity is fragmented and fraught with colonial power struggles, as England rules over the others. Tellingly, many nineteenth-century writers used English and British as descriptors interchangeably. The subsuming of Irish, Scottish, and Welsh identities within a British (or, more descriptively, English) identity lends itself to an English hegemony, though one that was becoming increasingly problematized. The Irish Home Rule question dominated British politics in the early twentieth century, with Ireland nationalists fighting for its independence. In one particular incident, Ireland protested being included in the United Kingdom team during the 1908 London Olympics, prompting the team to be renamed the Great Britain/Ireland team so as to appease protesters and prevent an Irish boycott. Of course, that did little to solve the problem, but it serves as an example of renaming as redefinition. Even as the Irish, as well as other colonies, pulled away from the seemingly monolithic Empire, British writers were attempting to define a British identity that was both clearly distinct from and part of the

rest of the world. Cosmopolitanism can be seen as a way to navigate, or at least to articulate, that tension between national identity and international (or inter-national, in the case of Ireland) relations.

Before I define my use of the term cosmopolitanism, a complex term with multiple meanings, I wish to characterize Conan Doyle as a valuable starting point for discovering the cosmopolitanism of the late-Victorian and early twentieth century. Born to an Irish family in Glasgow, then moving to England, and later traveling widely, Conan Doyle embodied a complicated hybrid British identity. As a literary celebrity and creator of the quintessential English detective, Conan Doyle seemed to represent an identity based on British imperial hegemony. His writings include propaganda in favor of British military endeavors, historical romances that revel in British knights, and even an imperial adventure story *The Lost World* (1912) in the line of H. Rider Haggard and Rudyard Kipling. Conan Doyle seems to be rather bombastically imperialistic and has gained a reputation as such. However, while Conan Doyle does try to create the English masculine ideal, his fiction shows a certain amount of uneasiness with the direct and often violent imperial control over other countries. Conan Doyle's uneasiness with imperialism intensifies over time: though he retains a nostalgic dedication to militarism and masculine chivalry throughout his career, his portrayals of English imperialism are often muddy rather than adamantly deterministic. For example, as I explore in my second chapter, Conan Doyle uses the foreign and exotic as a source of villainy in his fiction. The villains and sources of trouble have ties to India, Africa, Australia, and America: all current or former colonies of Great Britain. However, the actual villainy from these adversaries often spring from what the texts establish as eminently British traits: greed, a

preoccupation with hierarchy and mastery, over-determined masculinity, and abuses of the foreign. These colonial villains are not contaminated; their cruelty is inherently British. Conan Doyle contrasts his colonial villains with cosmopolitan heroes: ones who use their relationship with the foreign to benefit all sides and form transnational bonds. Through his fictional and non-fictional works, Conan Doyle tries to navigate a cosmopolitan approach to relations with other nations, reflecting an evolving pattern of global outreach that culminates in Conan Doyle's writing on spiritualism, wherein he forms a diverse cosmopolitan commonwealth of the afterlife.

I began this chapter with a reference to Diogenes's "citizen of the world." To form the basis of my handling of cosmopolitanism, I first refer to Martha Nussbaum's extrapolation of the Stoic cosmopolitan philosophy derived from Diogenes in the introduction to her book *For Love of Country: Debating the Limits of Patriotism* (1996):

The Stoics stress that to be a citizen of the world one does not need to give up local identifications, which can be a source of great richness in life.

They suggest that we think of ourselves not as devoid of local affiliations, but as surrounded by a series of concentric circles. The first one encircles the self, the next takes in the immediate family, then follows the extended family, then, in order, neighbors or local groups, fellow city-dwellers, and fellow countrymen—and we can easily add to this list groupings based on ethnic, linguistic, historical, professional, gender, or sexual identities.

Outside all these circles is the largest one, humanity as a whole. [...] We need not give up our special affections and identifications, whether ethnic

or gender-based or religious. We need not think of them as superficial, and we may think of our identity as constituted partly by them. (9)

Nussbaum approaches the conflict between nationality (or, as she refers to it, patriotism) and cosmopolitanism by complicating the relationship between the two (and more) allegiances. Being a “citizen of the world” does not necessarily mean giving up citizenship of one’s own country (or ethnicity, or gender, etc.), but in understanding how that personal identity works in relation to the rest of the world, which Kwame Anthony Appiah (2006) would call “rooted cosmopolitanism.”² Nussbaum’s discussion of cosmopolitanism has identity at its core, and she highlights identity construction as integral to cosmopolitanism through her discussion of cosmopolitan education. Identity construction, however, is highly complicated, especially when considering the multiple identities people carry, their understandings of how they relate to received identity markers, and how they relate to the above concentric circles. For instance, I can identify as a woman, but my identification as a woman depends on my own definition of gender, definitions I’ve received and believed in the past, my awareness of how other people (men and women) perceive gender, how that differs from masculinity, how both of those genders are constructed in relation to each other, how they’ve been constructed in the past, and how that definition is complicated by differing sexualities that call into question the gender dyad of woman/man. My awareness of my gender must then relate to all of my other identity-modifiers: American, Southern, graduate student, bespectacled, etc., each of which includes similar multiple levels of awareness and identity construction.

² Appiah develops this concept across a series of writings, beginning with his essay “Cosmopolitan Patriots” (1996) or most recently in his book *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers* (2006).

Thus, cosmopolitanism can not only be articulated as the relationship between national identity and identity as a “citizen of the world” (with national identity considered within the context of a multitude of other personal identifiers), but also includes the relationship between awareness and construction: how aware people are of how the identities are constructed as well as how they decide to construct their own identities. The relationship between identity awareness and construction involves multiple negotiations, making cosmopolitanism a self-consciously reflexive imagining. In her seminal 2001 book *The Powers of Distance: Cosmopolitanism and the Cultivation of Detachment*, Amanda Anderson specifically addresses the transformative aspects of cosmopolitanism in the nineteenth century, describing cosmopolitanism as a concept that “places a value on reciprocal and transformative encounters between strangers variously construed, [while] simultaneously [having] strongly individualistic elements, in its advocacy of detachment from shared identities, its emphasis on affiliation as voluntary, and its appeal to self-cultivation” (31-32). Not only is there no contradiction between nationality and cosmopolitanism, but personal identity (including nationality) depends on “self-cultivation.” In other words, identity within cosmopolitanism is self-consciously constructed, using detachment as a critical tool in this self-construction. Detachment, in Anderson’s case, does not mean a lack of emotional or moral sympathy, a wish to remove from human relationships or cultural ties, or even the stereotype of cosmopolitan elitism. Rather, Anderson describes detachment as a way of viewing the world, to “objectify facets of human existence so as to better understand, criticize, and at times transform them” (6). This detachment, or the ability to see one’s own identity as a factor in a larger community, is vital to the concept of identity construction in cosmopolitanism.

Integral to Conan Doyle's work is the idea that identity is largely self-defined and constructed. While Conan Doyle may refer to racial attributes and physiognomy when describing characters, his characters have a great deal of agency in their own identity construction. Sherlock Holmes, for instance, comes from English country squires and French artists, but much of his identity is due to his own efforts of study and practice. Despite his hybrid British national identity, Conan Doyle carefully crafted for himself a literary persona and public personality through his participation in clubs (he was far from the "unclubable" Mycroft), his enthusiastic sportsmanship, and his avid political involvement through nonfictional war writings and newspaper letters. He referred to himself in a letter to his mother, when defending his volunteering for the Second Boer War, as "hav[ing] perhaps the strongest influence over young men, especially young athletic sporting men, of anyone in England (bar Kipling)" (*Life in Letters* 434). Not only does Conan Doyle concern himself with his own identity construction, but wants to serve as an example for how young British men should construct their own identities, how they should represent Britain to the world, and thus how they should relate to the rest of world. While the focus on militarism, sportsmanship, and masculinity may seem related to "muscular Christianity" and Victorian imperial propaganda, Conan Doyle's actual practice of identity construction has more in common with a concept that seems wholly antithetical to Victorian masculinity: decadence.

In order to distinguish Conan Doyle's construction of British masculine identity from more prosaic models grounded in public schools and imperial service, we must first locate Conan Doyle as a particularly urban writer, with much of his fictional work produced in the fin de siècle, the zenith of British aestheticism and decadence. His second

Holmes novel, *The Sign of Four* (1890), was commissioned in the same dinner party as Oscar Wilde's *A Picture of Dorian Gray* (Doyle, *Memories and Adventures* 73). While Conan Doyle is not a British Aesthetic in the same way as Oscar Wilde, aestheticism's influence on his writing can be seen in his portrayal of Sherlock Holmes, his urban and artistic detective. Tanya Agathocleous discusses Conan Doyle's use of London in the Holmes stories as a cosmopolitan space, particularly in the way Sherlock Holmes constructs London as a system of knowledge and interrelations. Cosmopolitan realism, or Agathocleous's tying of cosmopolitanism to urban realism, addresses how British writers, including Conan Doyle, tried to articulate urban spaces as a messy space of negotiation for British identity: rather than locating British identity solidly within the country, these writers attempted to locate both Britishness and a larger world identity within London, which was large and varied enough to act as a microcosm for the world. She refers to a "melding of city and world:"

realist writing produced both a sense of detailed, accumulative local knowledge and an ideal of totality. Together, these different scales allowed for a sense of human community designed to give shape and meaning to the inconceivable complexity of the modern world: a world made newly visible by the alienating forces of imperialism, capitalism, and technology at work in the city. Writers did not merely reflect a new global consciousness, then, but used the city to shape it—and to relate it to quotidian experience. (xvi)

The ability to articulate this global consciousness relies on an aesthetic rearrangement of parts: both individual identity and how it functions within the world is not only an

exercise in detachment, but decadence. However, that identity is not necessarily solely urban. London, while an important locus of imperial identity, represents only one aspect of Conan Doyle's cosmopolitan endeavor. Agathocleous's discussion of Conan Doyle as an author within the context of urban realism likewise necessarily excludes his other important literary forms—particularly his historical romances and nonfiction, which Conan Doyle considered as more important than his more popular Holmes fiction. Agathocleous's exclusive focus on Holmes as urban cosmopolite, in some sense, reveals both the strengths and limitations of her study. While Holmes embodies a new kind of aesthetic, decadent cosmopolitanism, he also forms only one dimension of an evolving concept in Conan Doyle's work. The inclusion of Conan Doyle's other writings reveals an author who is intensely conscious of Britain's place and identity within the wider world, and one who is actively engaging in a decadent reworking of a British international identity.

Conan Doyle would probably not use the word "decadent" in relation to his own writing, as the term during the fin de siècle was tied to negative connotations of degeneracy: a loss of energy, masculinity, and national identity. *The Sign of Four* actually features a parody of the decadent aesthetic in Thaddeus Sholto, a foppish hypochondriac who ensconces himself among his Eastern décor and lack the wherewithal to do more than indirectly address the injustice his family has committed. Holmes and Watson, as well, exhibit the dangers of degeneracy as well as being decadent (as I address in my third chapter). Regenia Gagnier's recent work *Individualism, Decadence and Globalization* (2010), however, proposes a new, more carefully historicized understanding of decadence at the turn of the century that allows us to trace the evolution

of Conan Doyle's thinking more effectively. Gagnier explores the 1890s as a decade of thought experiments, in which, "people [...] attempted to live their lives creatively, as if they were works of art, and treated decorum as formed behavior, civility as formed interaction, beautiful objects as formed labor, beautiful Nature as formed matter, games as formed competition, asceticism as formed self, and, often, socialism as formed society, forming self-interest for the social good: people, that is, who embodied and performed detachment as both critical and aesthetic" (1). As a way to iterate these "thought experiments," Gagnier describes decadence as "not a fixed state but a relation of part to whole within systems that change" (5). Gagnier adapts this definition of decadence from the aforementioned Havelock Ellis (1889), in which he defines the decadent style as an "anarchistic style in which everything is sacrificed to the development of the individual parts" (qtd. in Gagnier 2). Gagnier reframes Ellis's description of decadence, replacing "sacrifice" with "transformation," as decadence does not sacrifice the whole, but develops the individual parts to create a new whole, or a new worldview: "Many *fin-de-siècle* figures opposed narrow egoism, domesticity, and nationalism with larger social visions. This tension of independence versus interdependence, specifically of individual development threatening the functioning of the whole, constituted the anxiety of liberalism after a century of its development" (3). Gagnier directly contradicts the "degenerate" self-interestedness associated with decadence in Ellis's work. Rather, decadence rejects more insular modes of British identity—"egoism, domesticity, and nationalism" refer to insularity of the individual, the family unit, and the nation—by linking it to more expansive modes of identity with "larger social visions." The "tension of independence and interdependence" shows the experimental and "scrappy" (3) (to use

Gagnier's term) nature of decadent identity construction: the individual forms an identity at once "rooted," self-consciously constructed, and in relation to other identities. Gagnier largely confines herself to the 1890s, when decadence was most prominent, as well as the intersection between individualism and socialism that forms much of Gagnier's project.

If Conan Doyle's work can't be described as ostentatiously decadent, he does participate in these decadent experiments of "forming," and his decadence can be traced throughout his career, beyond the 1890s. Conan Doyle's decadence manifests as an ethical reconstruction of British masculine identity: a way to emphasize the parts of Britishness that can sustain an ethical cosmopolitan global identity while shedding the violent and destructive parts that has saw as inherent in existing British identity modes. To use an obvious example of Conan Doyle's decadent cosmopolitanism, which I will discuss in chapter 3, Sherlock Holmes is decadent: he only studies certain subjects and sacrifices a holistic education for those subjects, but he is able to use those skills to create a new profession, a "web" of influence, and a new worldview. As a detective, then, Holmes is able to restructure the world as a better one. Conan Doyle is trying to self-consciously construct what I call responsible decadence (or a decadence for the express purpose of creating a better whole) through cosmopolitanism. Conan Doyle's vision of cosmopolitanism is recuperative on an individual and global scale: he reimagines and restructures the world for the purpose of helping and connecting people.

I refer to Conan Doyle as forming a British identity that is more ethical and cosmopolitan; however, I acknowledge that his ethics and rhetoric are entrenched in late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century beliefs about race and ethnicity, imperialism, gender, sexuality, etc. While I frame Conan Doyle as a cosmopolitan, I do not claim that

he adheres to twenty-first-century ideologies of globalization or identity construction. Besides the racist and sexist rhetoric in much of his work, as well as the propagandistic whitewashing of British behavior during the Second Boer War, Conan Doyle does not question the primacy of the Anglo-Saxon man, and in fact much of his project is concerned with recuperating Anglo-Saxon men in order that they may take their rightful world leadership role. While he criticizes many imperial practices for their violence and destructiveness to both colonizer and colonized, much of his social project is concerned with restructuring imperialism rather than withdrawing from colonies altogether or allowing colonies sovereignty. In order to navigate Conan Doyle's ethical contradictions, I refer to Lauren Goodlad's discussion of "actually existing cosmopolitanisms" in her article "Cosmopolitanism's Actually Existing Beyond; Toward a Victorian Geopolitical Aesthetic" (2010). She acknowledges the problematic nature of nineteenth-century cosmopolitanism:

[C]an Victorianist practice combine the new [twenty-first century] emphasis on cosmopolitan ethics with in-depth description of an imperial age? The aim of such practice would not (or not often) be to valorize Victorian geopolitics but, rather, to recognize the nineteenth century as the precursor to our own globalizing moment: the scene of multifarious world perspectives, democratic projects, heterogeneous publics, and transnational encounters (some recuperable for present-day ethics, a great many more worthy of illuminating historicization). The practice I envision would enunciate the geohistorical as well as expressive dimensions of

Victorian globality, exploring the sinuous interchange between embedding structures and embodied ethics. (400)

Goodlad proposes an approach to Victorian cosmopolitanism (that can, in fact, be applied to Britain in the first few decades of the twentieth century) that does not ignore the oppressive power structures of imperial Britain, but historicizes and complicates our view of Victorians. It would be easy to condemn any Victorian writer who does not outright reject imperialism and any other oppressive power structures as well as the rhetoric that supports them. However, as Goodlad points out, seeing Victorians as either “all-for” or “all-against” imperialism is reductive, and what’s more interesting is the “interchange between embedding structures and embodied ethics.” These writers actively work out the ethics of their own society,³ sometimes supporting, sometimes resisting, and sometimes, as Gagnier would point out, conducting “thought experiments” to work out new forms of society. The interplay between “embedding structures and embodied ethics” in “actually existing cosmopolitanisms” is much like the negotiations of identity that I relate to Conan Doyle’s cosmopolitan project: while he is concerned chiefly with British masculine identity (or the identity within two power structures of Britishness and maleness), his purpose is to rework those identities and the society which empowers them in order to build a society that benefits all. The value of Conan Doyle is that he can write both within and without of power structures, thus giving him critical “distance”; his “Celtic” (to use his term) ethnicity and his financially poor early life inform his critical eye on received structures like imperialism, and his self-formed identity as a prominent British author

³ I use the word “society” as a general term, meaning any aspect of the social milieu informed by politics, science, art, culture, etc.

informs his wish to use his power to restructure imperialism in ways that anticipate the English Commonwealth of the later twentieth century.

In the following chapters, I partially work to reclaim Conan Doyle, as his reputation as a writer (besides his Sherlock Holmes canon) has suffered since World War II and has only now begun to recover. While he was an internationally known and respected literary celebrity and public persona during his lifetime, with his reputation largely surviving the backlash against him once he began publically advocating spiritualism, much of his larger body of work has since disappeared from popular and critical attention. Some Sherlockians, fans of Sherlock Holmes both within and without academia, even participate in a “Great Game,” in which the characters Holmes and Watson are treated as real and Conan Doyle is often relegated to a less-talented literary agent.⁴ However, the past few years have seen a resurgence in critical attention to Conan Doyle. Diana Barsham, Catherine Wynne, Daniel Stashower, and Douglas Kerr have done rather extensive scholarship on Conan Doyle, focusing on a wider array of his work. Kerr begins his 2012 book of Conan Doyle scholarship with, “Arthur Conan Doyle was, arguably, Britain’s last national writer” (1), a statement that highlights how far Conan Doyle has come to fulfill George Grella’s call for more serious scholarly attention to Conan Doyle in his 1983 entry in the *Dictionary of Literary Biography*: “he should be regarded more seriously by orthodox teachers, scholars, and critics. It remains a shame and a scandal that he is so little and so lightly studied within the professional academic and literary community.” To further reclaim the author, I wish to frame Conan Doyle as

⁴ This is not to minimize Sherlockian scholarship, as casual fans and academics with an interest in Sherlock Holmes owe much to the extensive body of work Sherlockians have produced, both scholarly and popular. Rather, I point here to the “Great Game” as a symptom of a larger trend of placing such emphasis on one creation of Conan Doyle so as to exclude not only his other works (which might be understandable given the relative popularity of Holmes) but the author himself.

an author who is consciously critical of the society around him, one who participates in experiments of world transformation both through his fiction and nonfiction. Rather than see him as an uncritical military propagandist or an upholder of the imperial masculinist status quo, I see Conan Doyle as a passionate and intelligent advocate for social change and self-conscious negotiations of identity on a national and global scale.

As such, my chapters explore Conan Doyle's identity and world reimaginations throughout his work. Two chapters focus on his Sherlock Holmes canon: chapter 2 discussing the intersection of degeneracy and colonialism in two of his most famous works, *The Sign of Four* and "The Adventure of the Speckled Band" (1892), and chapter 3 focusing on aestheticism and decadence in the characterizations of Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson. The final two chapters explore works that receive much less critical attention: his historical romances and war writings in chapter 4, and his actual spiritualist texts in chapter 5. The chapters also take a loosely chronological organization, an organizational tactic I use in order to explore how Conan Doyle consciously renegotiates his cosmopolitan views as he grows as a writer and as his work transforms in response to changing attitudes and major world events in the early twentieth century. Each chapter explores a different facet of Conan Doyle's identity-building: the problems with British masculine identity in a colonial context in chapter 2, a possible recuperative construct of British masculine identity through Holmes and Watson in chapter 3, the real-world implications of identity-negotiation in the context of war in chapter 4, and a relocation of British masculine identity in the spiritual realm during and after the Great War in chapter 5.

Chapter 2 is an exploration of Conan Doyle's Anglo-Indian villains in two of his most famous Holmes works, *The Sign of Four* and "The Adventure of the Speckled Band." These villains are often labeled as degenerate because of their being affected, or infected, by their colonial experiences and relationship with the Other. This chapter questions the Orientalized explanation of their degeneracy and villainy, and instead locates their villainy in inherently British masculine identity structures: ones based on greed and over-determined violent mastery over the Other. With Roylott from "The Speckled Band" and his later theatrical version Rylott, Conan Doyle critiques a British masculine identity structure that is both dangerous and unsustainable: that of the British man who uses his power over the Other to maintain himself while not fulfilling his social role as protector and benevolent master. In contrast, Jonathan Small from *The Sign of Four* represents a negotiation of a more hybridized and "small" British masculine identity, one based on chivalry and productive relations with the Other.

In chapter 3, I shift my discussion of British masculine identity and degeneracy from a focus on colonial service to a focus on aesthetics and decadence. Using Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson as primary examples, I trace how Conan Doyle explores more transformative modes of British masculine identity through what I term "responsible decadence." Holmes's construction of his own identity, in opposition to the well-rounded Victorian gentleman, is based on a decadent array of specializations: he separates and "distills," like a Paterian chemist, the traits necessary for crime detection, thus creating a more useful mode of British masculine identity than those existing. At the same time, the aesthetic and decadent detective avoids degeneracy with responsibility: chivalry to women and directed energy useful to society. Likewise, Watson demonstrates a reformed

British identity through appreciation of Holmes's art and their mutual recuperation from degeneracy.

Chapter 4 explores the global implications of British masculine identity transformation, focusing on his nostalgic idealization of chivalry in the medieval historical romances *The White Company* (1891) and *Sir Nigel* (1906), as well as his application of those chivalric ideals to the political realities of the Second Boer War and Britain's place within an increasingly globalized world. While Conan Doyle owes his view of Britain's place in the world to Charles Dilke's concept of Greater Britain, he transforms the assumption of Anglo-Saxon racial and commercial superiority to a British global identity that is rigorously self-constructed and based on culture and behavior rather than race. He uses chivalry to construct British identity, emphasizing responsibility, benevolence, sportsmanship, and manly camaraderie as ways to redeem an imperial identity based on mastery and abuse. His soldiers become knights in his defense of the Second Boer War, using chivalry as an ideal for the identity of the British soldier rather than as a mask for the ugliness and destructiveness of war. In the years between the Second Boer War and World War I, Conan Doyle explores athletics as an avenue for chivalric cosmopolitanism that entirely avoids the unsustainable destruction of war, with athletes fulfilling the same roles as knights and soldiers, making connections to other athletes in spirited competition. The Modern Olympics is the best example of his athletic chivalric cosmopolitanism, as Conan Doyle wished to construct a British Olympic team that would include all of the colonies under the same flag, with colonizer and colonized on equal footing. His British identity within chivalric cosmopolitanism, then, becomes

inclusive, less race-based and more Commonwealth-oriented, with all the people of the British Empire working toward cosmopolitan unity.

With the Great War calling into question Conan Doyle's idealistic rhetoric for cosmopolitan unity in the physical realm, I frame his increasing advocacy of spiritualism during the war and after as an exploration of cosmopolitan unity in the afterlife. While Conan Doyle's spiritualism is most often discussed in scholarship through (occasionally dismissive) anecdote, I focus on the moral and cultural implications of his spiritualist texts: his first spiritualist text *The New Revelation* (1918) and his representation of spiritualist arguments and conversions in the third Professor Challenger novel *The Land of Mist* (1926). The séance forms the ultimate egalitarian community, in which women and the lower classes hold the most spiritual power as mediums and racial Others hold the most spiritual clarity in the afterlife. However, Conan Doyle's purpose is to spiritually transform British men in order to climb a spiritual hierarchy, as they are being held back by institutional religion and materialism. These barriers to spiritual awareness are also forces that cause earthly division, so through spiritualism Conan Doyle imagines a society in which those barriers are subjugated to spiritual togetherness.

Sherlock Holmes has recently seen an upsurge in popularity, with films and television shows such as *Sherlock Holmes* (2009) and *Sherlock Holmes: A Game of Shadows* (2011) by Guy Ritchie, BBC's *Sherlock* (2010-present), and CBS's *Elementary* (2012-present) redefining the detective. The 2014 court decision of *Klinger v. Conan Doyle Estate, Ltd.*, has established Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson as characters in the public domain (previously under copyright because of the ten short stories remaining under American copyright law), which will probably contribute to an expansion of

creative Sherlockian ventures. As Conan Doyle's detective soars in popularity and transforms with each new iteration, the time is ripe for the author himself, as well as his extensive non-Holmes work, to attain a new academic and popular prominence as well. With this work, I hope to bring attention to Conan Doyle as an author, historicized within his own time as well as relevant to ours.

Chapter 2: Degenerate Villains and British Masculine Identity in “The Adventure of the Speckled Band” and *The Sign of Four*

As much as we remember Sherlock Holmes stalking the foggy streets of London, or chatting with Watson in the cozy confines of 221B Baker Street, perhaps the most famous scene in the Sherlock Holmes canon (besides the detective locked in mortal combat at Reichenbach Falls) is in a dark room in the dead of night in an old country manor. Sitting on the bed, Watson nearby with pistol at the ready, waiting for the low whistle and clang of the grate, Sherlock Holmes prepares to foil a man who plans to kill his stepdaughter with an Indian snake. Holmes’s sudden attack—“You see it, Watson? [...] You see it?” (“Speckled Band” 1:419)—and the subsequent death of the villain by his own murder weapon makes “The Speckled Band” (1891) one of the most memorable of the Holmes stories.

And certainly “The Speckled Band” ranks high among scholars as well as fans, noted for its heavy Gothic influence, its almost embarrassingly obvious phallic metaphor, and especially its villain, Dr. Grimesby Roylott, an aristocratic former colonial doctor with a penchant for Indian animals. Roylott seems to form the archetype of the Holmes villain (though most Holmes stories tend to lack a clear-cut villain or crime altogether): educated and cunning, with marks of hereditary defects and harsh colonial experiences. Roylott’s colonial aspects stand out in the story, with his cheetah and baboon roaming the grounds, his Indian cigars, his Turkish slippers, his Indian “swamp adder,” and particularly his tropically-aggravated temper. All these Oriental trappings seem to subsume his actual motive (preventing the loss of income from his stepdaughters via marriage), to the point that his villainy becomes self-explanatory: he’s villainous because

he's Anglo-Indian. As Yumna Siddiqi (2006) points out, the returned colonial, while “a routine phenomenon,” is “portrayed [in the stories] as menacing, and their presence in England precipitates a crisis, either a crime or a mysterious tragedy” (233). Despite the fact that the narrator of the stories, Watson himself, is a similarly afflicted returned colonial—a military doctor wounded at the Battle of Maiwand in the Second Afghan War—the Englishman tainted by life in the colonies stalks through the Holmes canon, terrorizing the English countryside.

The returned colonial in the Holmes stories represents a locus of common *fin-de-siècle* fears: an Englishman who is not truly English, who is infected by the exotic and unknowable and represents a slippage in British borders and identity. Much has been written about the rhetoric of crisis in *fin-de-siècle* Britain—a rhetoric that reflects concern over shifts in practically every aspect of British life and culture. As such, much of that discussion lies outside of the scope of this discussion, in which I will focus primarily on the rhetoric of degeneration as it relates to British masculine identity and contact with the Other.

William Greenslade (1994) describes degeneration as explaining the “paradox [of] the growing sense in the last decades of the century of a lack of synchrony between the rhetoric of progress [...] and the facts on the ground, the evidence in front of people's eyes, of poverty and degradation at the heart of ever richer empires” (15). Degeneration, then, “fostered a sense that what might really be happening to civilisation lay somehow hidden, buried from sight, yet graspable through patient observation of the contours of the surface” (Greenslade 15). The sense of something being wrong, of dissatisfaction, springs from the disconnect between idealistic rhetoric and realistic problems, but it also

relates to radical cultural changes, especially progress that came to be labeled as regressive: changes in gender roles spurred on by the women's movement, increased rights and legal status for the lower classes, etc. Andrew Smith (2004) locates this crisis within the "dominant masculinist culture" (1), a culture that defined masculinity by mastery, self-control and self-containment, and imperial service. This crisis was not, however, simply of gender roles, but of the collision between gender, nationality, and performance. Degeneration was not a failure of masculinity, but of British masculinity, particularly in how British males acted as representatives of the British Empire, both at home and abroad.⁵

In chapter 3, I will discuss how Sherlock Holmes relates to discussions of aesthetic decadence and degeneration. For this chapter, however, I will focus more on degeneration as how it relates to contact with the Other and the effect of British masculine identity. The fears of infection from India leading to degeneration are not merely fears of physical health; they are fears of a loss of identity. Identity is performative in nature: the changes in physical appearance suffered by these men (brown skin, deformities, physical weakness, and illness) match their failures in performance (assimilation into a foreign culture, loss of vigor and mastery, or increased violence and insanity). As men in imperial service went to India to *do* things, to enforce British control, the loss of their ability to *do* (or their ability, willingness, or effectiveness in acting for the British Empire) represents a dangerous slippage in British identity. Angelia

⁵ While the work of Benedict Morel and his 1857 treatise *Traité des dégénérescences physiques, intellectuelles et morales de l'espèce humaine et des causes qui produisent ces variétés maladives* (in which he explore human degeneration as a psychological malady) predates and influenced much of the British writings about degeneration, I turn to Greenslade here as I am focusing chiefly on iterations of degeneration in Britain in the fin de siècle. For a fuller discussion of degeneration, I refer to *Faces of Degeneration* (1989) by Daniel Pick.

Poon discusses the performative nature of British identity in her work *Enacting Englishness in the Victorian Period* (2008): “The idea of national selfhood or identity as resistant to language and representation, more easily felt than described, and more susceptible to recognition in the breach and the negative, contributes significantly to the hegemonic power of Englishness” (1-2). Notice the performance of Englishness relies on restraint, or resistance to the Other, and can most notably be described in “the breach and the negative,” or in contrast to the opposite. Englishness is defined by not-Englishness, in other words. However, as stated above, Britishness is imperial in nature, and it is therefore dependent on relations to the Other. As Poon further points out, “Empire, as Kipling succinctly suggests, provides the extra-territorial and transnational co-ordinates of Englishness, rendering the knowledge and indeed construction of English culture in irrevocably relational rather than autochthonous terms” (2). So Englishness becomes at once hybrid, in which the “English subject [is] necessarily a travelling subject tacking back and forth between different, and often imagined, racial landscapes and cultural loci (Poon 3), and a locus for definition and fixity, as “[k]nowledge of Englishness in the time of empire, in other words, is critical to the authorization of British colonial power” (Poon 4). This paradox, British identity forming in contact and contrast with the Other in “contact zones”⁶, helps define the concept of degeneration in these colonial British men: they must become the master of the colonial Other through understanding and force, but they must not lose their inherent Englishness that can only be defined against the Other.

Degeneration, then, can be articulated as a fear of infection, a fear of weakness and criminality that subverts Englishness. As an Empire that represented itself as strong

⁶ I refer to Mary Louis Pratt’s (1992) term, which she defines as a “space of colonial encounters, the space in which peoples geographically and historically separated come into contact with each other and establish ongoing relations, usually involving conditions of coercion, radical inequality, and intractable conflict” (6).

upholders of justice in the world, England came not to fear the foreign (or not *just* the foreign), but the possibility that British men might become weak and criminal through imperial service. Ronald Thomas (1994) links criminality, nationality, and identity: “these fictions of criminality [in 1890s England] link questions of *personal* identity and physiology with questions of *national* identity and security in ways that redefine the relation of an individual’s body with the body politic” (655, emphasis his). The slippage of British masculine identity is most clearly articulated in the Holmes stories through criminality and disease, while Holmes’s role is, as Laura Otis (1998) describes, a sort of “imperial [...] antibody” (33) who “defends the heart of his Empire against the germs that must inevitably reach it from the foreign lands it seeks to control” (32). Maria Cairney (2007) links disease and criminality in the Holmes stories, as “Holmes’s clients frequently appear as patients and his criminal suspects as diseased and afflicted. Both the victims and the perpetrators of crimes, therefore, exhibit ‘symptoms’ of their association with the disease of criminality” (63). Even the one Holmes story that deals with colonial infection and disease apart from criminality, “The Adventure of the Blanched Soldier” (1926), which involves a soldier returning from the Second Boer War with psychosomatic leprosy, still contains a criminal element, as the soldier’s behavior is described as “guilty” and “slinking” (“Blanched Soldier” 2:545). Rod Edmond (2001) locates leprosy in “The Blanched Soldier” as “understood as both an unavoidable imperial risk and an intolerable imperial burden. [...] Doyle’s [concern is] with the danger it would present if brought back to the metropolitan center” (515). The danger is still that of infection and violence, a threat that comes from not just the disease or the soldier, but with its foreign presence in England. As Leslie Haynsworth (2010) states,

“the Holmes stories are less concerned with exposing the more problematic elements either of imperialism or of domestic relations than they are with demonstrating how volatile and dangerous the collision of the two can be—and how ill-equipped the British legal system is to deal with such collisions” (par. 15). This collision explains much of the criminalization of Roylott’s Anglo-Indian characteristics in “The Speckled Band:” the danger is not necessarily that he’s killing his stepdaughters for their money, but that he’s infecting the domestic sphere with imperial violence.

The knee-jerk reaction is to make the assumption that Conan Doyle criminalizes the Other, coding criminal violence as foreign in nature, and that British masculine identity must remain inherently “British.” However, while Conan Doyle certainly represents colonial spaces as violent and dangerous, and his returned colonials have classic marks of degeneration, the representation of these “villains” is too complicated, too full of ambiguity and contradictions, to characterize them merely as being infected by foreign attributes. Conan Doyle is much more interested in building a more sustainable British identity in relation to the colonies rather than simply fearing degenerative infection from the Other. Siddiqi situates Conan Doyle’s view of Empire as “a vast, heterogeneous, global unity that inspired broad loyalties, and that could have a salutary effect on British manhood, countering the perceived degeneracy of the turn-of-the-century English culture” (233). Empire and colonial contact can thus become recuperative to modes of Britishness that were not working in an increasingly cosmopolitan world. Conan Doyle particularly portrays as problematic the “wealth-gaining” mode of imperial service, or British men who only go to colonies in order to recuperate personal wealth and restore their place in British power structures. While

several of Conan Doyle's characters are wealthy colonials who have funded their rich English lifestyles with colonial gains—characters from “The Boscombe Valley Mystery” (1891) and *The Hound of the Baskervilles* (1901), to name a few—these colonial gains are rarely without consequences. These consequences relate mostly to British conduct in the colonies: how they gained the wealth, how they mistreated people in the colonies for the wealth, and even just their focus on personal gain. These “colonial villains” are not evil because they are tainted by the foreign, but evil for inherently British qualities.

The purpose of this discussion, then, is to explore Conan Doyle's “colonial villains” as an investigation of modes of British masculinity. Conan Doyle, through these villains, reframes British masculine identity in relation to the Other (in this case, the colonies), showing the destructiveness of an inherently British identity that subjects the Other to oppressive control, leeches wealth off the Other, and gives no service in return. Through negotiation in the contact zones, British men are then able to transform their identities: forming constructive (though admittedly still dominant) relationships with the Other, and becoming more adaptable to a changing world. In order to articulate this negotiation of identity, I will focus on two “villains”: Dr. Grimesby Roylott from “The Speckled Band” and Jonathan Small from *The Sign of Four* (1889). I choose these two stories because they are most prominently discussed in Holmes scholarship, particularly as depicting Anglo-Indian villains, and they serve as revealing representations of British involvement in India during the mid-to-late nineteenth century. I will particularly look at the villains' involvement in imperial service, their relationship to and treatment of the Other, and their transforming identities. The inherently British masculine traits of both characters are the source of their degeneration and villainy, not necessarily their

“colonial” traits. While Roylott represents a destructive, over-determined form of British imperial dominance, Jonathan Small is able to negotiate his identity through “smallness” as a hopeful but not entirely successful transformation of British masculine identity. Together, these two characters serve as an indictment of the failures and abuses of British Imperialism, as well as an exploration of how to recuperate British involvement in the world.

Failed Mastery in “The Speckled Band”

“The Speckled Band,” or the “snake story,” as Conan Doyle called it, is a locked room mystery that is a combination of the Gothic and the sensational. The Gothic trappings are a bit overwhelming and recall one of Conan Doyle’s early literary influences: Edgar Allan Poe. Like “The Fall of the House of Usher” (1839), the story features an old country estate in disrepair, a fallen aristocratic family, twins who bear an uncanny link, and a heavy Gothic tone, including sounds in the night, darkness, and at the center the Byronic figure of Dr. Grimesby Roylott. At the same time, “The Speckled Band” is clearly an imperial story, as Roylott and his step-family the Stoners have Anglo-Indian origins and the story is littered with Indian animals. The tension of the story seems to be the influx of Anglo-Indian outsiders on English soil.

Besides the colonial props of Indian animals and Turkish slippers, Roylott is deeply marked by his colonial experiences, physically and mentally tying him to degeneration. Watson first describes Roylott as having “[a] large face, seared with a thousand wrinkles, burned yellow with the sun, and marked with every evil passion” (1:408). Darkening of the skin is a classic sign of degeneration in late Victorian literature,

and certainly one used several times in the Holmes stories—Watson him was described by a friend as “thin as a lath and as brown as a nut” (*Study in Scarlet* 1:4) shortly after his colonial experiences. The “brown” or “yellow” skin can be tied to racial Othering, while the yellowing and aging of Roylott’s skin implies illness (particularly since malaria, or “yellow fever,” was considered a colonial disease) and hardship foreign to the more “domestic” England. The further marking of the face with “every evil passion” points to the Victorian belief that emotions or the inner being manifested physically, but it also places Roylott firmly in the degenerate and foreign realm of “evil passions,” rather than the more English rationality. His stepdaughter Helen Stoner, when describing him to Holmes, explains how his colonial experience has tied him to passions rather than rationality: “Violence of temper approaching to mania has been hereditary in the men of the family, and in my stepfather’s case it had, I believe, been intensified by his long residence in the tropics” (1:401). Stoner admits that “violence of temper” is strongly tied to Roylott’s English aristocratic heredity, but his “residence in the tropics” subsumes the English nature of Roylott’s temper, especially coupled with his degenerate physical features.

The common critical characterization of Roylott ties his Orientalized degeneracy with his villainy. Lesli Favor (2000) discusses Roylott as “an Englishman who has been irreparably altered by the Other” (400) and whose “evil [...] stems from his connection with the East” (399), India having “brought out the worst in Roylott and propelled him back to England to wreak havoc there” (400). This interpretation of Roylott is stated explicitly in the text, and it supports, for Favor and others, a criticism of late Victorian literature that glorified Empire, supported a white Anglo masculine hegemony, and either

vilified or silenced the Other. There is certainly quite a bit of silencing and vilifying going on, as well as supporting white male hegemony. However, the “Oriental” details seem odd, almost unnecessary, for the core of the tale: a man kills his daughters with an untraceable poison for their money. In fact, other than the Indian snake, none of the “Oriental” inclusions are necessary for the case. Rosemary Hennessy and Rajeswari Mohan (1989) state, “Royslott’s links to the Orient encode him with multiple semes for otherness in overdetermined opposition to the western, rational, middle-class Holmes” and whose “association [...] with the wild Orient is also in excess of the requirements of the solution” (190). Royslott’s “overdetermined” Orientalism both distracts from his motive and method of murder, setting up a system of red herrings, as well as calls attention to Royslott’s colonial roots, though not in a way that necessarily vilifies. The problem is, Royslott doesn’t need his Oriental trappings in order to become a villain. His real villainy springs from his patriarchal disempowerment and his attempts to regain power by abusing that very power.

Other critics have complicated Royslott’s representation as villainous because of his Anglo-Indian identity. Along with Hennessy and Mohan’s representation of Royslott as a controlling patriarch, Susan Harris (2003), for example, claims, “India becomes a laboratory in which England’s hereditary criminals are identified; had Royslott never gone out to serve the Empire, his inherited propensities might never have been detected” (459). Here, Harris emphasizes Royslott’s hereditary propensity for violence, a propensity admitted by Helen Stoner in the short story. Interestingly, though, India still seems to carry the blame, as India becomes the “laboratory” in which degenerate English villains

are made. Leslie Haynsworth shifts the “blame” from the colony, or the Other, to England’s construction of imperial service:

Royslott’s story suggests that it can be dangerous to make such opportunities available to those who have proven themselves unfit to prosper at home [...] having tasted material wealth and having learned from his colonial experience that it can be easily gotten, he plainly feels a sense of personal entitlement that makes him utterly ruthless. That his hereditary temperament has been dangerously exacerbated by his colonial experience is indicated by his affinity for the more atavistic elements of the empire (Haynsworth, par. 12)

So, then, Royslott is not a villain just because he spends time in the tropics, but because he was unfit for colonial service in the first place. Royslott’s colonial “service” gives him a sense of “personal entitlement” and makes him obsessed with mastery, which explains in part his quickness to kill those under his power for his own advancement, as well as his obsession with holding a mastery over dangerous Indian predators. However, Royslott’s colonial fortune was not as easily gained as Haynsworth implies. He built a practice by “his professional skill and his force of character” (“Speckled Band” 1:400), as Helen Stoner points out, implying that he was not simply raking in the money. In fact, Royslott’s colonial experiences seem less the ideal of English colonial mastery and more a nightmare of thwarted English power. Royslott goes to India to regain power—the impoverished aristocrat can become a “lord” over Indian people—and to build wealth—the doctor can build a successful practice that may elude him in England. These common colonial fantasies of wealth and power turn out to be hollow fantasies for Royslott,

unsupported by the British Empire and unsustainable in a colony where his full mastery over the Indian subject is called into question.

The statement that most blatantly blames Indian infection for Roylott's violence is Helen Stoner's, who attributes her stepfather's temper to his "tropical experience." This statement is never contradicted in the text, even though she goes on to describe him as "absolutely uncontrollable in his anger" (1:401). However, there are reasons to question Stoner's account. First, she has a great interest in making excuses for his abusive behavior, to others and herself, and in hushing up the evidence of his violence. In one instance of Roylott's temper, she "pay[s] over all the money that [she] could gather [to] avert another public exposure" (1:401), and Watson attributes his inability to write up the case sooner to a promise of secrecy to her. Apart from a fear of scandal, Stoner wants to hide the fact that Roylott physically abuses her. Holmes claims, with no evidence other than her narration, that she is "screening [her] stepfather" and that she "[has] been cruelly used" (1:406). At the uncovering of bruising in the shape of fingers on her wrist, she "colour[s] deeply" and "cover[s] over her injured wrist," saying, "He is a hard man [...] and perhaps he hardly knows his own strength" (1:406). This event, which strongly foreshadows Roylott's murderous intentions, also hints at severe trauma. Stoner, wanting to justify her stepfather's actions, might attribute his temper to his colonial experiences. The play based on this short story, which I will discuss later in this chapter, emphasizes the physical and emotional dominance Roylott has over Stoner, while calling even further into question his "uncontrollable temper."

The excuse that India mysteriously augmented his temper seems odd after hearing the particulars of his Indian experience. Stoner describing his temper-augmenting

experience as “tropical” implies that Roylott was affected by the climate, which was a common belief at the time. People often tied heat, tropical diseases, and a more “luxuriant” climate to a heightening of the passions, physical weakness, and moral laxness: all degenerate attributes. However, Roylott’s actual experience in India does far more to explain his actions. In order to understand how Roylott’s background contributes to his villainy, it is important to contextualize his Indian experience. While Conan Doyle is not necessarily the most careful across the Holmes canon about timeline continuity, he is very aware of India’s recent political history. In her interview with Holmes, Stoner gives a detailed timeline of events, which I have reproduced in a timeline below:

1853—Roylott marries Mrs. Stoner; Helen and Julia are at age two.

1853-1875?—Roylott kills native butler and is sent to prison.

1875—The family moves to England; Mrs. Stoner dies in a railway accident.

1881—Julia Stoner dies at age thirty.

1883—The year Watson places the events of this story in his narration.

The one event that cannot be anchored to an age or year in the text is Roylott’s imprisonment. We do not know when Roylott went to India, nor when his imprisonment happened in relation to his marriage to Mrs. Stoner. However, we can hazard a guess that the murder and imprisonment occurred sometime after his marriage, as the young widow of a Major-General with two young girls would be unlikely to marry a recently-released convict. There is also a time lapse between their marriage and their return to England, and a long imprisonment of two decades could account for the Stoners’ time in India, as well as the less-than-familiar relations between Helen and her stepfather. I only make a

point of this because the timing of these events is contextually important. First, as Helen has lived twenty-two years in India, it establishes that Helen is not quite an “innocent English citizen[.]” preyed on by “a villain from afar” (Favor 398), but an Anglo-Indian herself. While this does not negate her innocence nor her English citizenship, it does call into question her Orientalized description of Roylott, and it complicates the concept of the foreign attack on English domesticity.

The timeline is also important as a historical reference. If we accept that Roylott married Mrs. Stoner in 1853 and was imprisoned afterward, it would have been around the period of the Indian Mutiny of 1857. That makes Roylott’s murder of the Indian servant, as well as his avoidance of capital punishment, rather volatile during a volatile time. His murder of the Indian servant would have been highly political, an indication of heightening British/Indian violence as well as a representation of the abuse and control that led to the Indian Mutiny. Roylott’s imprisonment in India, happening before, during, or after the Mutiny, would have also placed him as a colonial washout and a disempowered British master.

Roylott would have also seen his imprisonment as a betrayal. After his murder of a native butler, Roylott “suffered a long term of imprisonment and afterwards returned to England a morose and disappointed man” (“Speckled Band” 1:400). We are led to believe that Roylott’s attack on the butler is evidence of an out-of-control degenerate temper, but the actual motive is a series of robberies. While it seems odd that robberies would have occasioned a lethal attack on someone who may or may not have been involved or to blame, Roylott’s actions make more sense in context with his position in India. Even though he’s not part of the military, he’s still a representative of England as

imperial force. Lisa Fluet (1998) comments on Roylott's choice of setting up a private medical practice in India: his "mid-century Indian practice, therefore, can be read both as an exploitation of the medical needs of Indian aristocrats for the financial betterment of his fallen aristocratic family, *and* as a manifestation of an organized, national system of control over [...] colonial bodies" (140, emphasis hers). The story itself explicitly states that Roylott chose to go to India in order to gain wealth and restore his family estate, which a series of robberies would have threatened, but the robberies also serve as a threat to Roylott's mastery. His motive may have been wealth, but, as Fluet points out, that wealth depends on his imperial function of control over Indian bodies. Fluet further explains that the "British medical practice in India was intended at least in part to reinforce, in terms of the treatment of Indian bodies, notions of superior medical knowledge and biological hegemony over a colonized population" (141). Therefore, Roylott's beating and murder of the Indian butler can be seen as an exercise of his imperial role. He has lost control of Indian bodies in the series of robberies, which has also revealed the tenuous control England has over India. In order to reestablish his control, he exerts the ultimate control over the Indian body to which he has the most established rights, his Indian servant. Roylott would have seen the Indian servant as a possible thief, or possibly allowing the robberies to happen through intent or negligence.

Thus it is not the climate or the foreign trappings that criminalize Roylott, but his misguided attempts to gain imperial mastery, as well as his abandonment by the imperial government. The disappointment Helen mentioned springs from the imperial government's failure to support his control over Indian bodies. Rather than hush up the crime or judge Roylott's actions justifiable, the government sends Roylott to prison.

Within the context of the Indian Mutiny, of course, the government's actions and Roylott's frustration are justifiable. The Indian Mutiny represents a struggle for power and rights between the Sepoy troops and the English forces. The Mutiny occasioned a restructuring of imperial practices, allowing the English government to take more direct control over India, though with a few cultural allowances to Indians. Rather than try to place the story within the specific history of the Indian Mutiny (as that is impossible), I refer to the Indian Mutiny as a moment of transition and negotiation of power structures and national identity. Roylott, still holding on to fantasies of riches and complete mastery, is unable to adapt his identity to this moment of negotiation. Thus, his criminalization, as well as his mental and physical deterioration, comes from his attempts to live up to his image of traditional British masculinity: that of aristocratic wealth and unquestionable, sometimes abusive, control.

Inherent in Roylott's deterioration and colonial failures is Conan Doyle's critique of imperial practices. Conan Doyle characterizes his criminal Anglo-Indian with what would be considered the worst of English imperial practices: greed, abuse, and violence. As I will discuss in more detail in a later chapter, Conan Doyle wished to mold the British Empire into a benevolent and chivalrous force, one whose purpose was to act as leader and protector of other countries. This idealized (if racist and flawed) view of Empire makes his recognition of imperial abuses all that more illuminating. Conan Doyle is not accusing Englishmen of becoming tainted by the Other, but becoming representative of the worst of English imperial qualities. Roylott goes to India not to serve the colony, but to drain it of its resources for purely mercenary intentions, using his mastery over Indians to advance himself at their detriment. Rather than use his control

over Indian bodies medically and benevolently, he abuses that power and kills the Indian who is most under his power.

It is perhaps not surprising, then, that Roylott embodies the same greed, abuse, and violence on his return to England. All of his actions are turned to self-serving greed, he uses colonial acquisitions in order to further his goals, and he destroys the people he's supposed to be serving—the people he has mastery over—in order to preserve his own fortune. He would have considered, for instance, the men marrying his stepdaughters as “robbers” trying to deplete his English fortune and his patriarchal mastery, as he continues to define himself with money and power. Rather than target the actual “culprits,” he again targets the socially vulnerable, the people in his care. Just as his wealth and mastery in India was dependent on mastery over Indian bodies, so his income and mastery in Britain depends on his mastery over the bodies of his stepdaughters. Following his previous pattern, Roylott determines that they, like the native butler before them, must be sacrificed, lest he be “robbed” not just of income but of the patriarchal mastery he sees as his British masculine birthright. As Hennessey and Mohan point out, the murder is a “symbolic rape” with which “Roylott enacts the ultimate patriarchal privilege” (191). While the Indian origin of the snake seems to Orientalize the crime, the phallic nature of the murder weapon, with its penetrative power and its literally going through the room's “vagina,” is perhaps more important than its Indian nature, and highlights the English nature of the crime: it's about controlling women in order to reinforce the patriarchal hold over the hereditary home. The murder also highlights a further critique of a mode of English masculine identity based on power, control, wealth, and violence. Roylott destroys his family to preserve his name, and he kills the people he,

as a patriarch, is traditionally supposed to protect so that he can preserve his patriarchal dominance.

Royslott further displays a destructive English masculine identity by his treatment of Indian animals. Often used as proof of his Oriental degeneracy, Royslott's use of Indian animals actually shows his control and mistreatment of colonial acquisitions. He imports tropical animals into the English countryside, and he lets them run wild. This certainly shows the foreign literally rampaging around the English countryside, as was the stereotype of the criminalized returned colonial, but it also shows a disregard for the welfare of the Indian animals. Likewise, his murder weapon, the "swamp adder," he has kept prisoner for more than two years in an iron safe, controlling it with a leash and hunting crop, and seeming to feed it on milk. While snakes can be trained and lured with milk, feeding a predator an all-dairy diet shows a lack of understanding and even an infantilization of the animal. He does not have a "passion for Indian animals," he has a passion for control over and abuse of Indian animals. Rather than being killed by his own weapon, Royslott's death now more seems like the abused colonized native getting his revenge on an exploitative master—an Indian Mutiny within his own home.

Finally, Royslott's "uncontrollable tropical temper" is unsustainable when disconnected from Helen's narrative. Helen's description, coupled with Royslott's explosive bout of temper in Holmes's sitting room, is of a roaring brute with no subtlety: all passion and reaction, no planning. However, his actual crimes are perpetrated through great secrecy, patience, and indirect actions. Rather than kill his stepdaughters through direct violence, he uses the most roundabout way to kill his stepdaughters: a carefully trained snake let in through a vent in room in which the snake might or might not bite its

victim. Even Roylott's threats against Holmes seem carefully gauged to scare Holmes away rather than an explosion of passion. While Holmes does point out the Indian bent of the crime—"The idea of using a form of poison which could not possibly be discovered by any chemical test was just such a one as would occur to a clever and ruthless man who had had an Eastern training" (1:422)—the crime is placed just as much to Roylott's cleverness and expertise.

So, what we see are the failures of an eminently British person—an aristocrat and a professional, one who has a vested interest in controlling bodies for his own wealth and position. However, as much as Roylott desires to embody traditional forms of English masculine identity, he in fact embodies a hybrid identity, fulfilling wildly different and even contradictory roles. Roylott's villainization, then, can be seen as a refusal to embrace a hybrid identity: an inability to negotiate his identity for the changing times. He, after all, kills an Indian servant when the imperial government has to deal with an Indian rebellion, and he refuses to adjust his mode of living when his stepdaughters want to marry. Beyond that, Roylott is also hybridized according to traditional social roles. Fluet discusses the liminal space Roylott holds in British society as an Anglo-Indian, who were characterized by the British "regarding changes in skin color, alcoholism, disease, and [...] luxuriant, overpaid lifestyles while in India and suspected [of] ill treatment of the native Indian population" (130). This description feeds into the characterizations of Oriental degeneracy assumed within the text, but it also accounts for Roylott's resistance to and separation from English society, as well as his inability to form an English medical practice. Roylott's disappointing Indian experiences "altered irrevocably his perspective on British society, and subsequently [have] damaged his own ability to regain his original

place within the existing class structure upon his return” (Fluet 131). The mention of class structure is key: the Oriental elements to Roylott serve as a distracting novelty, but the real problem lies in his inability to fit into an established social class.

Watson’s description of Roylott’s clothing acts as a succinct illustration of his liminal space in British society: “His costume was a peculiar mixture of the professional and of the agricultural, having a black top-hat, a long frock-coat, and a pair of high gaiters, with a hunting-crop swinging in his hand” (1:407-08). Watson’s description perhaps tells the reader just as much about Roylott as Holmes’s deductions. The agricultural aristocrat and the urban professional clothing clash, mixing both identity and setting in contradictory ways. The top hat and frock coat suit his urban setting, but Roylott’s high gaiters and hunting-crop give him a menacing yet ridiculous air, as if he were fox hunting in the center of London. This costume establishes not a man who can fulfill a multiplicity of roles, like Holmes, but a man who cannot settle on a role, and thus fulfills none. Furthermore, the incongruity of wielding a hunting crop in clothes and circumstances ill-suited for such a tool symbolizes Roylott’s disproportionate lust for mastery and control. This desire mars the appropriateness of his outfit just as it poisons other aspects of his life, ironically making him unsuitable to properly fulfill the positions of authority he grasps so tightly.

This issue of social class exists prior to Roylott’s departure for India. While he’s “the last survivor of one of the oldest Saxon families in England” (“Speckled Band” 1:400), his aristocratic family is impoverished and has left him with bleak prospects and a crumbling manor house. In order to recover his family fortune, he must adopt the means of another social class, that of the emerging professional class. When discussing

Roylott's means of financial gain, Fluet claims, "Roylott's choice of a private Indian practice betrays an interest in amassing a considerable income, presumably for the restoration of his family name and estate. The financial tinge to his aims suggests the g.p.'s stigma of 'trade'" (139). Not only does this imply a criticism of Roylott's imperial service, in which he is an "inadequate representative of Britain-as-imperial-power" (Fluet 133), it also reveals a changing social construction. Middle-class professionalism in the nineteenth century comes more and more to define the masculine role in British society; however, its "financial tinge" shows a discomfort with Roylott's compromising of his aristocratic identity and his role in imperial service.

Failing his attempts at private practice in India and England, Roylott must retreat back to his aristocratic country manor, where he supports himself not through his own inherited money (he has none) nor through his professional gains (he lost all), but by leeching off the income of his wife and, by proxy, his stepdaughters, who, as I've mentioned above, he harms rather than protects. Yet his failure as a traditional patriarch also spreads to his traditional rural aristocratic role, the eighteenth-century model of a country gentleman. Helen describes his manner when taking on the role of country gentleman as a "terrible change" (1:401):

Instead of making friends and exchanging visits with our neighbors, who had at first been overjoyed to see a Roylott of Stoke Moran back in the old family seat, he shut himself up in his house and seldom came out save to indulge in ferocious quarrels with whoever might cross his path. [...] A series of disgraceful brawls took place, two of which ended in the police-court, until at last he became the terror of the village, and the folks would

fly at his approach, for he is a man of immense strength, and absolutely uncontrollable in his anger. (1:401)

His “disgraceful” conduct reveals an “association with both aristocratic squandering and lower-class shiftlessness” (Hennessey and Mohan 190) as he acts more like the angry town drunk than the lord of the manor. His failure as a leader in the English countryside mirrors his failure in imperial service: he wants the privileges of traditional English masculine roles associated with wealth and power, but he does not fulfill the responsibilities of those roles.

His responsibility of hospitality and charity within the role of country gentleman becomes a parody of itself with his friendship with the gypsies. Hennessey and Mohan point out, “His friendship with the gypsies upon his return from India is related to this fall and is represented as simultaneously self-explanatory and suspicious” (190). The gypsies are another “overdetermined” Oriental tie, serving only to villainize Roylott and act as the most obvious red herring, as Julia’s dying words of “speckled band” become associated with the spotted head scarves of the gypsies. However, Roylott’s association with the gypsies is not necessarily villainizing. Holmes himself utilizes “street Arabs” (*Study in Scarlet* 1:47) (a name for homeless and orphaned children, but also carrying an Oriental connotation). It’s how Roylott relates to them. Rather than just be kind to them and let them stay on his ground—a suspect kindness, given the dangerous animals roaming the grounds as well—he “would accept in return the hospitality of their tents, wandering away with them sometimes for weeks on end” (“Speckled Band” 1:401). Rather than give hospitality, he imposes his company in what Helen calls a friendship, but may be just as much of an abuse of power as anything else.

Thus far I have analyzed the characterization of Roylott from the 1891 short story “The Speckled Band.” This Roylott strives for traditional English masculine identities and fails at all of them due to violence and an unwillingness to adapt to the changing times. This characterization, however, is not the only Conan Doyle-created version of Roylott and his infamous snake. The second version, a play written in 1909, reflects a vast shift in focus and characterization, reflecting the author’s own imperial experiences as well as the changing nature of personal identity.

Performing the “Cayenne Pepper Temper”

In her article “Sherlock Holmes and the Problems of War: Traumatic Detections” (2010), Catherine Wynne relates an anecdote by artist Mortimer Menpes, who asked Conan Doyle what his favorite Holmes story was and received the reply “the one about the serpent; he could not for the life of him remember its title” (qtd. in Wynne, “Problems” 31). Menpes was there to draw and interview Conan Doyle during his service in the Langham field hospital during the Second Boer War. While Menpes relates this forgetfulness to his lack of detective skills, Wynne is quick to point out that Conan Doyle currently had other concerns, namely the “appalling medical situation [that] took precedence over fictional recollections” (“Problems” 31). Wynne explores the traumatic effects of Conan Doyle’s war experience throughout her article: while Conan Doyle was fervent to volunteer for service, supportive of Britain’s war effort, and highly critical of the antiquated and ineffective military practices of the British forces, Conan Doyle’s later work reflects the traumatic events of the war. As Wynne points out, his characters tend to come back from the colonies not with a heightened temper or physical disorders, but with

psychological trauma. The leprous character returned from the Boer War in “The Blinded Soldier” may not have leprosy, but his psychosomatic leprosy reveals perhaps more than any physical disorder.

It is interesting, then, that the “snake story” makes another appearance eight years after Conan Doyle’s war experiences, this time as the play “The Speckled Band” (1909). As Catherine Wynne points out in another article, Conan Doyle attended one of the early performances of the play with Roger Casement and E. D. Morel. After the performance:

The three discussed the setting up of the Morel testimonial fund, later launched on 11 July, which was aimed at further facilitating Morel’s humanitarian work on behalf of the Congo natives. All had been engaged in this work since Casement, acting as British Consul in the Congo Free State, had published a report in 1904 outlining the abusive system of the forced labour, the torture and the mutilation of the Congolese natives by their white oppressors, a savage regime perpetuated by King Leopold of Belgium. (“Philanthropies” 69)

King Leopold’s rule over the Congo Free State serves as the ultimate juxtaposition of hypocritical humanitarian rhetoric and human rights atrocities, making it a focal point for criticism of imperial abuses and treatment of colonies. As Wynne points out, “The play testifies to an empire out of control, motivated by economic greed and dominated by issues of ruthless appropriation” (“Philanthropies” 71). Even more so in the play than in the previous story, Conan Doyle is informed by the trauma of colonial wars and overdetermined imperial rule based on violence and gain.⁷

⁷ For a more thorough account of Conan Doyle’s experiences in the Second Boer War, see chapter 4.

The story Conan Doyle claimed as his favorite amid battle wounds and enteric fever goes through several dramatic changes in play form, particularly in the characterization of the villainous doctor. Rylott shifts from a character who is defined by his social and political failures to the renamed Rylott, who becomes the locus of psychological trauma. A departure from the elusive Roylott, Rylott dominates the stage, even subsuming Holmes's character in many ways. Holmes' character does not make an appearance until the second scene of Act II, and by that time Rylott, played by Shakespearean-trained Lyn Harding, has dominated the first act and interacted with every character. In Roylott we get an imperial washout, living in impoverished circumstances, wearing ill-matched clothes that reveal his confusion of roles, and dying in Turkish slippers. In Rylott, however, we get a burly yet impeccably dressed man, a master of a household that employs three servants, over whom he maintains varying degrees of acute control. His degeneracy is not determined by failure, but has turned inward. Edward Morton's review in *The Playgoer and Society Illustrated* (1910) describes Harding's performance as, "a study of a nervous temperament; the restlessness, the irritability of the doctor and his violent explosions of rage, are all very naturally expressed by the actor" (82). This characterization of Rylott actually represents a negotiation between actor and author. R. Dixon Smith describes the conflict as one of interpretation, citing Hesketh Pearson's biography of Conan Doyle as saying that "Doyle had pictured Rylott as an old-fashioned melodramatic villain in a frock coat" (qtd. in Smith 92), whereas Harding wished to bring a more nervous temperament to the character, doing so through acting when Conan Doyle insisted on an unchanged script. J. M. Barrie, brought in as an intermediary, ruled in favor of the actor, but the character remains a hybrid creation:

Conan Doyle's masterly, manipulative dialogue for the character mixes with Harding's twitching, trembling performance to show a character who is in control, and good at being in control, but on the edge of losing control completely. Rylott's control over people, both in script and in performance, becomes more psychological than in the short story: Rylott still demands mastery and wealth, but he now no longer controls people's bodies: he tries to subsume others' very identities.

While Rylott becomes more obviously villainous, his Oriental aspects become more externalized from him. Every Oriental marker changes for the play: his cheetah and baboon turn into a boarhound named Siva, he now has an accomplice in an Indian servant named Ali, and this Indian servant even takes over control of the Indian snake. The boarhound, an English hunting dog, has possibly replaced the cheetah and baboon for practical reasons, as the two animals would ill suit a stage. However, the boarhound is only mentioned in the script and is killed off-stage by Holmes, so stage practicality is not necessarily the issue. The inclusion of a villainous dog might be Conan Doyle's wink to his enormously popular *The Hound of the Baskervilles* (1901), but it also serves to Anglicize the villain and to show his appropriation of what he considers Indian villainy. The dog's name closely resembles the Hindu deity Shiva, the Destroyer. Naming his dog after a Hindu god both insults and villainizes something held sacred in India. Even though he's not importing tropical animals to run around unchecked in the English countryside, he's still abusively appropriating colonial acquisitions.

Even more prominent in the play than the dog, and perhaps more immediately threatening, is Rylott's servant Ali, an Indian servant who apparently doesn't mind that Rylott has already killed one native butler. While Ali is certainly an Orientalized

character, played with “Oriental gravity and servility” (Morton 83) by William Ross, an English actor, he does not serve to Orientalize Rylott, but more to serve as one of Rylott’s Indian acquisitions and as a point of contrast to Rylott. He demonstrates the true dangers of overdetermined British imperial control: the Indian servant, who seems to have no goals of his own, becomes an unthinking tool of Rylott’s, much like the snake. Ali, in full turban and Indian garb, stands conspicuously in the background of many of the scenes in the play⁸. At other times, Rylott uses Ali in two ways: as a forerunner and enforcer in the house and as a snake-tamer. As a forerunner, Ali is able to indirectly assert control over the members of the household, particularly the remaining stepdaughter Enid and the old sympathetic butler Rodgers. In the opening scene, as Rodgers is trying to comfort Enid on the recent death of her sister, Ali appears to relay household orders to Rodgers, but Ali’s purpose is transparently to prevent Enid from receiving help, either physically or emotionally. Whenever any character tries to speak to Enid alone, Ali appears within minutes, acting as part of Rylott’s manipulative control over the household. Likewise, Ali takes over the snake-charming duties, allowing Rylott to control the snake, as well as the house, without direct effort.

While Conan Doyle primarily uses Ali as a stock servant, a bit of Oriental decoration on the stage in order to set the tone, he also crafts a relationship between Rylott and Ali that reveals the effects of long-term oppressive imperial control. Ali’s identity is entirely subsumed, and he’s subsequently used in the service of his oppressor as a tool of oppression. In only one case does Ali resist Rylott: after Holmes has revealed his identity as the disguised butler in order to protect Enid from Rylott’s physical abuse,

⁸ Pictures of the production were published in the July-August edition of the *Playgoer and Society Illustrated*, along with a review by Edward Morton, reprinted in Leslie S. Klinger’s edition of *The Illustrated Speckled Band* (2012).

Holmes runs with his accomplice Billy and shoots the dog off-stage. Ali, having witnessed Holmes's escape, bodily restrains Rylott from pursuing Holmes with a gun: "No, no, Sahib. He gone in darkness. What do you do? People come. Police come" (69). Ali seems to be saving his master from arrest, but the image taken of that particular scene for *Society and Playgoer Illustrated* shows the two actors in intense opposition: Ali grabbing Rylott's rifle out of his hands, and Rylott looking furiously at Ali for challenging him (Klinger 69). While Rylott relents, seeing the wisdom in Ali's words, he still utters his first harsh words to Ali in that moment:

RYLOTT. You're right. (*Puts gun down.*) We have another game; Ali,
you will watch outside Miss Enid's window to-night.

ALI. Yes, Sahib, shall I watch all night?

RYLOTT. All night? No, not all night! You will learn when you may
cease your watch. (69)

The threat is obviously to Enid, as Rylott has decided to commit the murder that night, and he wishes Ali to watch in case Holmes tries to interfere with his plans. However, it also shows that Ali is not necessarily aware of the full extent of Rylott's plans, as otherwise he would know he wouldn't have to watch all night. The exchange also contains a veiled threat to Ali as well. Ali has, after all, physically subsumed Rylott's authority in trying to take his gun, so we can see that Ali is not just tool and accomplice, but oppressed native subject to Rylott's abuse and manipulations.

As I have discussed above, while Rylott from the short story displays abuse and temper, which is stepdaughter describes as uncontrollable, many of his actions do not fit the profile of someone with an out-of-control temper, but one who uses temper to achieve

certain ends. The play's Rylott interacts with every character and is on stage through most of the play, giving the audience more of an opportunity to judge his temperament. While he does display "violent explosions of rage" (Morton 82), his explosions, for the most part, seem too deliberate and purposeful to be completely out of control. Most obvious in the script is his careful, manipulative nature: in every interaction with every character, Rylott's purpose is to manipulate the character in some way in order to get what he wants. The beginning of the play serves as a template: he sends Ali to keep his stepdaughter and servant from commiserating and possibly plotting against him, and then he bursts on the scene from his study, terrorizing Rodgers into leaving. Having averted the immediate threat against him of Enid gaining sympathy and help, something that would undercut his own power, he proceeds to manipulate Enid into silence: "Oh! for God's sake stop your sniveling! Have I not enough to worry me without that? (*Shakes her.*) Stop it, I say! I'll have no more. They'll all be down in a moment" (4). Here we see his temper and outright violence, yet it's not uncontrolled. It seems more of a strategy to control ("stop your sniveling") and contain ("They'll all be down in a moment"). After the initial shock of physical and verbal violence to the female victim, he immediately changes tone:

RYLOTT. Woman, *will* you dry your eyes and try for once to think of other people besides yourself? Learn to stamp down your private emotions. Look at me. I was as fond of your sister Violet as if she had really been my daughter, and yet I face the situation now like a man. Get up and do your duty.

ENID. (*drying her eyes*): What can I do?

RYLOTT. (*sitting on the settee beside her*): There's a brave girl. I did not mean to be harsh. Thirty years of India sends a man home with a cayenne pepper temper. Did I ever tell you the funny story of the Indian judge and the cabman?

ENID. Oh, how can you?

RYLOTT. Well, well, I'll tell it some other time. Don't look so shocked. I meant well, I was trying to cheer you up. Now look here, Enid! be a sensible girl and pull yourself together—and I say! be careful what you tell them. We may have had our little disagreements—every family has—but don't wash our linen in public. It is a time to forgive and forget. I always loved Violet in my heart.

ENID. Oh! if I could only think so!

RYLOTT. Since your mother died you have both been to me as my own daughters; in every way the same; mind you say so. D'you hear?

ENID. Yes, I hear.

RYLOTT. Don't forget it. (*Rising, turns her face*) Don't forget it. (4-5)

This long passage demonstrates Rylott's strategies of manipulation. Rylott's attempts to affect Enid rhetorically seem to be a disaster: he can't make her laugh with his ill-timed joke, he can't convince her of his love for Enid or her recently deceased sister, and his tone and focus seems all over the place. However, this manipulation is far more effective than yelling at her or shaking her. He's not trying to make her laugh or convince him of his love. He's trying to terrify her into silence and devalue her subjectivity, while calming her enough to keep her from reporting the outright abuse. His commanding tone and even

physical control, as he “turns her face” when reiterating his wishes, work to normalize her circumstances. He knows that if the inquest finds the possibility of foul play rather than his hoped-for ruling of death by accident, he will be the primary suspect and, as Armitage shows at the inquest, Rylott does not have the best of reputations. Thus, he minimizes mental and physical abuse into “little disagreements” that must not be made public. This pattern of terrifying Enid and normalizing the abuse seems to be an established pattern with the two: Enid shows some wish to resist his control, but the trauma has worn her down, so that even in the death of her sister she surrenders her subjectivity.

Interestingly, for the “passionate” villain with the “cayenne pepper temper,” Rylott strongly appeals to Enid’s Englishness by calling on her to “think of other people,” “stamp down [her] private emotions,” and to “[g]et up and do [her] duty.” Self-effacement, self-control, and familial duty are common motifs of English identity construction, especially as identifiers that work in contrast with the Other, who is marked as passionate, selfish, and savage. This approach seems to be the most effective in containing Enid, who immediately responds with “What can I do?” Rylott misuses these idealized English qualities in order to reinforce his control, solidifying the worst English identifiers: control over others, violence, and greed. In Rylott’s misuse, Conan Doyle implies that the opposite of the idealized English qualities are not embodied in the Other, but in the English villain himself. Rylott uses empty rhetoric of duty and self-control in order to violate those very ideals. At the same time, Rylott protests a “cayenne pepper temper.” This line is particularly revealing, as he mentions his tropical-induced temper as an excuse for his own harshness, rather than his stepdaughter using it as an excuse for his

behavior and abuse. His particular phrasing—“cayenne pepper temper”—makes his temper almost a joke, and he further normalizes his behavior by saying “Thirty years of India sends a man home” with this temper. The temper, in his interpretation, becomes an inevitable colonial acquisition. Notice he also fails to mention any family history of temper of violence, as Helen does in the short story. In his manipulation, then Rylott comfortably uses a number of conflicting identities, reflecting Conan Doyle’s growing critique of British masculine identity: the colonial master must manipulate and hide abuses with misuse of ideals in order to control an unsustainable system of overdetermined violence. As Conan Doyle views the British Empire as the paternal protector of its colonies, actual colonial practices thus become synonymous with child abuse.

The true problem with British masculine identity construction in this play, though, is not with Rylott’s misuse of British and Orientalized identifiers, but with the fact that he subsumes the identities of all those he controls. He has already subsumed Ali’s identity, and in each encounter with all the other characters—Enid, Rodgers, Armitage, Mrs. Staunton (the housekeeper), Watson, and Holmes—he uses various methods of manipulation in order to control and take away their subjectivity. He succeeds best with the people who are under his power, who rely on him for protection: his servants and his stepdaughter. The English butler, Rodgers, who has served the family for most of his life, has become a “broken old man” (3) who Rylott has completely terrified into silence. Even his devotion to Enid, which Rodgers would consider the primary marker of his identity, is subsumed by his terror of Rylott. Enid, as I have already shown, has been traumatized almost completely into submission, and it’s only through her link to her

mother, their old family friend Dr. Watson, that she is able to regain subjectivity and identity. The remaining character under his power, Mrs. Staunton, he controls through her sexuality and her wish to rise in social class. Mrs. Staunton is the one female servant in the house, and she could easily serve as a support for Enid, but Rylott instead turns the women against each other by promising marriage to Mrs. Staunton. The entire character of Mrs. Staunton seems extraneous in a play, as she serves more as a frustration to Rylott than a confederate in his villainy. She does, however, serve to solidify the identity-subsuming nature of Rylott's control. When Mrs. Staunton tries to exert power in the household by quarreling with Enid and complaining that she is "always the last to be considered" (30), Rylott responds with "Why should you be considered at all?" (31). Rather than meekly submit to negation by Rylott, Mrs. Staunton fights back. She protests by reminding him of his unfulfilled promise of marriage, and when he tries to put her back in her place and even threatens unemployment, she threatens him with her suspicion of his murder. When he determines that she does not know how he committed the murder, he abruptly becomes romantic and cajoling, calling her by her first name, using his temper as an excuse, and telling her: "you have only my own interests at heart" (32). Even as Mrs. Staunton tries to exert her authority, using leverage she thinks she has, he quickly turns it around nonviolently and subsumes her identity. She acknowledges his methods: "You can always talk me round, and you know it" (32).

Rylott is, however, less successful in his attempts to manipulate and subsume the identities of Watson, Holmes, and the outspoken village grocer Armitage. He uses every method he has—Ali as a forerunner, outbursts of temper, threats of violence, appeals of reason—but his attempts to control these three men come to no avail. Watson stubbornly

resists Rylott's attempts to separate him from Enid, who Conan Doyle injects early in the play as an old family friend of the Stoners' in India; he considers it his duty to act as a friend to the orphaned Enid, and he protests Enid's rights to see friends in her own house. Armitage, the most outspoken opponent of Rylott, resists all threats of intimidation and attempts to act in Enid's favor. Armitage knows of Rylott's abusive behavior and not only accuses him of murdering his stepdaughter, but implicates Rylott in the death of his wife as well. Finally, Holmes resists Rylott's manipulations completely, calmly turning away Rylott's outbursts of anger, seeing through all of Rylott's attempts at reason, and finally depriving Rylott of all his tools of control—the dog, the servant, and the snake. These three men are able to resist Rylott's manipulations and see through his façade because, first, they are not socially under Rylott's control and mastery and, second, they are practicing Conan Doyle's ideal British masculine identifier: chivalry. Each of these men have power through their expertise and social position, but they use that power to help Enid. Thus, Conan Doyle shows the fragile nature of overdetermined imperial rule, as it is based on an unsustainable system of negation of the identities of those who lack power. Conan Doyle also shows a possibility of redemption in the chivalry of these men who can resist Rylott.

Through all of his manipulations, however, and through the increased mental control he holds over other people, Rylott is not entirely in control of himself. Part of the actor's interpretation unites with the script to form a twitching, nervous man, seeming on the edge of a breakdown, particularly when he is unable to exert his control over others. One of the changes from short story to script further supports Rylott's mental instability. When Watson reintroduces Holmes to Enid's case, rather than relying on the

stepdaughter's description of Rylott, Holmes compiles research for Rylott's backstory: "Fifty-five years of age, killed his khitmutgar in India; once in a madhouse, married money—wife died—distinguished surgeon" (46). While most of the details remain the same (though the timeline seems to imply that Rylott married his wife after the murder of his servant, and specifically for money), one change is made: rather than prison, Rylott was sent to a madhouse after the death of his servant. This is certainly a significant change, as it shifts the villainization of Rylott from criminal action to insanity. When Watson tries to rationalize that Rylott will have more sense than to repeat his murder on Enid, Holmes responds: "No, no, Watson! you are making the mistake of putting your normal brain into Rylott's abnormal being. The born criminal is often a monstrous egotist. His mind is unhinged from the beginning" (46). Holmes characterizes Rylott, with his "abnormality," as a "born criminal," Conan Doyle uses this characterization to affiliate his narrative with the two then influential modes of discourse: the pathologization of the "criminal type" and the classification of mental disorders as abnormal in opposition to normal. This psychological pathology of Rylott's actions also serves as a critique for his identity construction of overdetermined violence and greed, or being a "monstrous egotist." His mastery and greed are signs of insanity, and his consignment to a madhouse rather than a prison depoliticizes the murder of his Indian servant. This is not to say that Conan Doyle is making Rylott's murder of his Indian servant as having nothing to do with race and imperialism: quite the opposite. He's showing that colonial abuses are not necessarily the result of a political construction, but the result of increasingly irrational abuses of imperial power. Greed and violence in the colonies become abnormal rather than a regrettable and unavoidable part of imperialism.

The doctor's mind is "unhinged from the beginning," not as coming away from India with a "cayenne pepper temper."

Further adding to this depoliticizing of Rylott's murder charge is the shift in timeline. The play is set much later, making Rylott's imprisonment happen probably long after the Indian Mutiny. The Indian events, in fact, have more ties to the Second Anglo-Afghan War, or Watson's time serving in colonial wars. The play opens with Watson attending the inquest of Violet's (Enid's sister) death. It is established that he knew their mother, Mrs. Stoner, before her marriage, and he knew Enid and her sister as a child. The inclusion of the family's backstory with Watson allows for a better reason for Holmes to get involved, as the original story only explained Helen seeking Holmes's help because of a referral from a random friend. It also allows for yet another redemptive possibility of colonial associations: while Rylott abuses his Indian possession and uses his Indian experience as an excuse for his abuses, Watson's relationship with Mrs. Stoner and Enid serves to establish a positive association with India. No longer is India or Anglo-Indians the locus for criminalization and colonial horror. Even as Holmes foils Rylott's plan, Watson acts as an example of the positive possibilities of involvement with the colonies. Even though he doesn't kill the snake himself or solve the crime, Watson acts through chivalry and works to reestablish Enid's subjectivity. Of course, this redemptive model is still predicated on relationships formed between English people, and the "natives" are shunted to the side in preference for the more important English characters. Conan Doyle's earlier novel, *The Sign of Four*, serves as an exploration of attempts at crossing the racial barrier with relationship and a more radical redefinition of the English masculine identity.

The Sign of “Small”-ness in *The Sign of Four*

Conan Doyle’s second Holmes novel,⁹ *The Sign of Four*, features his other major Anglo-Indian villain, Jonathan Small. Both Roylott and Small commit their crimes through “exotic” means, were present in India during the Indian Mutiny, and served time in an Indian prison for murder. However, that’s where their comparisons end. While Roylott is aristocratic and educated, going to India to restore his family fortunes, Small is middle-to-lower class and not as well formally educated, having gone to India to escape trouble over a girl. Further, the text portrays Small more sympathetically than Roylott, allowing him the chance to tell his own story (as opposed to Roylott, whose story is filtered through his stepdaughter’s voice) and giving him actions and motives that are less cruelly malignant.

Certainly, Small is not entirely sympathetic. As a soldier in India and later a plantation overseer, he serves as part of the same system of Imperial control in which Roylott takes part as doctor. His roles, rather than Roylott’s role in analyzing and controlling Indian bodies, are more overt in their use of force. As a soldier, he’s expected to enforce British rule. After the loss of his leg, he takes a job as an overseer in an indigo plantation: “What I had to do was to ride over the plantation, to keep an eye on the men as they worked, and to report the idlers” (1:215). Here he works as a representative of the plantation owner, a panoptical tool of control. Given a horse to compensate for the loss of his leg, he is literally placed above the working Indians, having gained the position primarily because of his status as a British man. He defaults into the job of soldier after the outbreak of the Indian Mutiny, given sentry command over two Sikh soldiers, “old

⁹ My choice to discuss the earlier Holmes novel after the later short story and play is not to force a false progression, but to bring to light different modes of identity within the Holmes oeuvre that do not necessarily depend on chronology.

fighting-men, who had borne arms against us at Chilian Wallah” (1:217). Small, who had “just got past the goose-step, and learned to handle my musket” (1:214), is given command over two more experienced soldiers: ones who had fought against the British a decade earlier in the Second Sikh War, but were now thrown into an alliance with the British. Small does not question his command or his own qualifications (he mentions pride in relation to this command), and he in the meantime discusses the rebels in completely racist terms, criminalizing and dehumanizing them. Small describes the Sepoy rebels as “black fiends, with their red coats still on their backs, dancing and howling” (1:216), and, later, “beating [...] drums, [rattling] tomtoms, [...] drunk with opium and with bang” (1:218). The residents of Agra, with or without political affiliations, Small describes as “fanatics and fierce devil-worshippers” (1:216). Small characterizes Indians by darkness, fierceness, drunkenness, and Godlessness. The Sepoys of his narrative are not people with specific political grievances, but savages out for blood. He does the same even for the Indians for whom he shows the most loyalty and humanize: his three compatriots are “tall, fierce-looking chaps” who “jabber all night in their queer Sikh lingo” (1:217), and the Andeman Islander Tonga is a “little hell-hound” and a “little devil” (1:206). In his racist rhetoric, Small has internalized ideas of racial fixity and essence, which John McBratney (2005) describes as the “idea of analyzing the pure type of the race to which their human specimens belonged” (156). McBratney applies this sense of racial fixity to the treatment of the Indian characters in the novel. Of Tonga he says, “Doyle’s narrative ascribes the Islander’s violence not to any legitimate resentment of British invasion of the archipelago but to his race’s innate proclivity for monstrous aggression” (156). Likewise, McBratney claims, “The rebels in *The Sign of*

Four are represented not as opponents of a political order against which they might have a justifiable grievance but as disturbers of a social order that they regard with a motiveless malignity” (157). In a time of great political disturbance and transition in British-controlled India, Jonathan Small as soldier-turned-plantation and overseer-turned-soldier embodies a worldview of racial fixity and complacent British supremacy.

At the same time, Small himself is criminalized and dehumanized in Watson’s narrative. His physical appearance seems to be a locus of horror that haunts the novel’s characters: “A face was looking in at us out of the darkness. We could see the whitening of the nose where it was pressed against the glass. It was a bearded, hairy face, with wild cruel eyes and an expression of concentrated malevolence” (1:147). Thaddeus Sholto’s description of the man that seemed to scare his father to death is certainly influenced by the circumstances, but the “wild cruel eyes” and the “concentrated malevolence” anticipates Small’s own descriptions of the Indian rebels, as well as the text’s descriptions of Tonga. Likewise, the wife of the owner of the steam launch that Small hires refers to Small as “a brown, monkey-faced chap” (1:180), a description that dehumanizes him comparable to the racist rhetoric against Africans. The more objective descriptions by Holmes and Watson are not much better. Holmes, after an analysis of the room and some deductions about the origin of Small, describes him as “a poorly-educated man, small, active, with his right leg off, and wearing a wooden stump which is worn away upon the inner side. His left boot has a coarse, square-toed sole, with an iron band round the heel. He is a middle-aged man, much sunburned, and has been a convict” (1:165). While this covers all the facts and is mostly based on physical evidence (and he is sunburned instead of “brown”), Holmes’s supposed descriptor of “poorly-educated”

shows a class bias and implies low intelligence rather than the limited formal education Small's social class affords.

Perhaps the most sympathetic physical description is Watson's after Small's arrest:

He was a sunburned, reckless-eyed fellow, with a network of lines and wrinkles all over his mahogany features, which told of a hard, open-air life. There was a singular prominence about his bearded chin which marked a man who was not to be easily turned from his purpose. His age may have been fifty or thereabouts, for his black, curly hair was thickly shot with gray. His face in repose was not an unpleasing one, though his heavy brows and aggressive chin gave him, as I had lately seen, a terrible expression when moved to anger. He sat now with his handcuffed hands upon his lap, and his head sunk upon his breast, while he looked with his keen, twinkling eyes at the box which had been the cause of his ill-doings. It seemed to me that there was more sorrow than anger in his rigid and contained countenance. Once he looked up at me with a gleam of something like humour in his eyes. (1:206)

Like Roylott, Small's face has been transformed by India and especially prison: with sunburn and wrinkles. Rather than bestial malevolence, Small is marked by sorrow and humor, with a face that is "not an unpleasing one." The humor particularly shows Small's humanity: he's able to see his situation objectively, and he's also hiding the secret that he's won over the police, even if he's been caught. He's not as dumb as Holmes painted

him to be. He's also "a man who was not to be easily turned from his purpose," a descriptor that could be applied to Holmes himself.

What follows this description is a long narrative that tells Small's backstory, a section of the story that particularly interests critics. Rather than condemn Small as an Anglo-Indian villain in the style of Roylott, critics tend to treat Small with more sympathy, pointing to the indictment of troubling imperial practices in his narrative, practices which subsume Small's own crimes. Lawrence Frank (1996) sums up the critique of imperial abuses Small's story seems to represent:

On the face of it, the mystery of the Agra treasure would seem to expose the realities of British rule in India. It offers a history of theft, betrayal, and murder that involves not only Jonathan Small but also other representatives of the Empire in the figures of Major Sholto and Captain Morstan. [...] Later, Sholto and Morstan violate their obligations to their office and to their superiors and then proceed to betray their pledge to Small and his Sikh associates in their desire to secure the treasure for themselves. [...] Such events reveal the racism and the greed that inform the British presence on the Indian subcontinent and that, in the murder of Bartholomew Sholto, lead to an inevitable retribution.

Nevertheless, in his account of the Agra treasure Dr. Watson's story only perpetuates myths of race and gender that have proved central to the imperialist project. [...] All of this occurs at a particular historical moment when empire and patriarchy are perceived to be threatened. (77)

Frank points out, rightly, that the crimes of the British officers Sholto and Morstan, higher in rank and social class than Small, reveal the mercenary and irresponsible actions of representatives of the British Empire. While Morstan is perhaps less villainized in the text, given that he does not break loyalty with Small in the same way Sholto does, Morstan still enters into a pact with a thief and murderer in order to gain treasure, and he does so because of gambling debts, an activity which Conan Doyle himself considered unmanly.¹⁰ However, Frank qualifies his reading of Small's narrative as a critique of empire by pointing out the rationalizing effect of Watson's narrative and the fact that these events could only happen during a time when "empire and patriarchy are perceived to be threatened," thus the solving of the case restores patriarchal and imperial order. As McBratney claims, the narrative involves the "collapsing of political into criminal activity" (157). He's referring to the representation of the Sepoys' actions as criminal rather than politically-motivated, but we can also apply this to the portrayal of the British officers. While Small's narrative depoliticizes them in order to point out their criminality, they are decriminalized in Watson's narrative because of their political power.

The confession of the criminal Jonathan Small problematizes the voice of authority in the text, perhaps even more so than the righteous indignation of the previous novel's crusader of love and religion in *A Study in Scarlet* (1887). While the American Jefferson Hope's revenge against the Mormons who destroyed his fiancée is told in a separate narrative written in third person omniscient, thus seemingly separating it from judgment or bias, Jonathan Small's tale is told through his own words but framed by

¹⁰ Conan Doyle states in his autobiography, "the demoralization from betting, the rascality among some book-makers, and the collection of undesirable characters brought together by a race meeting, I cannot avoid the conclusion that the harm [of horseracing] greatly outweighs the good from a broadly national point of view" (*Memories and Adventures* 263).

Watson's narration, as previously mentioned, and Holmes's authorization. Jaya Mehta (1995) points out that, in Small's confession, "metropolitan assumptions become unmoored as problematic colonial voices emerge" (636) and the Indians and Tonga become humanized in a way Watson's narrative does not allow, "perturbing Watson's sanitary version" (636). However, Mehta goes on to say that his narrative is nonetheless "immediately de-authorized by Holmes" (634): "Although the upper-class Major Sholto is guilty twice over of theft, the lower-class Jonathan Small alone is criminalized in the novel" (637). As Mehta further points out, Small's troubling narrative gives way to the normative English domestic resolution of Watson's marriage plans and Holmes's scientific rationalism.

However, domesticity and scientific rationalism does not fully de-authorize Small's account but shows the fragile nature of both. In perhaps the most sympathetic reading of Jonathan Small's narrative, Benjamin O'Dell (2012) states, "Not quite a confession, 'The Strange Case [sic] of Jonathan Small' is more appropriately an indictment of the Empire's integrity. Making use of the moral relativism endemic to imperial space, Conan Doyle displays the contradictions ingrained in England's as-of-yet unfulfilled imperial vision" (991). This moral relativism is accentuated by Small's direct address to his audience—Holmes, Watson, and the police, as well as the reader: "I should like to know how many fellows in my shoes would have refused a share of this loot when they knew that they would have their throats cut for their pains. [...] If he [the merchant Small killed] had got out, the whole business would come to light, and I should have been court-martialled and shot as likely as not; for people were not very lenient at a time like

that” (1:224). Small’s justification comes in response to his audience’s horrified reactions:

For myself, I confess that I had now conceived the utmost horror of the man not only for this cold-blooded business in which he had been concerned but even more for the somewhat flippant and careless way in which he narrated it. Whatever punishment was in store for him, I felt that he might expect no sympathy from me. Sherlock Holmes and Jones sat with their hands upon their knees, deeply interested in the story but with the same disgust written upon their faces. (1:223)

This is a moment in the narrative in which Conan Doyle seems to want to direct readers’ feelings. After all, Watson is often the reader surrogate as well as narrator, and the heroic Holmes acts as the moral compass as well as the intellectual authority. However, the “horror” and “disgust” seems less directed at the murder itself, but at the “cold-blooded business” and the “flippant and careless” narration. While the disgusted reaction seems to criminalize Small as an Englishman who has become villainous from imperial involvement, the English characters are actually repelled at the pragmatic violence of Empire, as Small points out. They themselves might have acted the same, and the “heroic” endeavors of Imperial forces are shown for what they are: violent, motivated by gain, and lacking in empathy for the Other. O’Dell not only points out the indictment of imperial abuses, but also the implications of this narrative to England’s place in the world: “English national identity, increasingly dependent upon its relationship to other cultures, must be understood not as a product of national origins but as a formation forged through its difficult—at times, humiliating—interaction with the world” (983).

These interactions are “humiliating” in that they reveal the problems of constructions of British masculine identity.

The crux of Jonathan Small’s narrative’s placement in the story—criminal confession or imperial indictment—depends on who we take as the ethical center of the novel. The assumption that Holmes and Watson are moral centers can be called into question. While both Holmes and Watson become heroic defenders in the later short stories, these early versions in the first two novels are darker and more flawed. Watson, an imperial wash-out who still suffers from a wounded leg and no employment, must depend on the disappearance of the Agra treasure in order to feel assured of his chances of even approaching Mary Morstan with a confession of love. His romantic storyline is often cited as a normalizing return to English domesticity, but it strikes a false note after the moral ambiguity Small’s story. The Agra treasure as insurmountable class barrier reveals a social construction that, even in idealized domestic England, is supported by ill-gotten colonial gains. No one but Small questions Mary Morstan’s ownership of the treasure, and Watson does not question the idea that Mary will be irretrievably changed by the treasure (despite the fact that she never sold the pearls she received from Thaddeus Sholto from the Agra treasure, and thus shows a lack of interest in financial gain). At the same time, Holmes is “right,” in the sense that he solves the case; however, his “de-authorizing” of Small’s story falls flat. He follows Small’s story with a short expression of appreciation and a clearing up of details:

“A very remarkable account,” said Sherlock Holmes. “A fitting windup to an extremely interesting case. There is nothing at all new to me in the latter part of your narrative except that you brought your own rope.

That I did not know. By the way, I had hoped that Tonga had lost all his darts; yet he managed to shoot one at us in the boat.”

“He had lost them all, sir, except the one which was in his blow-pipe at the time.”

“Ah, of course,” said Holmes. “I had not thought of that.” (1:234)

This is an understated reaction to a narrative that reveals the greed-motivated abuses of British officers. Of course, Holmes is mostly concerned with the mechanical facts: how the criminal accomplished his ends and whether there were any details he could not or did not deduce. However, his comment about rope ownership is particularly irrelevant after Small’s narrative, and his mistake about Tonga’s dart perhaps reveals that Holmes is “missing the point” of the narrative: he understands the outer details, but he refuses to engage in the dangerous implications

These dangerous implications find a locus in the character of Jonathan Small, both in indictment of imperial abuses and in a transformation of British masculine identity. O’Dell’s description of Jonathan Small for the most part decriminalizes him:

The hidden depths of Jonathan Small’s character consequently come as something of a surprise. Although not a character of foreign origin, Small’s deplorable behavior in the British Army and subsequent kinship with Mahomet Singh, Abdullah Khan, Dost Akbar, and Tonga mark his collapse into the realm of cultural miscegenation. At the same time, neither embarrassed nor ashamed by the loss of his English identity, Small is able to shirk off the racist discourse touted by his fellow Englishmen

and co-conspirator Major Sholto and transcend the boundaries of race to enter an informal brotherhood with the novel's Eastern characters. (989)

Indeed, Small does go through a dramatic transformation through his narrative. Though he spouts racist language and tends to essentialize people by their race, his relationships with his Indian compatriots are marked by honor and loyalty. O'Dell describes his move from imperial representative and master as a "loss of [...] English identity" that he is "neither embarrassed nor ashamed by." However, I would argue that Small does not necessarily lose his English identity. Instead, Small represents an exploration of British masculine identity that contrasts strongly with the violent, controlling one represented by Roylott, one that more comfortably negotiates a hybrid identity. He begins his career in India thoughtlessly fulfilling various imperial roles, which reaches a crisis in his joining the Sign of Four. When offered the alliance, the Sikhs utter the line that Mehta calls "the only explicit criticism of colonialism in the novel" (636): "We only ask you to do that which your countrymen come to this land for. We ask you to be rich" (1:219). Offered the riches, given death as an alternative, and assured that he would not betray the people he was supposed to protect, Jonathan Small acquiesces to the theft and murder. Small almost has pity on the victim who begs for his protection (which is his imperial responsibility), but "talk of treasure my heart turned to it – what I might do in the old country with it" and "thought of his treasure turned me hard and bitter" (223). His only instance of greed leads to his only instance of violence. Just as Roylott kills the native butler to help preserve his wealth, Small kills to raise himself in social class and become a wealthy returned colonial. The murder is actually the culmination of his imperial British masculine identity.

Like Roylott, Small is crushed by the imperial authority when they discover the murder. When he and the three Sikhs are prosecuted, “The three Sikhs got penal servitude for life, and I was condemned to death, though my sentence was afterwards commuted into the same as the others” (1:226). He doesn’t explain this change in sentence, and mentioning the death penalty seems strange when we know he didn’t die. The change in sentence—execution to life imprisonment—represents a loss of Englishness, at least in political status, as he is treated “same as the others.” However, this also signals a change in Small’s self-identification: already he has pledged an oath with the Sikhs “that we should each always act for all, so that none might take advantage” (1:225), so he has formed an equal status with the Other before the government has a chance to equate them. Even as they are “all four tied by the leg” (1:226), he has formed ties of loyalty and honor with those he complacently considered beneath him. While these ties of loyalty and honor may be explained by his Orientalization, or by “honor among thieves,” his changing relationship goes even further. As O’Dell puts it, “Unlike his affiliation with the British Empire, Small’s connection to the Sign of Four depends upon honor, begging the question as to the specific influences responsible for his descent into a life of crime” (990). Even as he gains a higher status in the Andaman Island prison, his goals remain not just to regain the treasure, but to act for the three Sikhs. When he tries to include two British officers—Captain Morstan and Major Sholto—in his confederacy, Sholto immediately tries to talk Small out of including the Sikhs: “What have three black fellows to do with our agreement?” (1:230). While Sholto at first commends him for what must seem to him remarkable loyalty, thinking that proves him especially trustworthy, he becomes impatient with Small’s insistence that the Sikhs must share in the treasure and

the planning. Small staunchly responds to Sholto's racist, dehumanizing dismissal of the Sikhs with "Black or blue [...] they are in with me, and we all go together" (230). This does not mean that Small has completely shed himself of racist language and assumptions, but it does mean that he has reformed his identity in relation to the Other: he does not see the wealth as his, but as "ours," and not even political and racial similarities can transcend that loyalty. The one who complacently accepted England's mastery over India now vehemently resists that very same complacent mastery. Throughout the rest of his narrative, the treasure becomes a sort of McGuffin. Small ostensibly pursues it, but his real motivation springs from revenge for Sholto's theft and betrayal: "Even the Agra treasure had come to be a smaller thing in my mind than the slaying of Sholto" (1:231). However, this is not personal revenge, but the vengeance of a group. He leaves a paper marked with the Sign of Four at each act of vengeance, and he thinks, "if I ever met my Sikh friends again it would be a satisfaction to know that I had left some mark of our hatred" (1:233). Not only do we see continuing loyalty, we see an acknowledgment of a common afterlife destination from someone who comes from "chapel-going folk" (1:214) and generalized people of Agra as "fanatics and fierce devil-worshippers" (1:216).

While Jonathan Small is technically the villain in *The Sign of Four*, he does not fit the same destructive mode as Roylott. He avoids violence, he treats his "Indian acquisition" Tonga with a surprising amount of humanity for the time, and he pursues the people who wronged him rather than destroying those under his protection. In other words, he constructs himself as his name implies: small. The last name "Small" is literally innocuous and perhaps evokes his socio-economic status, as well as his literal

stature (being described as a small man). However, the word “small” crops up too often in relation to him to ignore. Holmes initially describes him as “small” to Athelny Jones. When describing his command position at Agra Fort, Small comments, “I was pretty proud of having this small command given me” (1:217). Likewise, Small says, “Even the Agra treasure had come to be a smaller thing in my mind” (1:231). As Jonathan Small is an exploration in British identity, particularly within colonialism, the recurrence of the word “small” could be an indication of an exploration in “smallness” in British identity, contrasting with the “bigness” that Roylott would later come to embody. While Roylott is the wealth-pursuing, mastery-obsessed aristocrat, Small is lower in class and, for the most part, falls into imperial service with no real agenda. His complacent acceptance of British imperial and racial predominance is even apolitical: he criminalizes the Sepoy rebels because he doesn’t even think about the politics of their actions and instead regards their actions on face value. When he forms the Sign of Four, he is just as apolitical, yet we see his complacent acceptance of British mastery begin to dissolve. He begins to construct his identity in relation to the Other based on experience rather than through his imperial and racial affiliations. This transformation reflects an experiment in constructing British masculine identity as “small,” rather than “big.”

This concept of “smallness” in relation to identity construction perhaps explains two of the odder moments in *The Sign of Four*: when the scientifically rational Holmes begins spouting philosophy. These moments are easy to overlook: they don’t seem to add to the action or to Holmes’s character. However, these moments can be connected to Conan Doyle’s exploration of British identity construction and relation to the Other. In the first instance, Holmes breaks his exposition during his and Watson’s pursuit of the

criminals and suddenly exclaims: “Are you well up in your Jean Paul? [...] He makes one curious but profound remark. It is that the chief proof of man’s real greatness lies in his perception of his own *smallness*. It argues, you see, a power of comparison and of appreciation which is in itself a proof of nobility” (1:176, emphasis mine). Here we see another significant use of the word “small,” used rather soon after we learn the “villain’s” name. The quote also seems ill-placed in Holmes’s mouth—philosophy he supposedly hasn’t read (according to Watson’s list of his knowledge bases in *A Study in Scarlet*, discussed in more detail in the next chapter), and a construction of identity he doesn’t seem to apply to himself (as he considers himself quite big in relation to other people, which leads to his underestimating Small). However, it does seem to serve as a comment on identity construction that Conan Doyle wants to get across: “small” construction rather than “big” construction, especially in relation to the Other, or the “point of comparison.” We see Small enact this philosophy in fits and starts, particularly in his building of equal relationships with the Other. Holmes’s second philosophical flight of fancy as he watches some lower-class workers gives the first context:

“Dirty-looking rascals, but I suppose every one has some little immortal spark concealed about him. You would not think it, to look at them. There is no *a priori* probability about it. A strange enigma is man!”

“Someone calls him a soul concealed in an animal,” I suggested.

“Winwood Reade is good upon the subject,” said Holmes. “He remarks that, while the individual man is an insoluble puzzle, in the aggregate he becomes a mathematical certainty. You can, for example, never foretell what any one man will do, but you can say with precision

what an average number will be up to. Individuals vary, but percentages remain constant. So says the statistician. (1:201-02)

It is really odd that our hero, who is supposed to be protecting the British people, would suddenly wonder if the low-class dockworkers have souls or not. While Watson defends the people by saying that all people are animals with souls, or, more to the point, souls with animals around them, Holmes resorts to statistics and mathematics, or, more importantly, to the place of the individual within a group. His Reade analysis seems almost a tangent, but if related to how the workers, while seeming soulless creatures to him from a distance and in a group, would individually become fully actualized people, we can see Conan Doyle's concepts of identity construction take form. Seen as a group, the dock workers become dehumanized, as well as the Sepoy rebels, Andaman Islanders, Sikh soldiers, and Indians in general. Small's complacent, racially fixed view of the Other comes from viewing them as an undifferentiated group whose "percentages remain constant." Once Small views them as individuals, as Mahomet Singh, Abdullah Khan, Dost Akbar, and Tonga, he sees the variations: they become fully actualized (in his perception if not completely in the text itself), and eventually he can refer to them as "friends." He has come to construction himself by "smallness," by equality with the Other, and thus breaks from comfortable racially fixed generalizations and colonial expectations.

Conclusion

Even so, Small's exploration of an alternate mode of British masculine identity construction cannot be entirely successful. His language and expectations are still largely

formed by British imperial hegemony, and he is still largely villainized in the text. Rather than gain a heroic death at the end of the story like *A Study in Scarlet*'s Jefferson Hope, Small is still regarded with disgust and dismissed by the main characters, and he's still sent to prison at the end. However, there is one small mention in the work that seems to decriminalize Small. When Holmes is tracking down the steam launch that acts as Small's getaway vehicle, he arranges to Watson and the police detective Athelney Jones to meet him at Baker Street. As an incentive to Jones, he sends the telegram: "Go to Baker Street at once. [...] I am close on the track of the Sholto gang" (1:194). The Sholto gang, not the Small gang. At first the slip-up seems either a typo¹¹ or authorial mistake (not out of the realm of possibility, given Conan Doyle's occasional laxness with details in the Holmes stories). However, if taken as intentional, the line makes little sense. Holmes could be wording the telegram this way for Jones's benefit, given Jones's belief in Thaddeus Sholto's guilt, but that would still make little sense, as Thaddeus had been in custody (and hardly on the run for Holmes to follow) and Jones had released Sholto that day, which was publicized in the newspaper. Holmes could be naming the criminals in this way to indicate their murder of Bartholomew Sholto, but that explanation rather stretches logic: a "gang" would not be named for their victim, but for their leader.

While I admittedly belabor the point, this odd lapse perhaps gives an indication of the true criminal in the text: Major Sholto, a man who is in a position to be a true representative of England in his colonial position, but who fails on every level. He's an officer stationed at a prison, yet he allows his gambling to compromise his position. Even within the illegal confederacy with Morstan, Small, and the Sikhs, he tries to cut the Sikhs out of the wealth, and then he betrays even his English compatriots in order to gain

¹¹ The "Sholto gang" quote appears in the original publication.

the entire treasure. Even on his death bed, when he feels guilt for denying Mary Morstan not only her share of the treasure, but even the assurance of what happened to her father, he qualifies his confession to his sons to keep the secret until his death, as he wishes to keep the treasure to himself should he survive. While Jonathan Small gains a small amount of dignity from the text, Major Sholto, as well as the son who most favored him, is given an ignominious death. Sholto, in fact, shares many similarities with Grimesby Roylott: the father of twins, and an imperial washout who only gains wealth from betrayal and dishonor.

Degeneration, then, comes not from contact with the Other—climate or people—but from an inherently English weakness of character, one that is allowed more rein given their assurance of the right to power in the colonies. Characters like Roylott (and Major Sholto, for that matter), represent the dangers of the misuse of that power. Conan Doyle's critique of Empire cannot be simplified into Empire-abolition, as Conan Doyle expressed many times a belief in a benevolent Anglo-Saxon Empire (discussed in chapter 4), but he does emphasize the need for a change in not just treatment of, but relationships with colonies. While Jonathan Small is not necessarily a cosmopolitan paragon, he does represent an early attempt on Conan Doyle's part to rewrite English identity within the purview of increasing globalization. Imperial rule by violence for the sake of enriching the ruling country is no longer sustainable and, just as in the case of Roylott, the speckled band will bite back.

Chapter 3: Truth, Justice, and the Aesthetic Way: Sherlock Holmes as the Responsible Decadent

Sherlock Holmes is as much of a cultural icon as he is a literary character, living far beyond Conan Doyle's original canon. The physical accoutrement—deerstalker hat, Inverness cloak, magnifying glass, and calabash pipe, a costume made popular by stage and film interpretations, even if it never shows up in the canon—makes Holmes instantly recognizable, but Holmes's characterization is much more widely interpreted. While his brilliance and almost preternatural powers of observation are mainstays in interpretations of his character, his personality can change from an eminent Victorian hero in the Basil Rathbone films of the 1940s, to Robert Downey, Jr.'s, sexy action hero of Guy Ritchie's *Sherlock Holmes* (2009), to the "high-functioning sociopath" played by Benedict Cumberbatch in BBC's *Sherlock* (2010-present). Holmes as a character is imminently adaptable. Much of the groundwork for these adaptations, however, lies in the canon itself. Conan Doyle created a character of sharp contradictions, but also one who could adapt his own identity to an ever-changing world. Throughout the canon, Conan Doyle represents Holmes at different times as an aesthetic eccentric, an actor, an athlete, a spy, a bee-keeper in Sussex, and a modern-day knight. The adaptations in books, theater, films, and television draw on the multiple and sometimes contradictory aspects of this character to sometimes wildly different results.

Traditionally, though, much emphasis has been placed on Holmes as an eminent Victorian gentleman working for the stability of British middle-class society: a stabilizing Victorian hero. As Jim Barloon (2006) sums up, many critics see the detective as a "myth [that] serves a comfortingly conservative function, that Holmes's popularity, in his own

day, derived from the reassurance that he provided to an increasingly fragmented society that mysteries are soluble and that criminality is punished” (33-34). Conan Doyle, in his other writings, is highly interested in social stability through domestic legal reforms and responsible imperial practices (fuller discussions in both chapter 2 and 4), so this reading of Holmes is not unjustified. And, indeed, Conan Doyle’s construction of Holmes is highly influenced by his ideals of heroism and manhood, ideals which he often uses as a way to articulate his discussions of social stability. Similar to Conan Doyle’s medieval heroes Alleyne and Sir Nigel from *The White Company* (1891) and *Sir Nigel* (1906), Sherlock Holmes can be seen as a late-Victorian knight-errant, an irreproachable action hero. I’m using the term “Victorian” here not just as a temporal term, especially since Holmes continued his adventures into the 1920, but as a type of idealized British masculine identity that became consolidated as a character type at the beginning of the twentieth century. Not only is Holmes a Victorian adventurer who can be seen to embody the aforementioned “ideals of manliness, gallantry, and self-reliance,” he also proves a knight-errant in his relations to women. While Watson, through his narration, insists that Holmes is cold toward women and even misogynist, never allowing women to sway his emotions, Holmes throws himself wholeheartedly into cases that ostensibly lack interest but involve the safety of a woman. Besides his famous interest in Irene Adler, he works to vindicate a blackmailed woman in “The Adventure of Charles Augustus Milverton” (1904), he reacts violently toward a man who mistreats his stepdaughter in “A Case of Identity” (1891), he is concerned to distraction for the safety of governesses in “The Adventure of the Copper Beeches” (1892) and “The Adventure of the Solitary Cyclist” (1903), and he even acts as confessor to a woman rather than detective in “The Adventure

of the Veiled Lodger” (1927). Holmes may claim that these cases all hold points of professional interest, but his concern for the female victim is too prominent to be dismissed easily.

However, there is another side to Sherlock Holmes. The representation of Holmes as an uncomplicated Victorian hero ignores the more *fin-de-siècle* attributes of Holmes. Especially in early works, Conan Doyle represents Holmes as an 1890’s aesthetic. In “The Case of the Domesticated Aesthete” (1984), Paul Barolsky terms Holmes as a “closet aesthete” (439), linking Holmes to many of his aesthetic contemporaries:

Granted, Holmes is neither so precious as Walter Pater nor so artificial as Oscar Wilde; but in many ways he is like them, like Wilde’s Dorian Gray, Huysmans’ Symbolist aesthete Des Esseintes, and the exquisite young connoisseur of art Bernard Berenson as well. [...] If he is never mentioned in the histories of aestheticism that treat both actual and fictional aesthetes, this is because his creator disguised or domesticated the detective’s aesthetic propensities, making them palatable to a vast, popular audience. Although Holmes flouts conventions, he is never scandalous in the manner of a Dorian Gray; rather, his aestheticism is tempered and mitigated. (439)

Barolsky goes on to cite as aesthetic Holmes’s rejection of conventionality, his view of crime and detection as an art form, his musical, artistic, and literary tastes, and his drug use and personal habits. Specifically, Holmes is a “languid, lounging figure” (“Scandal in Bohemia” 1:245) who “loathe[s] every form of society with his whole Bohemian soul” (“Scandal in Bohemia” 1:239). Conan Doyle frequently uses of the term “Bohemian” to describe Holmes. For context, we can look to the 1863 *Westminster Review* definition of

a Bohemian as “simply an artist or *littérateur* who, consciously or unconsciously, secedes from conventionality in life and art” and “a protest against the subjection of human life to money-making, and human intellect to conventional rule” (18). Holmes fulfills all these qualifications: he vocally resists and derides the conventional, and he cares more for the unusual and artistic elements than payment in his self-made vocation of consulting detective. Aestheticism, with its related term Bohemianism, dominates especially Conan Doyle’s early descriptions of Holmes, and even as he sheds his more unconventional qualities over the years (in particular, his cocaine usage), he retains his aesthetic distance and artistic sensibilities. By Holmes’s description of his own heredity, we can see him as the perfect fusion of conventional Victorian Britishness and aestheticism: “My ancestors were country squires, who appear to have led much the same life as is natural to their class. But, none the less, my turn [of observation and deduction] is in my veins, and may have come with my grandmother, who was the sister of Vernet, the French artist. Art in the blood is liable to take the strangest forms” (“Greek Interpreter” 1:683). I will further discuss the implications of Holmes describing his deductive methods as art, but at this time it’s important to note that he attributes “art” to his French ancestry, much like British Aestheticism in the *fin de siècle* owed much to mid-century French artists and writers. Holmes indeed claims he appreciates his art for its own sake, mirroring the mid-century French Gautier’s “l’art pour l’art.”

It is difficult, however, to see Holmes’s aesthetic qualities as creative or transformative, given their links to discussions of degeneracy at the time. Barolsky even qualifies that Conan Doyle is careful to “domesticate” his aesthetic detective, that his aestheticism is “tempered and mitigated,” implying that aestheticism is something that

must be “tempered and mitigated” for heroic action. This mitigation relates to the tension of Victorian constructions of masculinity and aestheticism: the artistic, dandy-ish Holmes is in danger of becoming decadent, a concept that is tied to aestheticism but with more negative connotations. Conan Doyle at times plays up Holmes’s more troubling decadent qualities: “[Holmes] alternat[es] from week to week between cocaine and ambition, the drowsiness of the drug, and the fierce energy of his own keen nature” (“Scandal in Bohemia” 1:239). As cocaine is not exactly a soporific drug, the drowsiness in this case points to Holmes’s decadence, his lack of energy when not pursuing “ambition,” or Victorian masculine energy. Holmes’s lack of energy highly resembles the contemporary pathologization of decadence. Psychologist Havelock Ellis in 1889 defines decadence as “an anarchistic style in which everything is sacrificed to the development of the individual parts,” which, as he points out, leads to a “disintegration of the whole” (qtd. in Gagnier 2). Max Nordau’s *Degeneration* (1895) pushes decadence into the realm of degeneration:

But the physician, especially if he have devoted himself to the special study of nervous and mental maladies, recognises at a glance, in the *fin-de-siècle* disposition, in the tendencies of contemporary art and poetry, in the life and conduct of the men who write mystic, symbolic and ‘decadent’ works, and the attitude taken by their admirers in the tastes and aesthetic instincts of fashionable society, the confluence of two well-defined conditions of disease, with which he is quite familiar, viz. degeneration (degeneracy) and hysteria. (15)

In Nordau's discussion of degeneracy, the decadent becomes weakened, feminized, and diseased, one who lacks "the sense of morality and of right and wrong," for whom "there exists no law, no decency, no modesty" (418), who is plagued by emotionalism and ennui, and who is marked by "a disinclination to action of any kind, attaining possibly to [sic] abhorrence of activity and powerlessness to will" (420). Indeed, we can see many of Holmes's own characteristics in Nordau's dire prognosis. Holmes's lethargy when not working on a case points to this troubling decadence: "for days on end he would lie upon the sofa in the sitting-room, hardly uttering a word or moving a muscle from morning to night. On these occasions I have noticed such a dreamy, vacant expression in his eyes, that I might have suspected him of being addicted to the use of some narcotic" (*Study in Scarlet* 1:11). Conan Doyle especially emphasizes this lethargic reaction in the early canon, marking his detective hero with something seemingly unheroic: decadent impotence.

How does Conan Doyle recuperate the lounging languid figure into the energetic knight-errant? It is tempting to accuse Conan Doyle of character inconsistencies, given Watson's wandering war wound and a timeline that has left Sherlockians scrambling for theories. Conan Doyle does shift a few details and character traits over the canon; however, Holmes tends to be both decadent and heroic within the same stories. He is, in fact, not heroic despite his decadence, but because of it, with his decadence being key to his emergent cosmopolitanism. In order to explain this contradiction, I must broaden my definition of decadence and move it away from the negative connotations of degeneracy. As I discussed in chapter 1, Regenia Gagnier's book *Individualism, Decadence, and Globalization* (2010) reframes decadence as retaining Havelock Ellis's idea of the

individuation of parts over the whole, but she attributes it to “thought-experiments on the limits of self and other” (2) that “opposed narrow egoism, domesticity, and nationalism with larger social visions” (3). She describes the thought experiments in aesthetic terms, in which “people [...] attempted to live their lives creatively, as if they were works of art” (1). Here we see the tension between self and other, individual and whole, that forms the center of the fear of decadence leading to degeneracy, that a focus on the individual will cause a neglect of the whole, leading to a disintegration of said whole. Yet Gagnier describes a decadence that still concerns itself with the whole, but uses attention to the individual part to recuperate and transform the whole. A detached, critical, and artistic view does not necessarily lead to neglect or unconcern, but formed reformation, a concept which Gagnier discusses as cosmopolitan in nature, as many of these “thought-experiments” centered on improving social relationship and deconstructing barriers between people.

In chapter 2, I discussed how Conan Doyle locates degeneracy in violent British masculine action: dominance without responsibility. With Sherlock Holmes, Conan Doyle is creating a possible answer to this degeneracy, a hero for 1890s Britain who recovers British masculine identity by a complete, self-conscious transformation of individual identity, one more suited to a changing world. Sherlock Holmes is not really a character of contradictions, but of multiple formed facets, or a “gem-like flame,” to slightly misappropriate Pater. I have been consciously using Pater’s ideas in this paragraph, as Pater’s model of aesthetic critic as scientist fits the decadent Holmes particularly well. In his preface to *The Renaissance* (1873), Pater states:

the function of the aesthetic critic is to distinguish, to analyse, and separate from its adjuncts, the virtue by which a picture, a landscape, a fair personality in life or in a book, produces this special impression of beauty or pleasure, to indicate what the source of that impression is, and under what conditions it is experienced. His end is reached when he has disengaged that virtue, and noted it, as a chemist notes some natural element, for himself and others. (ix)

Sherlock Holmes, who conducts chemical experiments in his free time, possibly as an alternative to cocaine, also acts as a chemist in the Paterian sense. He distinguishes, analyzes, and separates his own characteristics as well as his impressions of others in order to distill and transform. Decadence thus becomes a creative rather than destructive concept: the individuation of parts in order to distill those parts to a transformed whole, which I will call “responsible decadence.” This responsible decadence goes a long way in explaining how the decadent Sherlock Holmes still retains his energy and heroism. His work as a detective is not just about maintaining the status quo, but about reconstructing the world around him. His profession, self-consciously distilled from individual qualities and skills, allows him to reconstruct the individualities of others for the purpose of heroic action and social justice. Likewise, I will explore how Watson, both as a character and in relation to Holmes, performs an alternate form of responsible decadence, one that is more connected to emotions and personal relationships, thus becoming the avenue by which Conan Doyle can teach the reader responsible decadence.¹² Responsible decadence forms

¹² As noted in chapter 1, Tanya Agathocleous (2004) also touches on the cosmopolitan dimensions of Holmes in her discussion of “aesthetic cosmopolitanism,” a concept that ties Holmes’s “ardent interest in the city with a utopian commitment to ideals of global interconnectedness” (126). Holmes aesthetically constructs London as a “web” while recognizing it as a space that is inextricably connected with the rest of

the moral core of Conan Doyle's cosmopolitanism: in order to remake British identity into one that can create beneficial global ties (responsibility), it must be decadently broken into its constituent parts and transformed into a new whole.

Distilling and Deduction

Conan Doyle initially characterizes Holmes in *A Study in Scarlet* by way of Watson, then a new, rather distant roommate, investigating him. Watson assesses Holmes's knowledge:

Sherlock Holmes—his limits

1. Knowledge of Literature.—Nil.
2. “ “ Philosophy.—Nil.
3. “ “ Astronomy.—Nil.
4. “ “ Politics.—Feeble.
5. “ “ Botany.—Variable.

Well up in belladonna, opium, and poisons generally. Knows nothing of practical gardening.

6. Knowledge of Geology.—Practical, but limited.

Tells at a glance different soils from each other. After walks has shown me splashes upon his trousers, and told me by their colour and consistence in what part of London he had received them.

7. Knowledge of Chemistry.—Profound.

the world. To distinguish responsible decadence from Agathocleous's aesthetic cosmopolitanism, I will move my focus from how Holmes views London as an aesthetic space to how he constructs individual identities—his own as well as others'.

8. “ “ Anatomy.—Accurate, but unsystematic.
9. “ “ Sensational Literature.—Immense.

He appears to know every detail of every horror perpetrated in the century.

10. Plays the violin well.
11. Is an expert singlestick player, boxer, and swordsman.
12. Has a good practical knowledge of British law. (1:13-14)

After compiling the list, Watson “threw it into the fire in despair,” wailing, “If I can only find what the fellow is driving at by reconciling all these accomplishments, and discovering a calling which needs them all” (1:14). The solution to this mystery seems rather obvious to modern readers, steeped as we are in both detective fiction and specialization within education: he only specializes in skills that will help with crime detection, his chosen field. However, at the time, the above list does seem Holmes’s “limits,” as he does not fit into the mold of the “complete” Victorian man. He is ignorant of Carlyle and the solar system, but he’s expert in poison, London soil, and sensational literature. His education serves as an example of decadence in practice: he sacrifices the whole—a well-rounded Victorian education—for the parts—specialization. His “profound” knowledge of chemistry also calls to mind Pater’s aesthetic critic as chemist. Conan Doyle, in fact, introduces the character of Holmes during a chemical experiment involving a forensic blood test. Holmes’s chemistry and his specialization of knowledge points to a distillation of traits, an exercise in self-transformation so revolutionary that it baffles the more conventional Watson. This decadence, though, is not for its own sake, but in order to aid the heroic action of detective work, or responsible decadence. Just as

Holmes crows about how many murderers would have been caught because of his successful chemical blood test, Holmes uses his decadent selection of skills to aid people and right injustice.

One of the subtler examples of Holmes's responsible decadent work in action is his trick of almost magically deducing facts about a person on first meeting based on noticing details. In "The Red-Headed League," Watson attempts the Holmes trick on the character Jabez Wilson: "Our visitor bore every mark of being an average commonplace British tradesman, obese, pompous, and slow. [...] Altogether, look as I would, there was nothing remarkable about the man" (1:264-65). Holmes, seeing Watson's attempt, offhandedly adds, "he has at some time done manual labour, [...] he takes snuff, [...] he is a Freemason, [...] he has been in China, and [...] he has done a considerable amount of writing lately" (1:265). Already, Holmes has provided a far more expansive view of the client. Like Pater's aesthetic critic, Holmes has, in effect, distilled the beautiful into its constitutive parts. The term "beautiful" may seem odd here in reference to Jabez Wilson, but by beautiful I refer to Holmes's view of people as subjects for analysis: just as he values crime for its unusual features, thus making crime into an art to be aesthetically analyzed, he treats people as artistic objects, plumbing the depths of their histories and characters. Miles Kimball (1994) describes Holmes's critical gaze as problematically voyeuristic, a threat to the privacy of the innocent even as he tries to save them from the guilty: "Holmes is predisposed to see depravity; he cannot enjoy the beauty of surfaces because he cannot forget the 'hidden wickedness' he assumes lies beneath the surface. In effect, Holmes undresses reality, stripping it of its surfaces with the power of his gaze" (17). While his voyeurism has problematic implications, especially if, as Watson

occasionally worries, Holmes were to turn his powers to evil, Holmes never once uses his gaze to harm. In fact, he does “enjoy the beauty,” if we take into account his unconventional definition of beauty (sublime might be a better term). Yet his responsible use of his powers goes beyond helping people: he actually creates beauty out of his critical objects that goes beyond Watson’s more conventional general impression. As Jim Barloon puts it, “What Holmes, through his methodology, maintains, explicitly and repeatedly, is that individuality—Holmes’s word is *singularity*—not only exists but also matter vitally. [...] Like the romantics who wrote in the dawning of his own dwindling century, Holmes affirms the uniqueness of every man and woman” (34, emphasis his). Rather than generalizing the client as a character type, as Watson has done, Holmes supplies the client with an interesting past, habits, an institutional affiliation, and even a clue pertinent to the case at hand. The client becomes fully realized: “Holmes reconstructs, articulating the unified whole out of scattered, disconnected bits” (Barloon 37). The holistic view is dismissive and cruel; the decadent view is recuperative.

Even so, Holmes does not necessarily see himself as the kindly voice of recuperation, at least early in his career. Holmes retains an aesthetic distance from his clients, and even all people. As I discussed in chapter 1, by distance I refer to Amanda Anderson’s definition in *The Powers of Distance* (2001), where she describes detachment as not necessarily rejecting people or removing oneself from the world, but as a way of viewing the world, to “objectify facets of human existence so as to better understand, criticize, and at times transform them” (6). This distance is vital to Holmes’s decadent formation of his life. Watson describes Holmes in “A Scandal in Bohemia:”

He was, I take it, the most perfect reasoning and observing machine that the world has seen, but as a lover he would have placed himself in a false position. He never spoke of the softer passions, save with a gibe and a sneer. They were admirable things for the observer—excellent for drawing the veil from men’s motives and actions. But for the trained reasoner to admit such intrusions into his own delicate and finely adjusted temperament was to introduce a distracting factor which might throw a doubt upon all his mental results. Grit in a sensitive instrument, or a crack in one of his own high-power lenses, would not be more disturbing than a strong emotion in a nature such as his. (1:239)

Notice that Holmes is described as an “observer” who can “draw the veil from men’s motives.” As a “calculating machine,” an observer removed from humanity, Holmes can understand human emotion without participating in it. In fact, it is this very nonparticipation that allows Holmes to be the observer and reasoner. Except for the few times mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, Holmes seems even unconcerned with the fates of his clients: in “The Adventure of the Resident Patient” (1893), he coldly refuses to help a man because he did not reveal the entire truth about himself, and in *The Hound of the Baskervilles* (1902) Holmes uses Sir Henry Baskerville as bait for the murderer, favoring a dramatic reveal of the mystery that would highlight his own genius over the safety of his client.¹³ Emotional involvement with his client would take away from his objectivity, which would lead him to make generalizations based on

¹³ It is fair to mention, though, that the “client” in “Resident Patient” is a criminal, and Holmes immediately regrets his actions toward Sir Henry Baskerville.

preconceived notions rather than deductions based on objective observations. He would no longer be the chemist, but part of the chemical reaction.

Holmes justifies his detachment when Watson expresses his admiration for Mary Morstan, a new client, in *The Sign of Four* (1890). At Holmes's indifference to Morstan's beauty, Watson accuses him of being "an automaton—a calculating machine" and "positively inhuman" (1:135). Holmes replies, "It is of the first importance [...] not to allow your judgment to be biased by personal qualities. A client is to me a mere unit, a factor in a problem. The emotional qualities are antagonistic to clear reasoning. I assure you that the most winning woman I ever knew was hanged for poisoning three little children for their insurance-money, and the most repellant man of my acquaintance is a philanthropist who has spent nearly a quarter of a million upon the London poor. [...] I never make exceptions" (1:135). His detachment does not label him a degenerate member of society who does not care about people. He *chooses* to maintain his distance *for* other people. He is not merely an instrument for detection, but a self-constructing instrument. Rather than a well-rounded man, he is a formed man who maintains his aesthetic distance for the public good. His purpose is always transformative: his emotional detachment allows him to save the innocent in a way that Watson's sentimental impressions don't. Watson may love Mary Morstan, but only Holmes can solve her case.

I have discussed Holmes's distance from people in relation to his work, since Holmes, by his very self-construction, has few dealings with people outside of his work. (Watson is an interesting exception which I will discuss later in this chapter.) It is important to note Holmes's choice of profession: that of a self-proclaimed consulting detective. He describes his profession in his expansive-sounding monograph, "The Book

of Life:” “Like all other arts, the Science of Deduction and Analysis is one which can only be acquired by long and patient study” (*Study in Scarlet* 1:16). Just as Holmes distances himself from people, he applies aesthetic distance to detective work by describing it as an art. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, in describing Holmes as an aesthetic, Holmes describes himself as a “man who loves art for its own sake” for whom “it is frequently in its least important and lowliest manifestations that the keenest pleasure is to be derived” (“Copper Beeches” 1:492). Holmes’s primary motivation seems to be the search for “unusual and *outré* features” (“Stock-Broker’s Clerk” 1:568) in his cases, trumping any wish for money or fame, and overshadowing any satisfaction from protecting the innocent.

If Holmes is only interested in art and problem-solving to the exclusion of all other concerns, his line of work is not the most logical. He chooses a profession that puts him into close contact with people, the society of whom he would rather avoid. His profession is deliberately helpful, both to individuals and to society as a whole: he stops crime, protects the innocent, and tries to establish justice even when there hasn’t been any crime committed. Holmes’s early stories (when he’s at his most decadent) are littered with instances of him using his powers to specifically help people rather than coldly solve cases. In “A Case of Identity” (1892), Holmes threatens a man whom he has caught posing as his stepdaughter’s lover: “The law cannot, as you say, touch you, [...] yet there never was a man who deserved punishment more. If the young lady has a brother or a friend, he ought to lay a whip across your shoulders. By Jove! [...] it is not part of my duties to my client, but here’s a hunting crop handy, and I think I shall just treat myself to—” (1:304). Even though Holmes’s anger vanishes as soon as the man runs out of the

apartment, his intentions and results are the same as if he were really emotionally invested: he takes on the responsibility of a close male relative rather than maintaining strict distance, scaring the stepfather in order to gain the stepdaughter's freedom, and for no other reason. Likewise, Holmes protects an ailing man in "The Boscombe Valley Mystery" (1892), rages at his inability to save a man marked for death by the Ku Klux Klan in "The Five Orange Pips" (1892), allows a first-time criminal to go free in "The Adventure of the Blue Carbuncle" (1892), and urges a man to reconcile with his son in "The Adventure of the Beryl Coronet" (1892). All of these listed stories are included in *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*, a collection of Conan Doyle's earliest Holmes short stories that includes his description of Holmes as a "calculating machine." Holmes may be calculating, and his motivation may seem unheroic at times, but Conan Doyle actually makes the artistic distance into an avenue for heroism: Holmes's view of his work as art allows him the distance to understand, criticize, and transform in responsible decadence. He is able to distill the beautiful into the beautiful.

Conan Doyle brings attention to responsible decadence in Sherlock Holmes's methods by contrasting them with the ineffective energies of the Scotland Yard inspectors. Police investigators like Inspectors Lestrade and Gregson often work in tandem with Holmes on official criminal cases, bringing Holmes in to investigate when they are at a loss. The conventional police inspector serves as a foil to Holmes: unlike Watson, the police are responsible for solving crimes, and therefore their incompetence, or semi-competence, highlights Holmes's expertise and effectiveness even more than Watson's amateur interest. *The Sign of Four* shows the sharpest critique of official police work in the buffoonery of Athelney Jones. Jones arrives at the scene of the murder in his

official police capacity, interrupting Holmes's more productive investigation, takes a vague look around, and immediately begins accusing the wrong party of the crime. His reasoning is based on holistic impressions: there was a treasure between two brothers, one brother is dead, so the other had to have killed him with the motive of greed.

These faulty impressions make Jones more than just an idiot who jumps to conclusions. Conan Doyle is careful to establish Jones's philosophy: "Stern facts here,—no room for theories" (*Sign of Four* 1:163). He has already accused Sherlock Holmes of being "the theorist" who "lecture[s] us all on causes and inferences and effects" (1:163). Notice here Conan Doyle's not-so-subtle parody. Jones prizes "facts" but rejects "causes" and "effects," thus rejecting the idea that facts can be used to reconstruct a narrative. He also rejects "inferences," or the idea that these "facts" can mean anything. And yet Jones wrongly infers the treasure as a cause for fratricide. Jones here is the theorist. In fact, Jones becomes a parody of Holmes. He is the one to "lecture [...] on causes and inferences and effects." He is the one with the theory, as Holmes is quick to point out. Athelney Jones thus becomes not only an effective foil for Holmes, but also an example of ineffective energy. He immediately settles on Thaddeus as the murderer, and he uses every extra fact Holmes gives to him as further evidence for his initial theory, as shown in the following excerpt. I quote the passage at length in order to show Jones's dogged refusal to shift his viewpoint with changing facts—his conclusion remains the same, while he constructs narratives in answer to Holmes's objections:

"Sholto was, on his own confession, with his brother last night. The brother died in a fit, on which Sholto walked off with the treasure? How's that?"

“On which the dead man very considerately got up and locked the door on the inside.”

“Hum! There’s a flaw there. Let us apply common sense to the matter. This Thaddeus Sholto *was* with his brother; there *was* a quarrel: so much we know. The brother is dead and the jewels are gone. So much also we know. No one saw the brother from the time Thaddeus left him. His bed had not been slept in. Thaddeus is evidently in a most disturbed state of mind. His appearance is—well, not attractive. You see that I am weaving my web round Thaddeus. The net begins to close upon him.”

“You are not quite in possession of the facts yet,” said Holmes. “This splinter of wood, which I have every reason to believe to be poisoned, was in the man’s scalp where you still see the mark; this card, inscribed as you see it, was on the table, and beside it lay this rather curious stone-headed instrument. How does all that fit into your theory?”

“Confirms it in every respect,” said the fat detective pompously. “House is full of Indian curiosities. Thaddeus brought this up, and if this splinter be poisonous Thaddeus may as well have made murderous use of it as any other man. The card is some hocus-pocus—a blind, as like as not. The only question is, how did he depart? Ah, of course, here is a hole in the roof.”

With great activity, considering his bulk, he sprang up the steps and squeezed through into the garret, and immediately afterwards we heard his exulting voice proclaiming that he had found the trap-door. (1:163-64)

Here we see Jones, like a bad art critic, not only twisting facts to fit his own theory, as he does with the “stone-headed instrument” and Sholto’s fascination with “Indian curiosities,” but he also ignores facts altogether, declaring the card “hocus-pocus.” He is “weaving his web” around Thaddeus (using a term that Holmes often uses to describe his own deductive process) without doing a thorough investigation. He notes details, but he fails to think about their significance or see them through a critical eye. He lacks Holmes’s distance, relying on general impressions based on personal prejudices and stereotypes. Finally, he discovers the trapdoor (soon after Holmes has made the same discovery) with “great activity” and “exulting voice.” As Holmes continues his investigation, Jones spends his time arresting the entire household, prompting the newspaper to report the next morning: “The prompt and energetic action of the officers of the law shows the great advantage of the presence on such occasions of a single vigorous and masterful mind” (1:183). Here we see, in Jones, the energy so prized in Victorian culture and so parodied by Conan Doyle: he’s expending a great deal of energy in something useless, and then not spending that same energy in making the right observations and asking the right questions. His energy is useless as well as harmful. His assumptions lead him to arrest innocent people, and his “reasoning” is not only based on stubborn theories but also prejudices. In the long quote above, Jones points out that “Thaddeus is evidently in a most disturbed state of mind. His appearance is—well, not attractive” (1:163). He is not attributing Thaddeus’s “disturbed state of mind” to the very recent discovery of his brother’s death. Jones is more likely referring to Thaddeus’s exaggerated aestheticism, well established in the novel’s first description of his nervousness, hypochondria, detachment from society, and foppishness. Jones sees a man

who does not value the same British masculine “common sense” (1:163) energy, and he proceeds to conflate a strange appearance and behavior with unquestioned guilt. Jones is committing the same errors that Watson had about Jabez Wilson in the example I mentioned earlier in the chapter, but it’s far more harmful, as Jones has the authority of the British government and the approval of the media.

Conan Doyle carefully uses decadence as an integral part of Holmes’s heroism. The police, with their useless “energetic inquiries” (“Noble Bachelor” 1:450) and lack of focus on detail, become ineffective and even destructive influences as they bully innocent parties and let the guilty ones run free. Energy is the key word here. The major criticism against decadence is that it represents a loss of energy, and thus degeneracy. The decadent Holmes’s focus on details directs the necessary energy in a useful way, thus creating a new, more accurate, and even beautiful “whole” through the individuation of parts. We see this in Holmes’s more effective investigation of the Sholto murder scene. Holmes begins with facts—isolated details—but instead of suiting them to a narrative that he has created through prejudice and false expectation (Holmes only makes this error perhaps twice in all of Conan Doyle’s stories), he uses deduction, memory, and probability to create a narrative that fits the facts, and he does not begin this process until he has collected a great many facts. He uses a map, a footprint, a thorn, knowledge of the Andeman Islands, and the full testimony of two people in order to reconstruct the events of the murder, allowing for changes to his hypothesis should further details contradict. His narrative of the crime is not based on prejudices (with the exception of Tonga the Andeman Islander). He is not beginning with a holistic view, like Athelney Jones, but on isolated details that gain more significance when related to each other.

Watson as an Alternative Form of Decadence

In my previous example from “The Red Headed League,” I have perhaps been unfair to Watson, representing him, like many popular adaptations, as Holmes’s rather stupid sidekick. Next to Holmes, Watson does seem conventional and even dim.

However, Watson holds a narrative purpose within the stories that goes behind narrator and reader-surrogate. Watson is tied to Bohemianism, aestheticism, decadence, and even degeneracy; he is both artist and aesthetic critic; and he holds a powerful transformative influence over Holmes that manifests over the entirety of the canon. Through Watson’s more conventional and therefore approachable characterization, as well as his narrative relationship with the reader, we can see him as an avenue for Conan Doyle to re-educate his readers with responsible decadence.

Watson describes himself as a Bohemian, and his habits uphold that assessment: “The rough-and-tumble work in Afghanistan, coming on the top of natural Bohemianism of disposition, has made me rather more lax than befits a medical man” (“Musgrave Ritual” 1:604). While Watson is perhaps not as extreme in his rejection of conventionality—he marries, he pursues a conventional career, and he is part of a club—he does share in many of Holmes’s decadent habits—ennui punctuated by energy, untidiness and irregular schedule, and a keen interest in the interesting and macabre. Their first meeting in *A Study in Scarlet* highlights their similarities. Holmes admits of himself: “I get in the dumps at times, and don’t open my mouth for days on end. You must not think I am sulky when I do that. Just let me alone, and I’ll soon be right” (*Study in Scarlet* 1:9). Watson, in answer, says, “I object to rows because my nerves are shaken, and I get up at all sorts of ungodly hours, and I am extremely lazy” (1:9). Conan Doyle

spends the next chapter highlighting their differences and Holmes's inscrutability to Watson, but this initial meeting establishes their shared decadent qualities. Yes, Watson attributes his "vices" to his war-related illness, yet his "natural Bohemianism" persists throughout the stories, years after he has recovered his health.

Conan Doyle further establishes Watson as aesthetic by his narrative role. Watson is not only the first person narrator in most of the stories: he is the author of the stories. At the end of *A Study in Scarlet*, Watson proclaims his intention of recording Holmes's cases, ostensibly to set the record straight to a public who read the erroneous newspaper reports that give the police credit for solving the case. Just as Holmes corrects the irresponsible and ineffective energies of the official police, Watson corrects the irresponsible, generalized, yet official accounts of the press. In the next novel, *The Sign of Four*, Holmes and Watson argue over Watson's artistic choices for his pamphlet recounting *A Study in Scarlet*. Not only does this draw attention to Watson's role as artist, it also allows Conan Doyle to present a discussion of the nature and purpose of art. Holmes critiques Watson's work by saying, "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" (1:125). Here Holmes is contrasting his own art (deduction and observation) with Watson's art (the narrative form), and thinks that the two should be mutually exclusive. Watson retorts, "But the romance was there" (1:125), only to have Holmes point out that "Some facts should be suppressed, or, at least, a just sense of proportion should be observed in treating them" (1:125). Holmes tries to apply his own artistic sensibilities to critique Watson's art: he would only value the pieces necessary to create "an exact science [...] treated in a cold and unemotional

manner” (1:125). Watson, however, defends his artistic choices and does little to change them in future. His focus on “romanticism,” which he defends as facts within the case, shows a high level of artistic arrangement and purpose: he is representing responsible decadence to the readers not by simply teaching Holmes’s art, but by teaching the readers how to appreciate Holmes’s art. He’s presenting a model of behavior with Holmes, and thus must use the narrative rather than the explicative form. Even further, his artistic arrangement of *A Study in Scarlet* is far more decadent than perhaps later works: the novel is separated into two parts—the story of Holmes’s detection using first-person narration, and the backstory of the case, the romance, told in third person. Watson, and Conan Doyle, rarely uses this artistic arrangement, relying on frame narrations and confessions in future, but this arrangement does highlight Watson’s attention to the artistic purpose of his work, which is to render Holmes and his work aesthetically for an audience.

Earlier in this chapter I discussed Watson’s rather unfair, holistic artistic rendering of Jabez Wilson, a view that Holmes recuperates through details that Holmes misses. Again, it is important to remember Watson’s artistic purpose in modeling responsible decadence to his readers. He casts himself as the conventional foil to Holmes, embodying the holistic view of the reader in order to be corrected by Holmes’s decadent view. Conan Doyle illustrates the differences between the observations of Watson and Holmes in “A Case of Identity” when Holmes invites Watson to give a description of their recent client, Mary Sutherland. Watson provides the following description:

Well, she had a slate-coloured, broad-brimmed straw hat, with a feather of a brickish red. Her jacket was black, with black beads sewn upon it, and a

fringe of little black jet ornaments. Her dress was brown, rather darker than coffee colour, with a little purple plush at the neck and sleeves. Her gloves were greyish and were worn through at the right forefinger. Her boots I didn't observe. She had small round, hanging gold earrings, and a general air of being fairly well-to-do in a vulgar, comfortable, easy-going way. (1:297)

Holmes condescendingly praises Watson's description: "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. Never trust to general impressions, my boy, but concentrate yourself upon details" (297). Watson displays a reliance on "general impressions," summing up the woman's social class and personality based on her clothing. Watson is not necessarily incorrect in any of his observations, just reductive rather than transformative, a conventional foil to highlight Holmes's responsible decadent attention to detail. Watson the writer further constructs a romance, again for redemptive purposes. Watson's final impression of her creates a contrast between Watson's first impressions and Holmes's decadent transformation of her character: "For all the preposterous hat and the vacuous face, there was something noble in the simple faith of our visitor which compelled our respect" ("Case of Identity" 1:296). Holmes quickly solves the mystery, intimidating her stepfather who has been posing as her fiancé, but the story is less about the mystery and more about redeeming the character of Mary Sutherland, pulling her from a reductionist view (or a caricature on Watson's part) into a depiction of a fully-realized person, one who deserves a self-actualized identity, which Watson the writer achieves through a careful arrangement of description and revelation.

Watson does not just serve as a narrative foil or the artistic narrator. He is a fully realized character himself, serving as an exploration British masculine identity, both as a character who transforms and as an influence on Holmes's character. Despite his reliance on conventional stereotypes, Watson is much more connected to people on a personal level than Holmes, as well as much more concerned with people's physical and emotional well-being. While Holmes tends to look at clients as factors and crimes as interesting puzzles, Watson continually focuses more on people's health and safety, embodying perhaps a more feminized role, or at least a masculine role that incorporates more qualities that Victorians viewed as feminine. The result of this identity exploration is a more redemptive character, a Victorian man who can practice heroic action constructively rather than destructively. Watson begins as a degenerate imperial soldier, a potential victim of destructive forms of British masculine identity, and is slowly recuperated into a responsible decadent, an example more conventional and therefore more achievable for the reader than Holmes's more extreme form of responsible decadence. At the same time, Watson recuperates, or even domesticates, Holmes's more degenerate qualities. Through their relationship, we can see Conan Doyle exploring models of behavior in order to achieve responsible decadence.

As stated above, Conan Doyle initially ties Watson to degeneracy. Watson is an imperial soldier returned from colonial war. Watson vaguely mentioned the "honours and promotions" (*Study in Scarlet* 1:3) others received from this war, but Watson's own "misfortune and disaster" (1:3) quickly overshadow any positive connections to colonial service. Just as I discussed in chapter 2, imperial service is often linked with degeneracy: Watson returned "[w]orn with pain, and weak from [...] prolonged hardships" (1:3), with

his “health irretrievably ruined” (1:4), who is then allowed to languish in “that great cesspool into which all the loungers and idlers of the Empire are irresistibly drained” (1:4). Imperial service, a privileged avenue for British masculine identity, renders Watson broken, void of manhood, energy, and personal connection. It is through interest in Holmes’s heroic action as a responsible decadent that Watson is revived and given purpose, participating in transformative heroism in a way impossible in the colonial wars. London is no longer the “great cesspool” to Watson. Through his association with Holmes, Watson is energized as he finds new purpose, both as chronicler of Holmes’s cases and as a helper to Holmes in saving people and bringing justice to the chaotic streets of London. He not only gains a wife—one of Holmes’s clients—but he also regains his health: past the first two novels, Watson’s war injury is barely mentioned. The Watson of the short stories is barely recognizable as the Watson from the first two novels: the “army surgeon with a weak leg and a weaker banking account” (*Sign of Four* 1:136) becomes a healthy married man with a strong medical practice and an extensive readership. Holmes has recuperated Watson out of degeneracy. While Watson still has decadent qualities and an association with an even more decadent companion, he has become a useful and responsible member of society rather than a “lounger and idler.”

Watson, however, has an even more profound influence on Holmes, though it is not quite as obvious as Holmes’s recuperation of Watson. Watson domesticates Holmes’s extreme avenues of aestheticism, namely his cocaine use. Cocaine, of course, was not illegal nor particularly taboo in the 1890’s, yet Holmes’s use of it is particularly off-putting and destructive, as his “forearm and wrist [are] all dotted and scarred with innumerable puncture-marks” (*Sign of Four* 1:123), scars gained from a ritual Watson

sees him perform three times a day. Watson, though intimidated by his “cool, nonchalant air” (*Sign of Four* 1:123), finally works up the nerve to protest:

“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 least 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.” (*Sign of Four* 1:124)

Watson here is worried about Holmes’s health, but more importantly he is worried about what he describes as a descent into degeneration: Holmes would have “permanent weakness” and a “black reaction.” Just as Holmes has saved Watson from degeneracy, Watson is attempting to do the same. Likewise, Watson points out that he would “risk the loss of those great powers with which you have been endowed.” Watson cites the destruction of Holmes’s intellectual faculties, and that he has a responsibility to use them to help people rather than to destroy them through selfish indulgence. Watson knows the value of Holmes’s decadence, but he also insists on a certain amount of responsibility in that decadence, and that responsibility is to the betterment of society, or to transformative heroic action.

Besides preserving him from the most destructive decadent activities, Watson continually instills in Holmes the social importance of his work. At the end of one

particular story, wherein Holmes foils a bank robbery, Watson praises him in the following exchange:

“You reasoned it out beautifully,” I exclaimed in unfeigned admiration. “It is so long a chain, and yet every link rings true.”

“It saved me from ennui,” he answered, yawning. “Alas! I already feel it closing in upon me. My life is spent in one long effort to escape from the commonplaces of existence. These little problems help me to do so.”

“And you are a benefactor of the race,” said I.

He shrugged his shoulders. “Well, perhaps, after all, it is of some little use,” he remarked. “*‘L’homme c’est rien—l’oeuvre c’est tout,’* as Gustave Flaubert wrote to George Sand.” (“Red-Headed League” 1:287)

While Holmes tries to distance himself from the good he has done by casting it back as a “little problem” for the purpose of occupying his brain, Watson insists on Holmes’s heroic purpose. The quote in French, meaning “Man is nothing—work is all” can be read in two ways. In one way, Holmes is denying his link to humanity and saying that he only lives for work. However, it can also be read, as Holmes’s preface implies, as a heroic self-denial: he denies his own satisfaction, and that his work becomes more important for the world than he himself. Watson clarifies Holmes’s socially important role, no matter what Holmes says: he is a “benefactor of the race,” a point to which Holmes reluctantly concedes.

As I have established throughout this chapter, Holmes is aware of the social importance of his work, and he does, despite his own protests, slip into personal concern

for his clients rather than just seeing them as factors in a case. Yet the text continually shows the danger of Holmes's decadence: he might slip into degeneracy through cocaine use, and he also occasionally endangers clients in order to create a more dramatic effect. I have already cited Holmes's recklessly endangering Henry Baskerville's life in *The Hound of the Baskervilles* in order to have a dramatic conclusion to his case. Note that, while the novel was written in 1901, the actual case is set early in Holmes's career. I point this out to set up a comparison between similar instances from early in Holmes's life to later, as we can see the subtle changes in Holmes's character. Holmes remains detached, celibate, and obsessed with his work, but he changes quite a bit in his relations with others.

We can see the change in Holmes most dramatically in the way he treats Watson. At the beginning of *The Sign of Four*, just after Watson has scolded Holmes about his cocaine use, Holmes, to prove a point about his own powers, deduces details about the former owner of Watson's pocket watch. After Holmes slowly establishes that the watch's owner is Watson's elder brother, he says, in quick succession: "He 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" (1:129). Watson is, understandably, shocked, with "considerable bitterness in [his] heart" (1:129). Holmes has just unkindly and coldly stated a family history that would have certainly been painful to Watson. The history, in fact, sounds very much like Conan Doyle's own father, an alcoholic artist who was, at the time Conan Doyle was writing this novel, in a mental institution. Watson explains his anger with his suspicions of Holmes researching his

private family affairs behind his back, saying, “This is unworthy of you” (1:129), but Holmes realizes the actual problem. He “kindly” apologizes and explains himself: “Viewing the matter as an abstract problem, I had forgotten how personal and painful a thing it might be to you” (1:129). I have hitherto described Holmes as a detached reasoner, and Conan Doyle definitely sees the value in detachment, but here Conan Doyle establishes the dangers of detachment, as Holmes has hurt a friend through his logical puzzles. In fact, Conan Doyle places this instance, soon after the cocaine incident and at the beginning of the second novel, to establish that Holmes is continually in danger of becoming so removed from people that he becomes a destructive force. After all, crime detection is only a logical choice of career for Holmes if he wants to help people. If he stops wanting to help people, he will choose to either remove himself from society altogether or, more likely, become a criminal himself. Watson ruminates several times throughout the stories that it was lucky Holmes did not take up crime. It is Watson that represents a link to humanity for Holmes, leading him to care about protecting the innocent rather than just solving problems, or, rather, providing a socially useful purpose for Holmes’s decadence. Watson’s early scolding for cocaine use does not seem to do any good, but Holmes in fact does give up cocaine later in life due to his friend’s influence. As we see in Holmes’s apology and after-the-fact realization of the hurt he has caused, Holmes starts to learn empathy as a way to combat destructive detachment and add the responsibility to his decadence. With the realization that he has harmed his friend by treating these personal details as “factors,” Holmes begins a subtle transformation into someone who balances his decadent distance and focus on details with stronger emotional investment in community.

To see the change in Holmes's treatment of Watson, we can turn to the most dramatic example in one of Conan Doyle's last Holmes stories: "The Adventure of the Three Garridebs" (1924). Structurally, this story is very similar to his early story "The Red-Headed League:" a group of men cons a slow-witted older man out of his house in order to commit a robbery, and Holmes and Watson foil the robbery at the end without involving the initial client. Yet the story is remarkable in including the only injury Watson sustains throughout the entire canon, a superficial gunshot wound. After Holmes incapacitates the attacker, he reacts with the most emotion he's ever shown:

Then my friend's wiry arms were round me, and he was leading me to a chair.

"You're not hurt, Watson? For God's sake, say that you are not hurt!"

It was worth a wound—it was worth many wounds—to know the depth of loyalty and love which lay behind that cold mask. The clear, hard eyes were dimmed for a moment, and the firm lips were shaking. For the one and only time I caught a glimpse of a great heart as well as of a great brain. All my years of humble but single-minded service culminated in that moment of revelation. (2:624-25)

Holmes is far from the "calculating machine" that served as an early descriptor. He has come to value someone's life, giving him a "great heart." It is more than "years of [...] service" that has "culminated in that moment;" it is Holmes's transformation. Throughout his relationship with Watson, he has learned the value of not only social responsibility, but human connection.

To give one more example of Holmes's transformation, I refer to the short story "The Adventure of the Veiled Lodger" (1927), also one of Conan Doyle's final short stories. The story itself is remarkable in that it resembles a few other stories in which the crux of the mystery is the identity of a mysterious lodger, and yet there seems to be very little mystery altogether. This is not a case in which Holmes's deductive powers can shine, and while it has some interesting and grotesque features—a deformed woman, a circus, a lion attack—those are not necessarily the center of Holmes's investigation. Holmes is asked by the veiled lodger's landlady to act as a final confessor to her life-altering tragedy: she planned with her lover to kill her abusive husband while feeding the lion, a plan which went awry, leaving her alone and scarred. Again, the focus is not on Holmes's deductions, though he has deduced much of her story before she tells it, but of her confession. Just like in the previously discussed story, we see a dramatically changed Holmes:

We sat in silence for some time after the unhappy woman had told her story. Then Holmes stretched out his long arm and patted her hand with such a show of sympathy as I had seldom known him to exhibit.

"Poor girl!" he said. "Poor girl! The ways of fate are indeed hard to understand. If there is not some compensation hereafter, then the world is a cruel jest." (2:703)

Contrast this reaction with his reaction to the woman in "A Case of Identity," who has been forever emotionally scarred by her stepfather disguising himself as a suitor and faking his own disappearance. In the early story, Holmes reacts angrily to the stepfather, but he immediately laughs at the man and assumes everything will be all right with the

client. This reaction to another scarred woman is far different. He not only tries to give her psychological and physical comfort, but he sincerely invokes a higher power and afterlife. While one could point to Conan Doyle's increased interest in Spiritualism in the twentieth century as an explanation of Holmes's invocation of an afterlife, the context implies something more integral to Holmes's character change. He has internalized the responsibility that Conan Doyle saw as the necessary balance for decadence.

Holmes does not stop there in his duties to the veiled lodger. When he rightfully suspects the woman of suicidal tendencies, he tries to dissuade her:

“Your life is not your own,” he said. “Keep your hands off it.”

“What use is it to anyone?”

“How can you tell? The example of a patient suffering is in itself the most precious of all lessons to an impatient world.”

The woman's answer was a terrible one. She raised her veil and stepped forward into the light.

“I wonder if you would bear it,” she said.

It was horrible. No words can describe the framework of a face when the face itself is gone. Two living and beautiful eyes looking sadly out from that grisly ruin did but make the view more awful. Holmes held up his hand in a gesture of pity and protest, and together we left the room.

(2:704)

Holmes's reactions in this passage are complex. On the one hand, he shows he has internalized Watson's lessons about social responsibility by trying to convince her to not endanger (or take) her own life with a chemical substance, mirroring Watson's

exhortations about cocaine. He cites her responsibility to society, her usefulness, even just as an example of “patient suffering” to “an impatient world.” This Holmes is again far from the man who paced his own quarters, taking cocaine because his mind “rebels at stagnation” (*Sign of Four* 1:124). On the other hand, when he sees her face, he loses his assurance. His gesture is of “pity and protest,” and he does not respond in any other way. While telling her not to commit suicide because she has a duty to society, he is trying to order the world and its people according to his own view, trying to use the details to construct a new whole. However, he is confronted with a whole of no details, a face with no face. That moment keeps the scene from straying into a simple parable of Victorian morality. Though the woman eventually sends Holmes the acid, signifying that she’s decided to not take her life, Conan Doyle still does not leave us with easy answers or uncomplicated assurance. Part of what differentiates Conan Doyle’s responsible decadence from simple Victorian paternal morality is the intense self-consciousness that defines decadence.

Yet this is not a case of simply Watson making Holmes better, or even Holmes making Watson better. We rarely see, in the stories, one without the other because Conan Doyle creates their relationship as a balance: Holmes and Watson together is the eminent responsible decadent. Holmes, for the most part, supplies the decadence, and Watson usually supplies the focus on social responsibility and personal relationships. Through the two working together, Conan Doyle is able to provide a cosmopolitan alternative to the dying values of the Victorian Age: old hierarchies, systems, professionalism, and even individualisms make way for new, all the while preserving what Conan Doyle considers the best of British identity: chivalry and responsibility. In the next chapter, I will explore

how Conan Doyle applies formed identity construction to texts that explore how Britain relates to the rest of the world.

Chapter 4: Knights of the Empire and the Cricket Ball: Conan Doyle's Chivalric Cosmopolitanism

While Sir Arthur Conan Doyle is best known for his Sherlock Holmes stories, he felt his most important literary work lay in historical romances: medieval tales of war and chivalry inspired by Sir Walter Scott's novels. He reflects on his choice of literary genres in his autobiography *Memories and Adventures* (1924): "I now determined to test my powers to the full, and I chose a historical novel for this end, because it seemed to me the one way of combining a certain amount of literary dignity with those scenes of action and adventure which were natural to my young and ardent mind" (70). The historical romance was his ticket to literary prestige; he was not writing for entertainment, but for posterity.

These historical romances certainly achieved popularity. For the most part critically ignored throughout the twentieth century in favor of his more famous Sherlock Holmes stories, Conan Doyle's historical romances outsold his Sherlock Holmes collections in book sales during his lifetime, with *The White Company* (1891) going through fifty editions before 1914 (Kerr, *Conan Doyle* 13). The fact that his historical romances have not fared well either popularly or critically in the twentieth century says more about how the genre is perceived now than how it was perceived at the time. Historical romances were as important to the Victorians as they were to Conan Doyle. They were essentially nostalgic myths about the formation of England as a nation, thus serving as ways to explore and establish England's identity during a time of increasing globalization. However, in the twentieth century, the genre shifted from being nostalgic to being old-fashioned, a fusty relic of the Victorian period. This shift in popularity reflects a core difference in how the two genres are perceived: while detective fiction

seems to reflect an expansive world of innovation,¹⁴ historical romances seem to reflect an insulated world, stuck in the past and in the “traditional” values quickly going out of fashion. In other words, if detective fiction is now seen as progressive, historical romances are seen as regressive.

The shift between detective stories and historical romances can also be articulated as a shift in England’s self-image and its place in the world. While in detective stories the detective is a cosmopolitan figure, tying English identity with professionalism and diplomacy, historical romances are much more tied to British imperialism, with the knights serving as idealized forms of the British colonial soldier, relating to the rest of the world through combat and military conquest. In fact, historical romances can be seen as an imperial origin story, justifying Britain’s right to rule with idyllic tales of a heroic past.

It makes sense, then, that Conan Doyle would be drawn to the historical romance. Conan Doyle has been described as an “ardent imperialist” (Wilson 24), writing for a late Victorian public who, while they did not look too deeply into the actual mechanics of imperialism, embraced it as a patriotic ideal: “the British retain[ed] a world view embracing unique imperial status, cultural and racial superiority, and a common ground of national conceit on which most could agree” (Mackenzie 9). Conan Doyle, in many ways, did agree with this national conceit. He is rather unquestioning in his belief that white men, or, more specifically, Anglo-Saxons, are the most fitted to leadership, and he seemed to genuinely accept the popular view that spreading British culture and values to colonies was both a boon to them and of benefit to Britain herself. He frequently

¹⁴ The detective story, and the related spy story genre, reflected a heightened scope of internationalism in the twentieth century, especially in the advent of the World Wars.

expressed an ardent (if sometimes patronizing) admiration of other cultures, and reflected that Britain would do well to learn from them even as they were guided and improved by association with Britain.

However, it would be a mistake to then label Conan Doyle as a writer who uncomplicatedly supported oppressive direct control of contemporary modes of British imperialism. Since the late twentieth century, or post Said's *Orientalism*, less categorical views of the role of literature in relation to empire have emerged. Cosmopolitan theorists such as Lauren Goodlad have clarified the rhetoric of British international politics during the nineteenth and early twentieth century. Lauren Goodlad says, "The limit of such Victorianist scholarship [i.e., many current critical explorations of cosmopolitanism] is not, therefore, its political blind spots but its finite expectations. Writing from a postcolonial vantage that recognizes the pervasiveness of Eurocentrism, Anglocentricism, and racism, literary historians of nineteenth-century cosmopolitan ideals are bound to predict the flummoxing of the ethical aspirations they describe" (438). And, yes, if we try to pigeonhole Conan Doyle into a simplistic view of imperialism, many of his writings are flummoxing. He is imperial while being highly critical of imperial practices, he values masculinity while showing its dangers, and he writes giddily about war while being fully aware of the physical and emotional costs of war on soldiers. Rather than try to reconcile these contradictions, this chapter will explore Conan Doyle as an example of the British *fin de siècle* worldview; he feared a crumbling, degenerate Empire and, wishing to preserve it for the sake of Britain and its colonies, reconstructs Britishness with what I call "chivalric cosmopolitanism."

In order to demonstrate Conan Doyle's cosmopolitan project, I will discuss his two favorite genres: his historical romances and his non-fictional accounts of contemporary war (or his war writings). Conan Doyle's historical romances—in particular *The White Company* and its sequel/prequel *Sir Nigel* (1906)—have much in common with his war writing—particularly his two works about the Second Boer War, *The Great Boer War* (1900) and *The War in South Africa: Its Cause and Conduct* (1902). Both genres characterize the war with terms that bear a striking similarity to the chivalry of his historical romances: the soldiers become knights, and the battlefield becomes a field of honor where men test their mettle against each other. As I've mentioned, historical romances are imperial origin stories, whereas the war writings deal with present British military action within a particular imperial struggle. Both also seem to represent Britain's imperial identity and actions with glowing optimism: the historical romances are idealized through nostalgia to a certain extent, and his war writings are self-consciously propagandistic, with Conan Doyle attempting to defend British imperial action. However, Conan Doyle is not blindly idealistic. Complete idealistic militarism is at odds with many of his experiences and writings. As mentioned in previous chapters, one of his most famous fictional creations, Dr. Watson, receives only sickness and injuries from his military service. The Holmes stories are littered with wash-outs from imperial wars, and Conan Doyle himself battled enteric fever, both as doctor and patient, in the Second Boer War. His knights and soldiers fight honorably in exciting battles, but war itself he represents as an imperfect means of chivalry and masculine camaraderie. Conan Doyle defends the “causes and conduct” of the Second Boer War, or the reasons the British entered the war and the conduct of British soldiers during the war, yet he does

not entirely shy away from the grim realities of the war, and even strongly criticizes British military practices during the war. Even as Conan Doyle portrays war as patriotic and chivalrous combat, he pushes for military realism.

So, even through these genres designed to justify British imperial action, Conan Doyle questions the status quo of British imperialism. This seeming contradiction is only a contradiction in that we tend to see imperialism as an evil, whereas Conan Doyle continually explores it as a system that can be recuperated. He knows that direct, violent British control over the world is unsustainable and undesirable, as it harms the colonies (or those he believes imperialism is designed to help) and colonials (or those he believes should achieve greater manhood in their service). This recuperation of direct imperialism takes on a more cosmopolitan aspect, as Conan Doyle tries to redefine British global identity and relationships. Conan Doyle's concept of British global identity is distinct from Charles Dilke's worldview in *Greater Britain* (1869), in which he describes the "grandeur of our [Anglo-Saxon] race, already girdling the earth, which it is destined, perhaps, eventually to overspread" (vii). Dilke's *Greater Britain* assumes an inherent superiority of Anglo-Saxons, which shows itself in racial and commercial superiority. Conan Doyle's "chivalric cosmopolitanism" is indebted to the concept of a *Greater Britain*, yet he transforms that concept in his reworking of British global identity into a less race-based, more Commonwealth-oriented cosmopolitanism, one that is more grounded in "culture:" behavior, literature, athletics, etc. Conan Doyle uses the Middle Ages as a way to articulate his idealized worldview, preserving concepts of benevolent feudalism and masculine chivalry while trying to shed the abuses of power and the link between chivalry and war found in his contemporary war writings. Through historical

romances, war writings, and newspaper letters he envisions cosmopolitical unity with an Anglo-Saxon-headed commonwealth, in which all races are interconnected within a political and social union. As Conan Doyle increasingly sees war as problematic and a sort of necessary evil, he resorts more and more to athletics, particularly the Olympics, as a hopeful and productive means of masculine identity and cosmopolitical bonds.

The Middle Ages in the Victorian Era

In Conan Doyle's historical romances, his knights form the Victorian model of masculinity, as well as form the Britain that is "worthy" of heading the world's largest empire. Conan Doyle is tapping into myths of British identity during the turbulent *fin de siècle*, and particularly medieval chivalry as a working myth, as well as rewriting those myths. Of course, Conan Doyle is not alone in using the Middle Ages as a way to build British identity. The Victorian Era was steeped in representations of the Middle Ages; from historical romances, to theater, to paintings, to the study of heraldry, to the language of war and sport, it seems Victorians couldn't get enough of medievalism. These medieval representations were highly mythologized: "most Victorians drew their impressions of the Middle Ages from Sir Walter Scott's novels rather than from any historical medieval text [resulting in] an authentic fantasy" (Holloway and Palmgren 1). According to Holloway and Palmgren in their introduction to *Beyond Arthurian Romances* (2005), the "Victorians often looked to the Middle Ages to find resources for faith, patriotism, or leisure. Many used the Middle Ages as an anchor in a time of stormy upheaval. Yet the anchor moved, changed shape, and/or altered its material properties, depending on who needed it at any given moment" (1-2). And, indeed, a wide variety of

people used the Middle Ages for their own purposes: “For every secular feudalist like Carlyle, there was a fervent religious counter-feudalist like Kenneth Digby. For every Cardinal Newman who was looking for the embrace of a collective society through common values and faith, there was a John Stuart Mill focusing on the Middle Ages as a time that promoted individuality. For every Ruskin or Rossetti who used medievalism to promote high art and artisanship, there were five or ten Daniel Terrys who used it to sell theater tickets, songs, or soap” (Holloway and Palmgren 2). The Middle Ages became a language by which Victorians represented and reified a set of values. These values included duty (the code of chivalry), gender roles (knights and ladies), and a hierarchical social structure (feudalism). Likewise, the Victorian obsession with the Middle Ages seems to be tied to nostalgia, taking comfort in the more traditional past in a rapidly changing world.

Of course, we must question this idea of nostalgia. The Victorian concept of the Middle Ages comes from Arthurian legends (as reproduced by contemporary writers and artists) and Sir Walter Scott novels, not from actual historical knowledge, so this “nostalgia” is actually their own values reproduced. Holloway and Palmgren address the problem of nostalgia by referring to the Victorian medieval nostalgia as “a collective memory of their own making” (3). Nostalgia does not rely on historicity or even lived events, but on an idealized past: the myth of a golden age, where men were men, women were women, and everyone knew their place. Idealization then leads to controlling social narratives. Though we cannot simplistically say that medievalism was used as a way to control gender and class definitions, we can see medieval concepts (or at least the Victorian myths thereof) as playing a large role in shaping definitions of gender (through

chivalry) and social class (through feudalism). Mark Girouard's *The Return to Camelot: Chivalry and the English Gentleman* (1981) particularly traces how chivalry and feudalism—not the same but clearly related (Girouard 16)—gave a language for masculinity within a British Empire. As Girouard points out, it would take a book to define chivalry, but for the purposes of this argument I will confine myself to chivalry as it relates to Victorian masculine behavior—courage and sportsmanship, self-restraint and discipline, and duty to country.

This duty to country is particularly important in an era where the concept of nationhood was being reinterpreted (as discussed in chapter 1). Britain in particular was defining itself as a self-consciously modern and civilized nation, while also incorporating colonies within a commonwealth. The British imperial identity is therefore complicated. As Patrick Brantlinger points out, imperialism became an ideology partially based on a “[military] chauvinism based on loyalty to the existing Empire, both to the ruling nation and to its colonies” (8). This ideology mirrors the Victorian construction of the Middle Ages, with the Empire becoming feudal system on a large scale: the soldiers are knights enforcing rules over the serf colonies. All the while, myths of loyalty and chivalry hide the abuses within and problematic nature of the system.

Granted, we should be cautious in oversimplifying Victorian attitudes toward imperialism. As Girouard points out, “Imperialists, however much the ideals of chivalry lay at the back of their thinking, were not often compared to knights, or even described as chivalrous. One reason for this was the size, complexity and power of the Empire; the language of chivalry is easiest applied to simple situations, and the Empire was not simple” (227). And certainly people were aware that Empire was not simple, what with

colonial rebellions and imperial wars, highly publicized imperial abuses (Congo), and fears of degeneration. However, their awareness of the realities of Empire does not necessarily discount romance. Laurence Kitzan (2001) points out the ambiguities and contradictions of Victorian attitudes toward empire. In discussing gazetteers, which both recorded colonial property, “a basic celebration of the profit motive by a commercial people” (2), and the “dream,” Kitzan allows that Victorian imperialists were not, as many later critics supposed, “great hypocrite[s], spouting pious aphorisms of mission, and at the same time pulling in [their] profits” (2). The “dream,” as he calls it, was “a glorious concoction [...], an evocation of land and sea that promised fulfillment for an ancient race, a master race that kindly and firmly guided so many peoples in the world” (1-2). These two views, the practical and the dream, exist side by side, and there is “little indication that [Victorians] seriously confused the dream and the reality in empire, except insofar as [they] tended to believe that the dream had more substance than it actually did” (2). This dream, or the ideological force behind imperialism, often used the language of medievalism, or at least the “knightly” male virtues of bravery and chivalry. Conan Doyle’s work is based on this idealism; however, he doesn’t use the “dream” to enforce British imperial practices, but to question them.

Because of this contradiction—awareness of realities but belief in the dream—the Victorians, including Conan Doyle, cannot be seen as uncomplicatedly complacent in their attitudes toward imperialism. Conan Doyle, completely aware of the brokenness of the system, still pushes for the dream. The ideals of imperialism thus become impetus for a transformation of imperialism, and nostalgia paradoxically becomes a driving force for transforming imperialism into a more sustainable system. This calls for a transformation

of the relationship Britain has with the colonies, and the metaphor of feudalism becomes modernized: the soldiers change from knights to diplomats, and the colonies change from serfs to allies. Conan Doyle shows this transformation in his historical romances, particularly through the characterization of his knights and his portrayal of social justice.

Alleyn and Nigel as Anachronistic Knights

Kitzan calls Conan Doyle's novel *The White Company* an "imperial tale of the fourteenth century" (39). This self-consciously contradictory way of describing *The White Company* is nonetheless appropriate. As I've discussed above, historical romances are less about exploring accurate history and more about defining British identity, and the British identity of the late nineteenth century was overwhelmingly imperial. The novels serve as a British imperial origin story, establishing a national character before the inclusion of colonies, using late Victorian definitions of nationhood. Conan Doyle points out the imperial nature of his novel in a rather odd scene that departs from military conquest and hints at Conan Doyle's interest in spiritualism. A French lady with psychic powers, in a sort of séance, tells Sir Nigel of the fate of his country:

Whence come they, these peoples, these lordly nations, these mighty countries which rise up before me? I look beyond, and others rise, and yet others, far and further to the shores of the uttermost waters. They crowd! They swarm! the world is given to them, and it resounds with the clang of their hammers and the ringing of their church-bells. They call them many names, and they rule them this way or that, but they are all English, for I can hear the voices of the people. On I go, and onwards over seas where

man hath never yet sailed, and I see a great land under new stars and a stranger sky, and still the land is England. Where have her children not gone? What have they not done? Her banner is planted on ice. Her banner is scorched in the sun. She lies athwart the lands, and her shadow is over the seas. (334-35)

Conan Doyle has thus far in the novel balanced romance and realism (with his extensive historical research), so this abrupt foray into prophesy is odd enough to draw attention. The language is familiar enough: she is describing “the empire on which the sun never sets.” Kenneth Wilson (1993) points out that “for the reader, this would reaffirm the belief that the empire is Britain’s destiny. Moreover, the novel’s action is placed in the context of ‘the whole course’ of British history, which culminates in the contemporary empire” (26). And, certainly, this is a dramatic description of the British Empire.

However, the imagery is not altogether positive or benevolent, as one would expect from a text trying to establish British imperial destiny. The English “crowd” and “swarm,” and the Empire lies “athwart the lands, and her shadow is over the seas.” While the passage certainly iterates the greatness of the Empire, it also paints the Empire in negative terms, as an infestation or a shadow. In fact, the colonies (or the “great land under new stars and a stranger sky,” possibly referencing India or Australia) are “England,” rather than their own identities. This terrifying portrayal of Empire might come from the fact that it is a French lady seeing another country’s imperial progress, and it is certainly significant that this portrayal of British imperialism comes from one outside British identity. The spiritually aware French lady is more able to cast a critical eye on the accepted British identity. The representatives of the British leaders and soldiers in the novel, Sir Nigel and

his squire Alleyne, are present to hear this description, and this “crowding” and “swarming” is certainly in stark contrast with their lives of manly individualism and chivalry.

Why is this prophecy of Empire so horrific, especially within an “imperial tale of the fourteenth century?” Even though Conan Doyle is writing a romance, he points out, as with much of his writing, the conflict between romance and realism, between the ideal world and what the world actually is. *The White Company* and its later prequel, *Sir Nigel*, are romances that are steeped in Conan Doyle’s historical research. Amid the adventures, Conan Doyle spends long passages trying to capture the culture of fourteenth-century England, from the role of the church, to the heraldry of knights, to the construct of the military, to the daily lives of peasants. Particularly jarring in Conan Doyle’s romances is his descriptions of injustice: where chivalry fails, or where chivalry has no place in his mythic British past. Kenneth Wilson addresses the social injustice in *The White Company* and *Sir Nigel*, yet he differentiates between the state of the French peasants and those of the British: “Unlike the free English yeomanry, the French peasants ‘are so crushed down’ [...]. This myth does recognize that some injustice did exist in England, but it is precisely because the injustice is located in the past that the myth, a modern construction, can be reaffirmed” (26). He particularly points to the injustices of the Catholic Church “would reinforce an English Protestant reader’s belief that the Reformation removed such Papist injustice from England” (26). For Wilson, Conan Doyle constructs a “myth of a democratic British past” (26), yet this statement does not take into account several factors in the novel, particularly from the early chapters of *The White Company*. The knights,

soldiers, and bowmen hold a certain amount of freedom, but the English peasants' lives are portrayed as rather accurately grim.

In the early scenes of *The White Company*, monastery-raised Alleyne Edricson encounters the world for the first time in a series of adventures that begin as comic (a monastery refugee steals a man's clothes, Alleyne stumbles his way through his first conversation with a woman), but the adventures quickly turn more serious. After meeting several impoverished and dangerous travelers, Alleyne reaches the conclusion "that in this country of England there was no protection for a man save that which lay in the strength of his own arm and the speed of his own foot. In the cloisters he had heard vague talk of the law—the mighty law which was higher than prelate or baron, yet no sign could he see of it" (39). Directly after, Alleyne does experience the workings of justice: two "masterless men" are executed by a bailiff without trial, prompting Alleyne to think, "It was a terrible world [...] and it was hard to know which were the most to be dreaded, the knaves or the men of the law" (36). This scene seems at first a way to shed Alleyne of his innocence, but it also shows him a world of complete injustice, in which the people in power take advantage of the disenfranchised. The author who created the most famous literary detective and championed the wrongfully-accused George Edalji and Oscar Slater would not necessarily consider social injustice to be a thing of England's past. While he certainly points out that there is a myth of a democratic Britain, as Alleyne thinks about "vague talk of the law—the mighty law which was higher than prelate or baron, yet no sign could he see of it" (29). This is, in fact, a world that will initiate Alleyne into his future role as knight: protector of people rather than removed in a monastery.

The above scene bears a striking resemblance to the description of the plight of the French peasants, living under the rule of Sir Tristram de Rochefort, whose wife gave the prophecy of British Empire. The peasants live in abject poverty, while Sir Tristram lives in “rude plenty” (325). The surrounding country is “grim and desolate” and the peasants are “strange lean figures scraping and scratching amid the weeds and thistles, who, on sight of the band of horsemen, threw up their arms and dived in among the brushwood, as shy and as swift as wild animals” (313). This poverty is explained by the fact that they’ve had to ransom their lord, Sir Tristram, from enemy hands several times. Again, Conan Doyle grimly points out the horrors of a world steeped in injustice and, more importantly, a lack of chivalry. Sir Tristram is literally starving his peasants by acting the knight (going off to wars, etc.), but he does not do his chivalric duty: rather than protecting and making sacrifices for his followers, he forces them to make the sacrifices while he reaps the benefits of his social position. Of course, it’s always possible that Conan Doyle is indulging in a few French stereotypes, the Frenchman appreciating style over substance, and certainly the revolting peasants evoke images of the French Revolution. And, of course, Sir Nigel is right there in order to show more correct forms of British chivalry.

Yet Sir Nigel and Alleyne have problems holding to chivalry in a world that doesn’t support it. Jaqueline Jaffe (1987) describes Conan Doyle as “at heart, first and foremost, a royalist, while his sense of fair play and decency made of him, in theory, a democrat,” and in his writing he “finds himself floundering in situations where his loyalties are opposed” (62) in these scenes of social class strife. And, yes, Conan Doyle does seem to sympathetically describe the plight of the French peasants only to throw

them to the wolves. As Sir Nigel and Alleyne take refuge in Sir Tristram's castle, the peasants attack. The knights joyfully fight them off, Sir Nigel even lamenting the peasants aren't of aristocratic blood and thus cannot afford him honor in combat. Sympathy for the suffering peasants seem lost in the action scenes, and even Sir Tristram gets some moments of chivalry while protecting his wife, but that does not necessarily mean Conan Doyle is uncomplicatedly on the side of the knights. Conan Doyle is making a self-conscious contradiction. In a place where chivalry has failed, even our English heroes have little choice but to take on a sort of false chivalry. They engage in battle and protect a lady, but do so at the cost of the people they are supposed to protect. Sir Nigel points out that honor is impossible in this combat. In fact, the knights must abandon chivalry in favor of more realistic combat. The ideal has failed, and Conan Doyle actually shows the realities of fourteenth-century life: a society in which the lower stratum of society is used by the higher stratum. As we can see with the conflict between the peasants and the knights, Conan Doyle is concurrently idealistic and realistic. He sees the abuses of fourteenth-century feudalism, just as he sees the abuses of the "feudal" British Empire. He treats war as a necessary means of manliness and Empire, but he also shows the problems with it. His historical romances and his war writings are very similar in their idealism and their realism. In his war writings, he is at once trying to portray correct chivalry in war while also showing the flawed nature.

Conan Doyle's two protagonists, Alleyne and Sir Nigel, are primary examples of this struggle between the romantic and the realistic. While these two are certainly heroes, it would be a mistake to conflate them with Conan Doyle's own political views. Rather, I would like to see these two as points of negotiation, where Conan Doyle is trying to craft

representative British soldiers and show the problems and possibilities that along with that role.

The White Company features Alleyne Edricson, a young man raised by monks and only prevented from becoming a monk himself by his dead father's injunction that he should experience the world outside of the monastery. After some wandering while encountering social injustice, Alleyne fairly quickly drops his self-effacing and pacifist behavior for a soldier's life. In short, he fights people who attack the innocent and becomes a squire for Sir Nigel, he falls in love and swears to win a maiden through knightly conquest (Sir Nigel's daughter, in fact), and he generally becomes less and less like the monks who raised him, to the point that he saves his love from entering a convent herself. Kenneth Wilson rightly points out, "Individual heroism—which is part of both the discourses of manliness and of imperial history—is central to Doyle's adventure stories" (26). Heroism and manliness are central to especially Alleyne's journey, as he begins in the rather feminized and disempowered setting of a monastery. His physical description embodies Conan Doyle's exploration of manliness:

Although Alleyne is artistic and educated, sympathetic and adaptive, he is certainly not a public school "muff"; he is manly, but not so much that his readers would be unable to identify with him. Alleyne lives, moreover, by the code of chivalry almost instinctively: when insulted by another squire in Bordeaux, shortly after his arrival in France, his "gentle nature" turns into "fiery resolution" (225), and he is willing to fight to the death in order to get an apology. He is a model middle-class late-Victorian gentleman. (Wilson 27)

Wilson goes on to relate Alleyne's development into manliness to his "adventures in battle," and that "the process of becoming a man is defined in terms of becoming a hero through fighting and experience in war" (27). And, certainly, war is part of Conan Doyle's construction of manliness. The final battle in Bordeaux serves as Alleyne's ultimate test of character. However, Alleyne does rather little fighting compared to the other knights. After some rather hastily described fighting in which Alleyne is involved in the final battle, Alleyne's true heroic moment involves scaling a cliff to take a message to the prince and bring reinforcements. Alleyne is not concerned with achieving personal glory, or even a ransom that would make his fortune, but with serving his whole company. The innate chivalry that Wilson describes serves him best when he's performing non-violent heroic deeds, not fighting.

Jacqueline Jaffe traces Alleyne's heroic journey as one of not only self-discovery, but of developing a broader view of the world: "Unlike the heroes of many romances, however, Alleyne does not have to learn self-restraint; his path of duty is not one of self-control but one of self-expansion so that, while still remaining a Christian, he can experience life in all its complexity" (60). Alleyne at the end of the novel is far from the pale, timid, and limited young man at the beginning, controlled by the monks of Beaulieu (who bear striking similarities to the Jesuits Conan Doyle encountered at boarding school). Jaffe goes on to relate Alleyne's new way of life to "muscular Christianity." Certainly, Conan Doyle's ideas of young sporting male activity has much in common with muscular Christianity, but this angle has uncomfortable ties to a religion Conan Doyle actively resisted: he was disowned by his richer relatives for breaking with Catholicism, never espoused Protestantism, and was already developing Spiritualist

beliefs. Given Conan Doyle's own religious background, and given his experience with the divisive nature of religious organizations, he could be attempting to situate British global identity away from Protestantism, a departure from England's tendency to use Protestantism as a way to distinguish themselves as separate and above European Catholicism. The characters of *The White Company* certainly walk within a religious worldview, with Sir Nigel's frequent oath of "by St. Paul" and Alleyne's mental struggle between monastery teaching and the reality of the world, but religion has very little to do with their actual journey. Perhaps the English bowman, Samkin Ayelward, has a more appropriate oath in "by these ten fingerbones." The true religion, and the true motivation for action, of the characters is chivalry and action: "*The White Company* expresses Doyle's belief that honorable behavior, the impulse to protect all those who are weak and helpless and to fight aggressively to see that justice is done, is 'an article of faith which might strengthen and sustain as powerfully as any religion'" (Jaffe 61).

And yet chivalry has its faults and abuses, even for the most devoted practitioners. While Conan Doyle seems to delight in his knightly characters, he also undercuts their brand of chivalry as impractical and outdated even in its time. He loads all of the knightly virtues to the point of caricature in the character of Sir Nigel. In *The White Company*, Sir Nigel is a seasoned and venerable knight, whose small stature contrasts with his larger-than-life personality. In the later eponymous novel, the younger Nigel Loring, again a young man beset by monks, though as an impoverished aristocrat, must regain his family's fortune and honor on the battlefield, as well as win the hand of the daughter of another knight through three heroic deeds. The structure is very similar to Alleyne's journey in *The White Company*, with a few significant changes. As stated above, Alleyne

had to learn self-expansion; Nigel must learn self-restraint. Wilson notes, “Like Alleyne Edrickson, his virtue and virility are obvious; unlike Alleyne, however, Nigel has no outstanding artistic ability or intellect for which the text must apologize. He is a horseman [...] and a hunter: a true public school ‘blood’” (28). Nigel is able to prove his manliness by besting an uncontrollable horse in a classic hero’s initiation; however, Conan Doyle continually subverts Nigel as an archetype of manliness by using Nigel’s smallness for comic effect. He is too small to fit in his father’s armor, and he spends much of his life “in the recovery from his wounds or from those illnesses which arose from privation and fatigue” (180). During one particularly comic scene, after Nigel initiates a duel in order to prove himself to the English king, he is unhorsed and his helmet is knocked off to show no head (to the horror of the other knights), only to discover Nigel fully encased in the torso of his father’s armor. Nigel makes up for his small stature with a reckless bravery, continually impatient to take on impossible tasks of combat at every opportunity, but the running gag of his smallness, as well as his proclivity of getting knocked out at every combat, is a metaphor for the flaws of militaristic masculinity. The true “public school blood,” while being manlier, is perhaps not as heroic as Alleyne. Wilson comments on the difference between Alleyne and Nigel further by pointing out the time in which Conan Doyle write *Sir Nigel*: “The unambivalent evocation of heroism [...] is doubtless a part of the intensified patriotic fervour of the period after the Boer War. Indeed, Nigel Loring’s martial character would have provided a fictional resolution to the anxiety about England’s ability to defend itself after the army’s displays of incompetence during that conflict” (28). Nigel is certainly less ambivalently manly than Alleyne in personality, but his overt militarism is comic

rather than reassuring, and his actions are not always competent. He achieves missions, but at great sacrifice of health and even usefulness. He charges into combat with reckless abandon, leaving others to fight in his stead while he recovers from his injuries.

Contemporary readers would recognize in him some of the British strategic mistakes of the Second Boer War, especially his lack of planning and unwillingness to adapt himself to different styles of fighting.

Even for the setting, Nigel seems an anachronism, or at least a pursuer of knightly chivalry that seems out of place in the medieval world of Conan Doyle's novel. There are quite a few characters who seek chivalric glory in the same way as Nigel does; however, the voices of reason, particularly Sir John Chandos and Sir Robert Knolles, behave more like turn of the century military strategists: they sacrifice personal glory for the success of the mission. When Chandos calls his scars the "follies of my youth" (63), Nigel responds, "Are they not the means by which honorable advancement may be gained and one's lady exalted?" (63). Of course, Nigel is referring to his own personal chivalric philosophy, but Chandos responds with the entire point to Conan Doyle's novel: "I also had both and fought for my lady's glove or for my vow or for the love of fighting. But as one grows older and commands men one has other things to think of. One thinks less of one's own honor and more of the safety of the army" (63). He goes on to assert the importance of military strategy rather than personal advancement.

This is a lesson that Nigel learns at his lowest point. During a siege against a castle, Nigel breaks orders and follows a French soldier in a bid to storm the castle, unwittingly leading the rest of the company in the charge to a slaughter. The French soldier convinces Nigel with promises of personal advancement and exaltation of one's

lady, showing the problems with this focus of personal advancement. Nigel is, in this case, insubordinate, he forgets that he has a responsibility to his subordinates and thus leads them to their deaths, and he severely handicaps the army in his mad dash for glory. After this defeat, Nigel still pursues personal honor and advancement, but more cautiously. His next two knightly deeds, the last of which actually earns him knighthood, show that he's "think[ing] less of [his] own honor and more of the safety of the army," to use Chandos's words. He sneaks into the aforementioned castle to save the captured English bowmen—the entire reason for the siege—including his own servant. He is motivated by what Conan Doyle holds up as a truer form of chivalry: rather than doing deeds for his own name and the name of his lady, his primary concern is for his countrymen. Likewise, Nigel's final deed that turns him into Sir Nigel is one in which he has the correct focus. During the climactic battle of the novel, Nigel, following the charge of his own knight Chandos, happens to capture a wealthy-looking Frenchman, which later turns out to be the French king. Nigel has the choice to take the man prisoner and levy him for ransom, but he decides instead to follow his knight and complete the mission, thus putting his army and country first and later earning himself a knighthood. This climactic action of Nigel's is like Alleyne's in a lot of ways: while there is combat, the actual deed that gains them a knighthood is through refraining from combat. Nigel's lesson, though, is a lesson for the contemporary British military (to join Conan Doyle's many letters and pamphlets that suggested military improvements): war is not an opportunity for personal glory or achievement, but for strategic action and accomplishing the mission. As such, the novel *Sir Nigel* can be seen as Conan Doyle's exploration of the

balance between manliness (with its expectations of violent action and personal advancement) and chivalry (with its expectations of self-sacrifice and kindness).

Chivalry and the Realities of War

In 1900, Conan Doyle, wanting to put into practice his beliefs about military chivalry, volunteered for combat in the Second Boer War. Denied a combat post, Conan Doyle accepted a medical post and served in a field hospital during an outbreak of enteric fever. His service during the Second Boer War did not stop, however, with his four months at the Langman Field Hospital. He also wrote propaganda: *The Great Boer War* (1900) and a pamphlet called “The War in South Africa: Its Cause and Conduct” (1902). The book was based on the “copious notes on everything that he saw, heard, or had reported to him” during his service in South Africa, but it was really when he “saw the full extent of the national and international criticism being leveled at the British government” (Jaffe 115) that he decided to write a pamphlet in defense of Britain’s actions, both their involvement in the war and their actions during it. As a work that sets out to defend Britain against bad press, this work is necessarily propagandistic; however, unlike the propaganda that achieves its goals by demonizing the enemy, Conan Doyle’s concerns seem to be to put the war into an idealized perspective, as well as to point out and criticize the divergences from chivalry and military competence. If his historical romances are explorations of chivalry as a way to balance romance and realism in the construction of a worldview, his war writings are explorations of how to put this balance into practice. The contemporary British soldier must still be a knight in how he conducts

himself and treats others, but he must also acknowledge the reality of modern warfare and adapt to it.

In his defense of Britain's reasons for entering the war, Conan Doyle had to combat several highly justified critiques, some coming from his own mother. Conan Doyle's mother advised him not to involve himself in a war in which "a beleaguered David poised to fight off the Goliath of the British Empire" (Jaffe 114). One of the major criticisms of the war, one also voiced by Conan Doyle's mother, was that the war was simply an attempt to wrest control of the gold mines away from the Boers. In other words, the British Empire was being criticized for being unethically imperial: taking a territory away from its "rightful" owners, which happened to be white colonists, ones over whom Britain could not so easily claim racial superiority. While the British Empire was used to justifying imperial control over India, Africa, South America, etc., by infantilizing and dehumanizing the non-White native populations, the same justifications just couldn't be made about the Dutch settlers of South Africa. Conan Doyle handles the problems of the gold and the white enemies with convincing yet contradictory language. In an early chapter of the pamphlet, Doyle justifies British actions in the lead-up to the war:

That these Uitlanders had very real and pressing grievances no one could possibly deny. To recount them all would be a formidable task, for their whole lives were darkened by injustice. There was not a wrong which had driven the Boer from Cape Colony which he did not now practise himself upon others—and a wrong may be excusable in 1835 which is monstrous in 1895. [...] Officials and imported Hollanders handled the stream of

gold which came in from the mines, while the unfortunate Uitlander who paid nine-tenths of the taxation was fleeced at every turn, and met with laughter and taunts when he endeavoured to win the franchise by which he might peaceably set right the wrongs from which he suffered. He was not an unreasonable person. On the contrary, he was patient to the verge of meekness, as capital is likely to be when it is surrounded by rifles. But his situation was intolerable, and after successive attempts at peaceful agitation, and numerous humble petitions to the Volksraad, he began at last to realise that he would never obtain redress unless he could find some way of winning it for himself. (ch. 2)

This long passage highlights how Conan Doyle largely simplifies the causes of the war into a defense of disenfranchised British citizens, not altogether succeeding in distracting from the fact that this dispute is between two European groups over control of African wealth. While Conan Doyle acknowledges gold's centrality to the conflict, he shifts the focus to descriptions of violated rights and the chivalric responsibility of maintaining honor. The Boer War becomes a duel between men, in Conan Doyle's description. At the same time, Conan Doyle rationalizes past British behavior: the wrongs practiced by the British in 1885 are excusable, the wrongs practiced by the Boers in 1895 are monstrous. Conan Doyle further rationalizes and even denies stories of British present behavior: "Many of the accusations of widespread looting, brutality, and starvation in the women and children's camps were true, as was the charge that the British had used the soft-nosed 'dum-dum' bullets. Doyle, in a nationalistic fervor of indignation, refused to believe in these 'stories,' as he termed them" (Jaffe 115). In his wish to create an iron-clad

justification for the British involvement in the Second Boer War, and by proxy a justification of British imperial control, Conan Doyle glosses over or even refuses to acknowledge Britain's own culpability and abuses.

However, Conan Doyle's sole purpose is not to defend the British, though that is a primary purpose. His purpose is to explore ideal conduct for men in war, and thus, for the British and their place in the world. So Conan Doyle addresses not only British military conduct against other soldiers, but against Boer civilians, particularly women and children. One of the major criticisms against the British in the Boer War was their confining Boer women and children to concentration camps. Even though the name "concentration camp" had not gained the post-WWII connotations, they were still highly criticized for dehumanizing their inmates and for being under-supplied centers of disease and starvation. Conan Doyle does not necessarily deny any of these allegations; he claims 1) that they are unavoidable, as they protect women and children from combat, as well as British soldiers from potential civilian guerrilla attacks, and 2) that the problems of disease and lack of supplies are widespread problems for South Africa, not confined to concentration camps or purposefully inflicted on the inmates. He then goes on to defend the British treatment of the women in these concentration camps with quotes from both camp administrators and inmates, who cite the fair treatment of the prisoners. Rather than just a defense of British action, though, this scene becomes an exploration of the practice of chivalry in a bad situation. The British must care for the wives and children of their enemies for the protection of everyone involved, but the grim reality is that, however well the women are cared for, disease still exists, there's not enough food and water for anyone, and the women must be kept prisoner. As a field hospital medic who battled

enteric fever, both as a doctor and as a patient, Conan Doyle is too highly acquainted with the realities of war to ignore them.

Even through his unwillingness to believe outright abuses on the part of the British, he explores the problems with holding to chivalry in war, just as he shows the problems of unrestrained military combat in *Sir Nigel*. This conflict between the ideal and the real is best summed up on Conan Doyle's preface to his pamphlet: "There was never a war in history in which the right was absolutely on one side, or in which no incidents of the campaign were open to criticism. I do not pretend that it was so here. But I do not think that any unprejudiced man can read the facts without acknowledging that the British Government has done its best to avoid war, and the British Army to wage it with humanity" (preface). The key words here are "done its best." Conan Doyle cannot absolutely say that the war is perfect, but through its imperfections he tries to represent a conduct in war that would best combat these problems (through military strategy) and minimize the damage (through chivalric treatment of fellow soldiers and enemy civilians). Whether or not what he's saying is entirely (or at all) true, the rhetoric of identity construction is at the heart of propaganda, and Conan Doyle spends more time trying to construct a workable identity for the British in globalized politics than trying to justify what is actually going on.

One striking feature of Conan Doyle's propaganda is that, even as he condemns the Boers in several ways for their brutality and even backwardness, he valorizes them for their military effectiveness and chivalry (the very qualities he wishes the British Empire to embody), particularly for their superior tactics and humane treatment of prisoners:

There is a fellowship of brave men which rises above the feuds of nations, and may at last go far, we hope, to heal them. From every rock there rose a Boer—strange, grotesque figures many of them—walnut-brown and shaggy-bearded, and swarmed on to the hill. No term of triumph or reproach came from their lips. ‘You will not say now that the young Boer cannot shoot,’ was the harshest word which the least restrained of them made use of. [...] Captain Rice, of the Fusiliers, was carried wounded down the hill on the back of one giant, and he has narrated how the man refused the gold piece which was offered him. Some asked the soldiers for their embroidered waist-belts as souvenirs of the day. They will for generations remain as the most precious ornaments of some colonial farmhouse. Then the victors gathered together and sang psalms, not jubilant but sad and quavering. (*The Boer War*, ch. 7)

His description of the Boers soldiers is definitively marked with racial Othering. The Boers are “strange, grotesque figures,” “walnut-brown and shaggy-bearded” who “swarm” (much as the British Empire “swarms” in the prophecy from *The White Company*). Brown rather than white, “shaggy” rather than the clean-cut Tommy, the Boers come off as almost bestial. However, Conan Doyle’s Othering comes in rather striking contrast with their behavior; in fact, he seems to indulge in stereotypes in order to overturn them in the next sentence. Even as he marks their strange appearance, their behavior is impeccable. They help enemy soldiers, with only mild taunts and a few requests for trophies to mark the victory, and their attitude is mournful rather than celebratory. Conan Doyle continually treats the Boer soldier just as he does the British

soldier. While he believes them to be misguided by a corrupt government, the soldiers themselves are embodiments of stoic, chivalrous knights.

It would be tempting for Conan Doyle to paint the Boers in completely negative terms: there are many opportunities to criticize them for their guerilla warfare and their use of long-distance weaponry. After all, these tactics are not knightly. Yet Conan Doyle praises the Boer soldiers. They are “worthy opponents,” and he encourages the British military to learn from Boer military tactics: to wear camouflage as a kind of guerilla tactic, and to upgrade offensive and defensive tactics to take into account a new era of long-distance combat. The cannons and long-guns bear striking resemblances to the English longbow, which Conan Doyle highly praises in both *The White Company* and *Sir Nigel*, and a rudimentary cannon even makes an appearance in *Sir Nigel*. Rather than undercutting his propaganda, though, Conan Doyle’s praise of the Boer soldier conveys his true purpose: to construct a model of manhood that does not rely on combat, but on chivalrous behavior. The combat is a necessary evil, but the true victory, as he put it in words that he would re-echo some ten years later, is the “fellowship of brave men which rises above the feuds of nations, and may at last go far, we hope, to heal them” (ch. 7).

Alliances and Sportsmanship

Conan Doyle’s engagement with imperialism, then, shows his awareness of the dangers of degeneracy, both for British men and for British global identity as a whole. Conan Doyle’s “solution to the problems of degeneration,” as Kenneth Wilson says about his historical romances, is “an imaginary vision of empire founded upon manliness and ‘sound’ character” (40). Continually, Conan Doyle gauges the “manliness and sound

character” (defined in terms of chivalry) in how the British relate to others: the chivalrous knights of his historical romances must give up personal gain in order to help those around them, and the British and Boers in the Second Boer War are chivalrous in how they relate to enemies and prisoners. Thus, how Britain relates to not only its colonies but to the rest of the world is of the highest importance to Conan Doyle. As mentioned above, Conan Doyle uses war and militarism as a way to articulate chivalry, and yet it is fraught with problems, both to Britain and to the rest of the world. To address these problems, Conan Doyle shifts his focus from militarism to athleticism: British men must become not soldiers, but athletes. At the same time, we can track a shift in his idealized structure of the world: from an Anglo-American alliance that would centralize power to English-speaking peoples, to more of a Commonwealth, in which Britain would act through all of its colonies (not as a central country that happens to own a lot of colonies). These two shifts are perhaps over-simplifications, as we’re dealing with the span of Conan Doyle’s career from the late 1890s to the 1920s, with myriad political and global changes therein. However, keeping in mind the risks of over-simplification, it is useful to discuss Conan Doyle’s shifting global and identity construction: his later views of British identity construction through athleticism and his construction of the British Empire as a commonwealth show less of an emphasis on centralized power and violence and more of an emphasis on chivalric cosmopolitanism.

On several occasions, Conan Doyle expresses a wish for an alliance between Britain and America, writing about it in letters, speaking about it in lecture tours of America, and even putting it in the mouth of his famous detective. Sherlock Holmes, when entertaining two Americans, says, “It is always a joy to meet an American, Mr.

Moulton, for I am one of those who believe that the folly of a monarch and the blundering of a minister in far-gone years will not prevent our children from being some day citizens of the same world-wide country under a flag which shall be a quartering of the Union Jack with the Stars and Stripes” (“Noble Bachelor” 1:464-65). In a letter to *The Times* in 1896, Conan Doyle addresses the tensions between Britain and America, and calls for a union between the two, which would work towards “the greatest of all ends, the consolidation of the English-speaking races” (*Letters* 49). Conan Doyle is not alone in his wish to see the “consolidation of the English-speaking races:” Stuart Anderson addresses this turn of the century movement in his book *Race and Rapprochement* (1981). He describes it, “[a]t the risk of oversimplification” as “the belief—part of the prevailing orthodoxy in Great Britain and the United States in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries—that the civilization of the English-speaking nations was superior to that of any other group of people on the planet; and that the primacy of English and American civilization was largely due to the innate racial superiority of the people who were descended from the ancient Anglo-Saxon invaders of Britain” (Anderson 11-12). The entire debate, as described by Anderson, is embroiled in fin de siècle entwining of nationalism, imperialism, and racism (18), and is a way to explain the supremacy of the British Empire and America in world politics.

This Anglo-American union, with its assumptions of racial superiority, seems to emphasize a centralization of political and cultural power, the sort of top-down direct rule with which Conan Doyle increasingly becomes uncomfortable over the years. Particularly after the Second Boer War, after Anglo-Saxonism has for the most part fallen out of fashion and he has seen his fill of war (and anticipates a coming war with

apprehension), Conan Doyle searches for ways to express British identity and global alliances in ways that are based not on violence, but on friendly competition and camaraderie. He still prizes the soldier as the height of chivalry, but increasingly he applies his chivalrous rhetoric to athletes rather than to soldiers, and he focuses on athletics as a non-violent avenue for global ties.

Douglas Kerr explores Conan Doyle's interest in sports and its relation to late Victorian constructions of masculinity and nationhood. He points out that Conan Doyle "quite self-consciously set himself the task of a nation-writing programme" ("Straight Left" 191), and that sports is important to his construction of British manhood. Conan Doyle's approach to sports is the same as his approach to chivalry in the soldier. For instance, Kerr lists Conan Doyle's "bewildering number of sports" (191), with boxing as the most important, but also lists the two sports Conan Doyle hated: horseracing, which was embroiled in gambling and crime, and game shooting, which he considered unmanly cruelty against innocent animals (191). In fact, Conan Doyle likes and dislikes sports according to their innate chivalry. Shooting is important for the realities of war (Conan Doyle ran a shooting club on his property), but game shooting is needlessly cruel. Horseracing is a spectator sport, in which all the work is done by the horse and men are unmanned by debt and chance.

Boxing, as his favorite sport, bears the closest ties to Conan Doyle's concept of ideal manly combat. In *The Croxley Master*, a young man goes through rather a similar journey to Alleyne and Nigel. Robert Montgomery is a medical student who cannot afford his final semester of medical school (the privations of the hero at the beginning), and the overly-religious doctor for which he works takes advantage of his labor and

denies him the tuition money (the monks' hold over the hero). After decking a boxing contender, Montgomery is roped into taking his place in the ring against the Croxley Master in a bout which earns him both honor and the necessary money. Conan Doyle even calls attention to the knightly nature of the boxing contender: "He felt that it was like some unromantic knight riding down to sordid lists, but there was something of chivalry in it all the same. He fought for others as well as for himself. He might fail from want of skill or strength, but deep in his sombre soul he vowed that it should never be for want of heart" (39). While Montgomery thinks of his situation as "unromantic," preparing for a lower-class boxing match, Conan Doyle certainly doesn't portray it as such. Montgomery is able to achieve the chivalric ideal that neither his knights nor the soldiers of his war writings could achieve, all while learning the same lessons of self-restraint and strategy as he's fighting the older, somewhat decadent but still skilled Croxley Master.

So athletics are an avenue to chivalrous manhood and British identity, but they are also vital in how countries relate to one another, particularly since athletics were becoming increasingly globalized. The Modern Olympics, beginning in 1896, is perhaps the best example of the conjunction of athletics, globalization, and idealism at the time: the best of each country's young men (and later women) would come together for peaceful athletic competition, mirroring the ritualized peace of the Ancient Olympics. At a time when easier and cheaper travel and communication was bringing the world closer together, and world exhibitions and fairs were becoming increasingly popular, the fact that athleticism (rather than science, religion, etc.) became an avenue for peaceful relations is quite telling. Pierre de Coubertin, the originator of the Modern Olympics, saw

athletics as the ultimate peace-maker, inciting individual self-control that would lead to self-control on a national level (Coubertin 240). Pierre de Coubertin's politics, in fact, were quite similar to Conan Doyle's: "Coubertin's vision of a better world was liberal in the sense of classic nineteenth-century liberalism (which should not be confused with its collectivist twentieth-century variant). Individual liberty was the highest good. Like other prophets of nineteenth-century liberalism, however, Coubertin was torn between a belief in individualism and the conviction that nationality is the indispensable core of individual identity. His internationalism was never cosmopolitanism" (Guttman 2). I will further refine Guttman's description of Coubertin's politics: individualism, nationalism, and cosmopolitanism are not necessarily mutually exclusive in the nineteenth century. Just as athletics could redirect and channel youthful manly energies to self-control, international athletic competition could work towards peaceful relations between those countries.

Coubertin's Olympics are closely tied not only to nineteenth-century liberalism but also to British sporting culture. The Cotswold Games in Britain, beginning in the 17th century and the first recorded British games to hold the label "Olympick," took their cues from "a good knowledge of the original Olympic games in ancient Greece" (Radford 161); however, rather than a historically-faithful recreation of the original Olympics, the Cotswold Games and other British athletic events favorite traditional British sports, being much more concerned with creating a "national identity" (Radford 163). Sports then were seen as the heart of British masculine identity, a fact that highly influenced Coubertin as he toured British public schools and was influenced by Thomas Arnold's sports-centered educational program. Coubertin's attitudes toward athleticism, individual moral character, and national identity were firmly rooted in the impressions he had of the

British: “He was as sure as [Englishmen] were that character developed in schoolboy games manifested itself in firm British rule over ‘an empire upon which the sun never set’” (Guttmann 9). It is perhaps then not surprising that Conan Doyle, an avid sportsman interested in British masculine identity, would have taken so strongly to the Olympic Games as an avenue for international relations. Both his and Coubertin’s views on the Modern Olympics represent the types negotiation of global cooperation and national identity that characterized the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Conan Doyle first expressed his interest in the Olympics after being one of the 70,000 spectators in the 1908 London Olympics. After the scattered disappointments of the 1900 Paris Olympics and the 1904 St. Louis Olympics, with their poor planning and, in the case of St. Louis, lack of international diversity among the competitors, the 1908 London Olympics represented a return to the aspects of the 1896 Olympics that made it successful: an emphasis on athletic competition, a diversity of competitors, and a great deal of pageantry. Conan Doyle records in his autobiography the dramatic impression made on him by one Olympian: Dorando Pietri, who ran the Marathon to exhaustion and was disqualified because he received aid from two officials near the finish line. Rather than engage with the controversy of Dorando’s disqualification, Conan Doyle frames the event (and subsequent actions) as a moment of cultural connection and chivalry:

Of course the prize went to the American, as his rival had been helped, but the sympathy of the crowd, and I am sure of every *sporting* American present, went out to the little Italian. I not only wrote Dorando up, but I started a subscription for him in the “Daily Mail,” which realized over £300—a fortune for his Italian village—so that he was able to start a

baker's shop, which he could not have done on an Olympic medal. My wife made the presentation in English, which he could not understand; he answered in Italian, which we could not understand; but I think we really did understand each other all the same. (*Memories and Adventures* 225, emphasis mine)

The purpose of the passage is to show himself putting his ideals of chivalry into practice (his wife's presentation of the fund not unlike a medieval lady to a knight); however, Conan Doyle is also negotiating a situation where sportsmanship is being overridden by competition. Dorando has been disqualified after the American competitor protested, and Olympic officials themselves had helped Dorando. The legal disqualification was nonetheless unchivalrous and unsportsmanlike according to Conan Doyle's definitions, as he subordinates any Anglo-American fellow feeling to the higher ideal of cosmopolitan sportsmanship. Just as he had written about the Boer War by highlighting chivalrous and good behavior, Conan Doyle highlights the "sympathy of the crowd," including the "sporting" Americans (or the Americans who hold to fair play). Conan Doyle's concepts of chivalry correlate to his discussion of sportsmanship among competitors and spectators alike. Conan Doyle's treatment of Dorando also affords an opportunity for cultural connection, as despite speaking different languages and not understanding the other, "we really did understand each other all the same" (225). This cultural connection—a moment of understanding through chivalrous behavior despite cultural differences—contrasts with the unchivalrous disqualification of Dorando—a moment of valuing the win over chivalrous behavior.

Rather than casting Americans as possible allies to the British as he did earlier, Conan Doyle points out the friction between Americans and British that goes beyond protesting a disqualification:

There is no denying that the American team were very unpopular in London, though the unpopularity was not national, for the stadium was thick with American flags. Everyone admitted that they were a splendid lot of athletes, but they were not wisely handled and I saw with my own eyes that they did things which would not have been tolerated if done by an English team in New York. However, there may well have been some want of tact on both sides, and causes at work of which the public knew nothing. When I consider the Dunraven Yacht race, and then these Olympic Games, *I am by no means assured that sport has that international effect for good which some people have claimed for it.* I wonder whether any of the old Grecian wars had their real origin in the awards at Olympia. (*Memories and Adventures* 225, emphasis mine)

Conan Doyle is vague about the American athletes' behavior and the "want to tact on both sides," as well as the "causes at work of which the public knew nothing." Whatever incidents to which he is referring, they have caused so much friction that Conan Doyle wonders if athletics is the avenue toward peace that Coubertin claims. Conan Doyle may be talking about people's individual behavior, but there was certainly plenty of political controversy in the London Olympics, most notably the Americans refusing to "dip" their flag in deference to Edward VII, and the Irish boycott of the Olympic Games due to Ireland's wish to compete as a separate country rather than as part of the United

Kingdom. Conan Doyle, opposed to Home Rule at the time, does not address these controversies (quickly moving to a more pleasant anecdote of playing billiards with some of the American athletes); however, his wondering if “old Grecian wars had their real origin in the awards at the Olympia” shows that Conan Doyle is aware of these very real political tensions. His solution at this time, however, is to further consolidate British power by not only including Ireland in the team, but also including other colonies. Serving on the London Olympic Committee for the 1916 Berlin Olympics, Conan Doyle wrote the following letter to *The Times* in July 1912:

Sir, -- WE have four years in which to set our house in order before the Berlin Olympic Games. Might I suggest that the most pressing change of all is that we should send in a British Empire team instead of merely a British team? The Americans very wisely and properly send Red Indians, negroes, and even a Hawaiian amongst their representatives. We, on the contrary, acquiesce in our white fellow-subjects from the Colonies contending under separate headings. I am sure that if they were approached with tact they would willingly surrender the occasional local honours they may gain in order to form one united team in which Africans, Australians, and Canadians would do their share with men from the Mother Country under one flag and the same insignia. I would go further and see whether among Ceylon or Malay swimmers, Indian runners, and Sikh wrestlers we cannot find winners among the coloured races of the Empire. Such a movement would, I think, be of the highest political importance, for there could not be a finer object lesson of the

unity of the Empire than such a team all striving for the victory of the same flag. (*Letters* 171)

Of course, his conflation of the races represented in the American team and the British colonies is a bit of a false correlation. His belief that colonial athletes would “willingly surrender the occasional local honours” is also naïve; while Conan Doyle may acknowledge British abuses and colonial opposition in fiction, his optimism that these tensions will go away in a more united Empire can be seen as unrealistic today. However, his construction of cosmopolitical unity through athletics, putting colonizer and colonized literally on the same playing field, disrupts said dichotomy and restructures Britishness as not an Anglo-Saxon racial identity, but as a hybrid identity based on alliances and allegiances, which he terms as an “object lesson of the unity of the Empire.” Britishness, then, becomes an inclusive, rather than an exclusive, self-constructed identity, while the diverse athletes act as knights, “striving for the victory of the same flag,” or riding under the same banner or crest.

Throughout his work, Conan Doyle attempts to define British masculine identity in terms of ideals: cooperation and camaraderie, healthy competition, and chivalrous behavior. His historical romances display the roots of chivalry as a British characteristic while acknowledging the problems in how it was (and is) displayed. His war writings attempt to locate chivalry in a more global and contemporary setting, highlighting the unsuitability of war as an avenue to a chivalrous British masculine identity. His solution to the ravages of war—athletics—transforms chivalry into sportsmanship and gives hope for international connections, both within and without the Empire; however, over-determined nationalism and competition lead to the destruction of that optimistic

cosmopolitan world construction. In his later years, Conan Doyle turns more and more away from the physical and political to another ideal construction, the spiritual, in order to construct a peaceful cosmopolitan world and a sustainable British identity therein.

Chapter 5: “The great unifying force:” Sir Arthur Conan Doyle’s Spiritualist British Commonwealth

In 1927, the Fox Film Corporation conducted a ten-minute interview with the nearly 70-year-old Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. The author covers two topics, which, as he puts it, “people always want to ask me.” The first is “how I ever came to write the Sherlock Holmes stories,” and the second is “how I came to have psychic experiences and to take so much interest in that question.” In fact, these two subjects are the most important of Conan Doyle’s career: he’s best known and loved for Sherlock Holmes, much to his occasional consternation, as he wishes to be best known for spiritualism at this point in his life. He’s partially successful. In fact, Conan Doyle is as famous for Sherlock Holmes as he is infamous for spiritualism.

In the previous chapters, I have discussed Conan Doyle’s attempt at defining and reshaping the world in an attempt to create a cosmopolitan commonwealth, one in which Anglo-Saxons form a benevolent rule over a world in which all races, cultures, etc. are valued. The Boer War presented some difficulties with that idea, but Conan Doyle had not given up hope. The Great War, or World War I, presented more of a problem. European powers had devastated the world with their empire-building and bid for dominance. The years leading up to the Great War were Conan Doyle’s most politically active: he wrote letters to newspapers and the War Office, he trained his own local regiment of volunteers, and he even wrote a warning in the form of a short story called “Danger!” (1914), in which a foreign country (obviously Germany) subdues England by holding an underwater siege using submarines. While he remained stalwartly patriotic and even tried to give World War I the same writing treatment as he had the Boer War,

this period is when he devoted more and more time to spiritualism. After World War I, the bulk of his writing is spiritualist in nature. While the great loss of lives, as well as Conan Doyle's own personal losses, certainly contributed to his interest in spiritualism, his discussion of spiritualism becomes increasingly global, and his overseas lecture tours emphasize his global concerns. His emphasis is not just on the veracity of psychic phenomena but on spiritualism as a way to form a global community, both on earth and on the other side. His cosmopolitan empire has proven unlikely after World War I, so Conan Doyle is creating a utopian cosmopolitan empire in the afterlife, where everyone keeps their own identity, but identities are unifying, not divisive. This construct of the afterlife has far-reaching implications for those still on earth, who must not only help those hyper-rationalists and hyper-materialists still on earth, but also those who are suffering in the afterlife from their lack of spiritual awareness. The séance becomes a community, and the spiritual medium becomes a medium for enlightenment and unity.

Sherlockians and Conan Doyle critics alike seem unsure about how to treat what can almost be called Conan Doyle's obsession with spiritualism. In one of the few articles to deal specifically with Conan Doyle's spiritualism, Jeffrey Meikle (1974) foregrounds his discussion with, "The creator of Sherlock Holmes had previously seemed so 'solid,' his prose so blunt and workmanlike. Perhaps he had grown senile or had succumbed to grief over the war deaths of those close to him" (23). He later discusses Conan Doyle's increasing "credulity," framing Conan Doyle as one "no longer concerned with scientific evidence except as a rhetorical device for winning converts" (29). Meikle's treatment of Conan Doyle's spiritualism, while mostly focusing on forming a history of a period that many biographers tend to marginalize or skip over, also represents

the common critical treatment of Conan Doyle during this period: He's old and losing his touch, or he's mourning the loss of his son (or other family members). Likewise, he's buying into this unscientific hogwash while increasingly ignoring the evidence that his better creation, Sherlock Holmes, would insist upon. That seems to be the key element to the common rejection of Conan Doyle's spiritualism: they see it as antithetical to his more rational Sherlock Holmes, who, in response to the possibility of vampires in Sussex, responds, "The world is big enough for us. No ghosts need apply" ("Sussex Vampire" 2:594). I've discussed in a previous chapter that many Holmes fans tend to equate the author with the character, particularly in the qualities of hyper-rationalism and materialism. Thus, his seeming flights of fancy about séances, fairies, and automatic writing are flummoxing to say the least. Embedded in most discussions of Conan Doyle and spiritualism, whether obliquely or brazenly, is the question, "Did he just go crazy?"

The tone of critics and biographers ranges from embarrassment to outrage. In a contemporary review of Conan Doyle's *The Wanderings of a Spiritualist* (1921), Joseph Jastrow comments, "The charitable treatment of [Conan Doyle's spiritualist] mission would be that of silence; and this the author would resent as an unwarranted condescension" (266). While Jastrow claims to strive for objectivity, he goes on to speak of Conan Doyle's "ineptness of mind" and his "puerile (or is it senile?) credulity" (266). Jastrow's summation of the book echoes a Holmesian title: "the strange case of Conan Doyle" (266). As Jastrow frets over Conan Doyle's mental health, E. T. Raymond, another contemporary critic, gives Conan Doyle a more sinister edge. He characterizes Conan Doyle as "A genuine craftsman, having found his precise medium, having achieved a success as complete as it was deserved, finds no happiness therein, thinks

contemptuously of the happiness his art has brought to others, and turns with a sense of vocation to—it is difficult politely to specify what” (263). Raymond continues to demonize Conan Doyle, saying, “Sir Arthur the spiritualist makes cruel war on the great legend of the perfect detective” (264). These reactions continue throughout the twentieth century and into the twenty-first: those enamored of Conan Doyle’s Sherlock Holmes are occasionally confused that he did anything else in his career and might feel betrayed and even scandalized by his un-Holmesian spiritualist crusade.

There has been, of course, some more recent scholarship that takes a more measured and objective view of Conan Doyle’s spiritualism. Rev. John Lamond, one of his first biographers, and the first approved by his wife, was a fellow spiritualist, and thus the work treats Conan Doyle as a spiritualist prophet while continuing the author’s mission of proselytizing. A less biased example would be Daniel Stashower’s more recent biography *Teller of Tales* (1999). Rather than treat Conan Doyle’s spiritualist involvement as an embarrassing divergence from the “real Conan Doyle,” Stashower begins with spiritualism and dedicates just as much time to spiritualism as he does to Conan Doyle’s various other pursuits. In an interview for the *Baker Street Babes* podcast, the author says that spiritualism “hadn’t been addressed as comprehensively as [he] would have liked to have seen.” What comes of the book is a balanced picture of Conan Doyle as a spiritualist, neither apologizing nor condemning, but tying it in with the culture of the time and with all of his other works.

While most of the writing about Conan Doyle as a spiritualist is contained in his biographies, there have been a few critical responses that take Conan Doyle’s spiritualism seriously. Jacqueline A. Jaffe locates the “catalyst” of Conan Doyle’s conversion to

spiritualism as a response to the “catastrophic warning” of World War I and a feeling of “a growing sense of personal disillusionment and weariness” (122). This echoes the theories of a change in mental attitude and a reaction to personal loss, yet it takes a more generous tone, leaving Conan Doyle still the master of his own mental faculties. Diana Barsham combats the notion that “Doyle appeared to have surrendered his ‘masculine’ reason and fundamentally revoked the identity he had scripted for himself as a war historian and the creator of Sherlock Holmes” (242) by pointing to spiritualism as “an arena for that ‘aggressive fighting for the right’ which had increasingly become part of his own self-definition” (256). Others, as I will discuss below, have situated Conan Doyle within the larger context of spiritualism. However, there has been little to no serious critical engagement of Conan Doyle’s actual spiritualist texts.

The increasing critical acceptance of Conan Doyle as a spiritualist owes much to the resurgence of spiritualism as a focus for serious academic inquiry. Rather than measure the veracity of spiritualists’ claims, critics are discussing spiritualism as a cultural phenomenon, one not “at the outskirts of society and culture, but rather as culturally central for many Victorians” (Kontou and Willburn 1). Tatiana Kontou and Sarah Willburn in their introduction to *The Ashgate Research Companion to Nineteenth-Century Spiritualism and the Occult* (2012), a collection that is already a testament to the increasing prominence of spiritualist criticism, state, “Binaries that often seem intuitively clear in our contemporary moment, such as faith versus reason, spiritualism versus science, and tradition versus progress, did not similarly structure the Victorian age” (1). As I’ve stated in previous chapters, Lauren Goodlad points out that scholars attempting to evaluate Victorian beliefs and values, and those of the early twentieth century, from a

purely late-twentieth- or twenty-first-century perspective run the risk of oversimplification. It is all too easy to praise the detractors of spiritualism during the *fin de siècle* and early twentieth century while holding the spiritualists themselves in a sort of patronizing contempt. In attempting to contextualize what spiritualism meant to the Victorians, it is important to acknowledge that completely apart from questions of psychic phenomena or the presence of spirits, the spiritualist movement itself was a very real phenomenon with a spirit all its own. That is to say that spiritualists were not considered backwards or mentally suspect, as many have implied about Conan Doyle, but seriously and intellectually engaged in contemporary problems. As Kontou and Willburn say, “spiritualism and the occult provide flexible allegories for many concepts that are distinctly modern—such as the permeability between remote places, instantaneous communication from afar, and the recording and reproduction of the historical past” (1). Spiritualism was considered not merely a movement or belief but a science, at least insofar as it is inseparable from the scientific and technological rhetoric of the time. Christine Ferguson (2012) sums up spiritualism’s relations to science, as well as its modern critical importance:

Now the links between Victorian science and spiritualism are so well established as to be virtually truistic in the scholarship on the movement, second in ubiquity only to the assertions of spiritualism’s potential for feminist emancipation and gender subversion. This new awareness has effectively challenged the supremacy of the crisis of faith hypothesis hitherto used to account for the popularity of séances and mysticism in a technologically sophisticated and ostensibly rational era. No longer is

spiritualism viewed as a purely reactionary formation, a desperate, backwards clinging to the consolatory faith in spiritual immortality that contemporary science was rapidly eroding. (19)

Spiritualism, with its focus on identity redefinition, subversion of accepted social roles, community building, and modernist rethinking of society and technology, ends up sounding rather cosmopolitan. In fact, spiritualism is not just a continuation of Conan Doyle's manly quest for self-definition, as Diana Barsham puts it, or even a break from his career of rationalism, but a logical progression of Conan Doyle's cosmopolitan view of the world. Spiritualism, with its afterlife that equalizes all ethnic and social barriers, pushes Conan Doyle's cosmopolitanism to become even more inclusive than before. Rather than limit his focus of community and chivalrous behavior to young sporting British men, Conan Doyle can construct a spiritualist community in which all people can take part in equal measure, which has implications not only in the afterlife, but also in the earth-bound community of the séance. While chivalry still remains at the center of his British masculine identity construction, his scope has grown, and British men must transform accordingly.

Conan Doyle's *New Revelation*

Conan Doyle's first long spiritualist work, *The New Revelation* (1918), lays out the tenets of his spiritualism. In this work, Conan Doyle accomplishes three things: he tells of his own conversion into and belief in spiritualism, he uses spiritualism to redefine Christianity, and he redefines the afterlife experience. His own conversion he makes sure to frame as gradual and deliberate, knowing that his readers would be hesitant to accept

the creator of the rational Sherlock Holmes as a believer in psychic phenomena. He also makes sure to detail his years as a psychic researcher, emphasizing the study and deliberation that went into his decision. Conan Doyle himself relates his full acceptance of spiritualism with the War. He does not, however, describe himself as an isolated case:

But the War came, and when the War came it brought earnestness into all our souls and made us look more closely at our own beliefs and reassess their values. In the presence of an agonized world, hearing every day of the deaths of the flower of our race in the first promise of their unfulfilled youth, seeing around one the wives and mothers who had no clear conception whither their loved ones had gone to, I seemed suddenly to see that this subject with which I had so long dallied was not merely a study of a force outside the rules of science, but that it was really something tremendous, a breaking down of the walls between two worlds, a direct undeniable message from beyond, a call of hope and of guidance to the human race at the time of its deepest affliction. The objective side of it ceased to interest for having made up one's mind that it was true there was an end of the matter. The religious side of it was clearly of infinitely greater importance. (38-39)

While he describes his own decision to accept this “message from beyond,” he frames the circumstances of the decision with collective pronouns: “it brought earnestness into all *our* souls and made *us* look more closely at *our* own beliefs.” Ostensibly, he’s referring to the collective mourning and devastation of World War I, in which the death toll was so high that there were few who didn’t have a relative or loved one who had died. He also

puts the onus of acceptance on everyone. He came to a realization about the subject, but it was up to everyone to receive the message in the “time of its deepest affliction.” He ends with referring to “having made up *one*’s mind that it was true,” shifting the pronoun to the hypothetical third person, both talking about himself and allowing the possibility of the inclusion of the reader.

The passage also describes his conversion from psychic researcher, or skeptic, to believer. While Conan Doyle never denies the scientific nature of spiritualism, he grows impatient limiting spiritualism to a continual search for proof: “the psychical phenomena which have been proved up to the hilt for all who care to examine the evidence, are really of no account, and that their real value consists in the fact that they support and give objective reality to an immense body of knowledge which must deeply modify our previous religious views, and must, when properly understood and digested, make religion a very real thing, no longer a matter of faith, but a matter of actual experience and fact” (*New Revelation* 40). At the same time that Conan Doyle seems to separate spiritualism from science, he reaffirms it as science by his insistence that it’s been proven, that it now has enough evidence to become scientific fact. The above quote is also a useful rhetorical dodge on his part, as it relieves him of having to make a more rational case for his belief. His insistence of spiritualism having been “proved up to the hilt” becomes a source of accusations of credulity, and certainly some of Conan Doyle’s “proof” does not hold up to scrutiny, the Cottingly fairies being the most famous example.¹⁵ However, Conan Doyle is not proposing spiritualism as a field of study, to be

¹⁵ Conan Doyle’s work *The Coming of the Fairies* (1922) discusses the photographs of fairies taken by two girls, Elsie and Frances, in Yorkshire. These photographs caused a minor sensation in the newspapers, and Conan Doyle supported the veracity of the claims, though he never met the girls nor examined the originals. To his credit, the first sentence in his book about the incident admits the possibility of a hoax.

dissected in a lab or continually measured and scrutinized, but as a religion: a religion that, as he says, is “no longer a matter of faith, but a matter of actual experience and fact.” The “actual experience and fact” here is not necessarily the collected anecdotes or studies by psychical researchers, although Conan Doyle has collected plenty of that, but of the personal experiences in the séance. From here, we gather that Conan Doyle is making a distinction between the impersonal, institutionalized religion practiced by the Roman Catholic Church and the Church of England, and the personally experienced religion of spiritualism, where the participants take a much more active and gratifying role in their own spiritual growth.

Conan Doyle had long been dissatisfied with the common practices of Christianity. Raised in a Catholic home, practically terrorized by Jesuit priests at his school, and denied financial help from rich and staunchly Catholic relatives because he would not turn from his own agnosticism, Conan Doyle seemed to have an antagonistic view of religion throughout the first half of his life. Glossing over the more practical experiences with religion, Conan Doyle describes his early views of religion in more abstract form: “I had never ceased to be an earnest theist, [...] To say that the Universe was made by immutable laws only put the question one degree further back as to who made the laws. I did not, of course, believe in an anthropomorphic God, but I believed then, as I believe now, in an intelligent Force behind all the operations of Nature” (*New Revelation* 14-15). His earnest, indeterminate theism seems to spring from a dissatisfaction with religious structures and narratives. He rejects what he sees as a simplistic narrative of an anthropomorphic God, and he situates morality within humans themselves: “Right or wrong I saw also as great obvious facts which needed no divine

revelation” (15). God, or the “intelligence Force,” thus becomes a source of creation. His true problem with religion, though, seemed to be belief in the afterlife, or the immortal soul:

But when it came to a question of our little personalities surviving death, it seemed to me that the whole analogy of Nature was against it. When the candle burns out the light disappears. When the electric cell is shattered the current stops. When the body dissolves there is an end of the matter, Each man in his egotism may feel that he ought to survive, but let him look, we will say, at the average loafer—of high or low degree—would anyone contend that there was any obvious reason why *that* personality should carry on? It seemed to be a delusion, and I was convinced that death did indeed end all, though I saw no reason why that should affect our duty towards humanity during our transitory existence. (15-16)

His reasoning behind the lack of an afterlife is based on a surprising pessimism toward humanity, especially for the one who has already granted humanity the knowledge of right and wrong. Humans become “little personalities” who feel in their “egotism” that they “ought to survive.” His standard for humanity becomes the “average loafer.” He makes sure to not make this a classist argument, as the loafer can be of any social class, but he’s still creating a hierarchy of humanity and setting the standard at the bottom: some humans are more deserving of an immortal soul than others, but if all the loafers shouldn’t have one, none should. Of course, Conan Doyle is using a flawed argument purposefully in order to capture his belief system before his acceptance of spiritualism, which he signals by using flawed analogies of candles and electric cells. Having studied

the sciences, he would know that both the candle and the electric cell produce lingering energy far more than light and current.

His pre-spiritualism definition of humanity self-consciously reflects a humanity that is stagnant and diminutive. This term “loafer” is an interesting choice for Conan Doyle in itself, as the term is tied not necessarily to social class, but to masculine action. The term “loafer” can most easily be tied to laziness, but it also fits with the rhetoric of degeneracy: a “loafer,” like the “loungers and idlers of Empire” (4) of *A Study in Scarlet* (1887), is one who lacks energy and is a drain on British society. The loafer cannot be anything but a loafer, and personalities (or souls) are only valuable to the ego of the person. He goes further to argue against the “spirit” being independent of the body with an appropriately medical analogy: “Suppose a man had an accident and cracked his skull; his whole character would change, and a high nature might become a low one. With alcohol or opium or many other drugs one could apparently quite change a man’s spirit. The spirit then depended upon matter” (*New Revelation* 17). He contradicts this early analogy with an artistic one: “I did not realise that it was not the spirit that was changed in such cases, but the body through which the spirit worked, just as it would be no argument against the existence of a musician if you tampered with his violin so that only discordant notes could come through” (17-18). The shift from medical/scientific analogies to artistic ones shows a shift in his definition of humanity: humans become not fallible, temporary bodies, but immortal souls encased in fallible, temporary bodies. The quality of humanity cannot be quantified by earthly action, but by its spiritual potential. In fact, with spiritualism, the individual human regains his or her importance and individuality and cannot be shrugged off as the “average loafer.”

This redefinition of humanity has larger implications on human action and becomes a central motivation for Conan Doyle's spiritualist mission. If there is an afterlife that all souls enter upon death, and if that afterlife is not based on Christian concepts of a Heaven and a Hell, what is the afterlife? What happens to these immortal souls? In answer to that, Conan Doyle brings in evidence from séances he has attended. He first distinguishes the séance from both parlor games and psychological research: "For example, I find that on one occasion, on my asking some test question, such as how many coins I had in my pocket, the table spelt out: 'We are here to educate and to elevate, not to guess at riddles.' And then: 'The religious frame of mind, not the critical, is what we wish to inculcate'" (*New Revelation* 20). Séances are serious business, a moment of communion with the spirits in order to grow in spiritual knowledge. His spiritual knowledge from a séance perhaps leads to his most famous description of the afterlife:

She went on to say that the sphere she inhabited was all round the earth; that she knew about the planets; that Mars was inhabited by a race more advanced than us, and that the canals were artificial; there was no bodily pain in her sphere, but there could be mental anxiety; they were governed; they took nourishment; she had been a Catholic and was still a Catholic, but had not fared better than the Protestants; there were Buddhists and Mohammedans in her sphere, but all fared alike; she had never seen Christ and knew no more about Him than on earth, but believed in His influence; spirits prayed and they died in their new sphere before entering another; they had pleasures—music was among them. It was a place of light and of

laughter. She added that they had no rich or poor, and that the general conditions were far happier than on earth. (25-26)

What is most striking about this description of the afterlife is that it does not describe a final destination, a system of punishment and reward, or even proof that any one religion is right. In fact, minus the bodily pain, it sounds more like an elevated version of earth. Everyone keeps their own individual nature, even to the point of their own religion, ethnicity, and preferences. The main difference seems to be a lack of division. There is no money to create class and wealth differences and no reason for religious disagreements, even if the differences remain. The chief problem within the afterlife stems from “mental anxiety,” the source of which Conan Doyle reveals in his next anecdote about conversing with the spirit of a former cricket player: “He had been a free-thinker, but had not suffered in the next life for that reason. Prayer, however, was a good thing, as keeping us in touch with the spiritual world. If he had prayed more he would have been higher in the spirit world” (26-27). With this anecdote, Conan Doyle introduces the concept that there is a hierarchy within the afterlife, not based on class, religion, or ethnicity, but based on spiritual awareness. Thus, it becomes the duty of those on earth to prepare themselves and others for this spiritual realm.

Conan Doyle points out two problems that hinder people’s spiritual awareness: materialism and earthly religion, which he does not see as mutually exclusive. Materialism is the denial of the spirit realm, and he cites as a continual problem, as it leaves souls entirely unprepared to the next life, whereas institutional religion gives the soul entirely the wrong impression of the afterlife. In his spiritualist novel *The Land of Mists* (1926), a séance features communication with a spirit who comes from “the outer

darkness:” “He doesn’t know. He doesn’t understand. They come over here with a fixed idea, and when they find the real thing is quite different from anything they have been taught by the Churches, they are helpless” (350). The scientific materialist seems to have more hope, as he only wants evidence and the willingness to change his mind, which Conan Doyle sees as his own experience. Those who unthinkingly trust in the knowledge of the afterlife “taught by the Churches” are in more danger, as Conan Doyle sees religious churches as divisive and materializing the spiritual. He argues that, far from “psychical research [being] quite distinct from religion” (*New Revelation* 51), spiritualism “*is* religion—the very essence of it” (51, emphasis his). The people in the afterlife keep their own religions because it’s part of their ethnicity and culture, part of who they are, but spiritualism is:

the great unifying force, the one provable thing connected with every religion, Christian or non-Christian, forming the common solid basis upon which each raises, if it must needs raise, that separate system which appeals to the varied types of mind. The Southern races will always demand what is less austere than the North, the West will always be more critical than the East. One cannot shape all to a level conformity. But if the broad premises which are guaranteed by this teaching from beyond are accepted, then the human race has made a great stride towards religious peace and unity. (52)

Conan Doyle is using broad, and rather racist, generalizations here, and he does focus largely on Christianity throughout the rest of the book, but his point is surprisingly liberal. All the world religions are correct as systems insofar as they emphasize the

spiritual, so there is no need for religious division, just as there is no division in the afterlife; everything hinges on spiritual awareness.

Conan Doyle's rewriting of Christianity in the ensuing chapters is perhaps his most radical discussion of spiritualism and a frequent target to his detractors. He points out that "Christianity must change or must perish" (*New Revelation* 54), and then goes on to detail the spiritualist side of Christianity, even to the point that "[t]he early Christian Church was saturated with spiritualism" (62). His construction of Christ is a bit contradictory, as he spends much time pointing out that all of Jesus' actions could be interpreted as the work of a powerful medium, mostly focusing on his miracles and the Transfiguration. He claims that the Church has focused too much on the death of Christ, and has misinterpreted Scripture due to "Oriental poetry [treated] literally as if it were Occidental prose" (*Vital Message* 102). However, he also refers to the "Christ spirit" in his spiritualist reinterpretation of Christianity:

But these modifications would be rather in the direction of explanation and development than of contradiction. It would set right grave misunderstandings which have always offended the reason of every thoughtful man, but it would also confirm and make absolutely certain the fact of life after death, the base of all religion. It would confirm the unhappy results of sin, though it would show that those results are never absolutely permanent. It would confirm the existence of higher beings, whom we have called angels, and of an ever-ascending hierarchy above us, in which the Christ spirit finds its place, culminating in heights of the infinite with which we associate the idea of all-power or of God. It would

confirm the idea of heaven and of a temporary penal state which corresponds to purgatory rather than to hell. Thus this new revelation, on some of the most vital points, is *not* destructive of the beliefs, and it should be hailed by really earnest men of all creeds as a most powerfully rather than a dangerous devil-begotten enemy. (*New Revelation* 53-54, emphasis his)

Conan Doyle's seemingly contradictory discussion of Jesus comes from the two names used: Jesus and Christ. Jesus refers to the man, or the medium, whereas Christ refers to the spirit he was channeling. In placing the "Christ spirit" at the center of the spiritual hierarchy, Conan Doyle seems to be implying the centrality of Christianity to spiritualism, slightly contradicting his point that all religions are the same. His rhetoric about spiritualism is self-consciously Christian: he refers to a "cloud of witnesses" (94), a reference to Hebrews 12:1, when discussing spiritualist evidence, he reassures with "tidings of great joy" (ch. 3), a reference to Luke 2:10, and even his title—*The New Revelation*—is a reference to Revelations of the New Testament. There's still a heaven and "temporary penal state," there are still angels, Christ, and God, but now it's rendered into a system of spiritual awareness in which the Christians must take more of a central place. The centrality of Christianity mirrors, or at least implies, the centrality of Anglo-Saxons in Conan Doyle's "revelation" of the afterlife. Just as Conan Doyle sees the Anglo-Saxon race as being the leaders of the physical world, he wishes Anglo-Saxons to become prominent in the spiritual world. However, Anglo-Saxons are held back by their own materialism and their own misunderstanding and misuse of Christianity. The shift from "Oriental poetry" to "Occidental prose" implies that the West is not only

misinterpreting Christianity, but that the West has lost a deeper understanding of spirituality that still exists in the East.

Challenger's Challenge

If Anglo-Saxon men are unprepared to take prominence in spiritualism, it is then left to the most active members within spiritualism (or at least the ones with the most spiritual power and awareness): women, those from more “primitive” ethnicities, and lower classes. These are often the mediums and guides, and as Conan Doyle states, “Nearly every woman is an undeveloped medium” (*New Revelation* 100) and “[t]here is no such leveller of classes as Spiritualism, and the charwoman with psychic force is the superior of the millionaire who lacks it” (*Land of Mist* 362). While he does not spend much time in *The New Revelation* talking about the actual mediums, his two spiritualist novels, *The Parasite* (1894) and *The Land of Mist* (1926), focus much more on mediums and, in the case of the latter, the culture of spiritualism. The two novels, one written before his “conversion” and the other written after, are wildly different, especially in Conan Doyle’s treatment of spiritualism as a whole and the medium in particular. *The Parasite*, a horror novella that tracks the destructive power of a powerful female Anglo-Caribbean medium over the British male protagonist, associates spiritualism with manipulation, dominance, and sexual aggression. While the veracity of spiritualism isn’t questioned in the work, the trustworthiness of mediums is horribly suspect. In contrast, *The Land of Mist*, the third in the Professor Challenger series, documents the culture of spiritualism, visiting séances, haunted houses, and even spiritualist religious services,

always emphasizing spiritualists as forming a community based on spiritual awareness, the most spiritually aware members of which happen to be women and lower-class men.

The Parasite's first person narrator, Gilroy, a scientist studying physiology, claims to be "a materialist" (5) as he is "a man who is devoted to exact science" (4). He claims a need for spirituality, which he places within the purview of his fiancée Agatha, and he expresses frustration at being pressured into spiritual belief by his psychological researcher friend. However, Gilroy does not remain purely materialist for long. After one dramatic experience with the medium in question, Miss Penclosa, Gilroy immediately believes in her powers and devotes all of his time to a scientific study of her. The conversion is incredibly rapid, which Doyle attributes to Gilroy's Celtic nature: "by nature I am, unless I deceive myself, a highly psychic man. I was a nervous, sensitive boy, a dreamer, a somnambulist, full of impressions and intuitions. My black hair, my dark eyes, my thin, olive face, my tapering fingers, are all characteristic of my real temperament" (5-6). In other words, Gilroy is already feminized and removed from Anglo-Saxon rationality, and thus more susceptible to Miss Penclosa's spiritual manipulation. As opposed to Conan Doyle's later writings, spiritual susceptibility in this case takes on a more sinister character. Those with the ability to be influenced, Agatha and to a larger degree Gilroy, are portrayed as nervous and degenerate, while the medium herself becomes a "parasite": monstrous and destructively domineering.

It is perhaps a misnomer to call *The Parasite* a spiritualist novel, as this work uses a sensationalist portrayal of spiritualism as a mechanism for horror. The less experienced Conan Doyle takes on a decidedly narrower definition of spiritualism, defined by abilities and parlor tricks. Miss Penclosa is actually not a true medium by Conan Doyle's later

definitions, capable of channeling and communicating with the spirits of the dead, but a mesmerist.¹⁶ When explaining her power of mesmerism to Gilroy, she characterizes it as the power of command, in which she can “send [her] soul into another person’s body” (42). Her actual method within the novel involves placing people into trances and either planting suggestions or actually controlling their actions. Her demonstrations range from forcing Gilroy to keep appointments with her, causing him to spout nonsense during his lectures, and even attempt to break into a bank. While he is under her influence, Gilroy has no control over his own actions and occasionally no memory. The focus, then, is not on communication or the afterlife, but on control and dominance. When Miss Penclosa places Agatha under a trance, she has “the expression with which a Roman empress might have looked at her kneeling slave” (18); her power is one of utter command, which she uses to selfish and destructive purposes. Having fallen in love with Gilroy, she tries to force him to love her, and when he refuses, she punishes him by ruining his career and credibility, culminating in an attempt to force him to throw vitriol in Agatha’s face, an action only prevented by Miss Penclosa’s death. Every action she takes is to divide rather than unify. The spiritualist power here is earth-bound (her influence ending in her death), and her motives are earth-bound as well. Miss Penclosa embodies the worst of female, Othered, sexual destruction to the point of near parody.

Conan Doyle’s much later work, *The Land of Mists*, entirely drops the topic of mesmerism, takes a less hostile view of non-Anglo-Saxon races and women, and focuses more closely on the relations between the spirits of the dead and the living. The novel

¹⁶ Bruce Wyse, in his article “The Equivocal Erotics of Mesmerism in Arthur Conan Doyle’s *The Parasite*” (2004), contextualizes *The Parasite* with the discussions of mesmerism at the time, noting its fantasy-driven eroticism and sexual power dynamics. For the purposes of this work, I will focus on mesmerism as the use of power for dominance and subjugation, not necessarily tied to sexuality.

tracks the investigations into spiritualism of Edward Malone (the Irish reporter who served as the narrator for the previous Challenger novels) and Enid Challenger (Professor Challenger's daughter), who experience every aspect of contemporary British spiritualist culture. Eventually, they convert to spiritualism, and help with the conversion of the skeptic Professor Challenger. The novel, in contrast to *The Parasite*, relies on normalization rather than sensationalism in its portrayal of spiritualism. Rather than using their power for sexual dominance and control, mediums become channels for the dead and arbiters of spiritual growth. In one particularly telling scene in the novel, a grocer named Bolsover presides over a séance. While he is lower class and not highly educated, he is "solidity personified—the very opposite of the fanatic whom [Enid] had imagined" (340). The purpose of Bolsover is to dispel the common view of spiritualists as either nervous (unlike *The Parasite's* Gilroy) or as con artists (as Miss Penclosa represents, despite her very real power). Bolsover's séance is less of a production and more of a small religious meeting. He and his wife invite dead spirits into their midst, and the group gains knowledge from the "guides" and gives knowledge to those spirits who, as I've mentioned above, have not reached spiritual awareness and thus suffer in the afterlife. The construct and conduct of the séance are all centered on building a community. The participants hold hands and work to a common goal to making connections with the dead. Conan Doyle thus shifts the focus from control and spectacle, as in *The Parasite*, to religious and communal purpose.

The "guides" in the afterlife, those dead spirits who are able to lead and instruct the mediums within the séances, are all racial Others. The guides for Bolsover's first séance are a little black girl called "Wee One," who focuses the spiritual energies through

handling musical instruments, and an Indian guide, Red Cloud, who navigates the afterlife for them. Each of these guides are portrayed with rather embarrassing racial stereotypes—Wee One greets them with “Gooda evenin’” (346) and Red Cloud with “Good day, Chief! How the squaw?” (352). They are also not the purveyors of knowledge, but merely of guidance, Conan Doyle emphasizing Wee One’s childish nature with the instruments and punning on Indians as guides through the wilderness. A later séance makes use of a Chinese spirit as an educational guide, one who is high in the spiritual hierarchy and can instruct the séance, as well as guide spirits to the séance for help, but even he speaks in comically broken English. However, it is significant that these ethnic Others are more spiritual: Conan Doyle is citing the spiritual poverty of Anglo-Saxons and the relative spiritual awareness of some of the major ethnicities subject to Anglo-Saxon domination. Just as Conan Doyle wished to see an athletic alliance of Britain and its colonies with a commonwealth Olympic team, he wishes to see a spiritual commonwealth between Anglo-Saxons and the more spiritually able colonized peoples.

The onus for spiritualist proselytizing on the part of women, other ethnicities, and lower-class mediums is primarily to convert Anglo-Saxon educated males. These are the ones shown to be suffering the most from their own materialism and religious prejudices, as well as the ones least capable of psychic powers. The journey of spiritual discovery is, then, on the part of the white male. The novel begins with Malone, the young Irish news reporter friend of Professor Challenger, collaborating with Challenger’s daughter Enid while writing a series of news articles on various religions. Malone, the narrator from *The Lost World* (1912) and *The Poison Belt* (1913), is now a character in a third person narrative, yet he remains the observer, quickly converted to spiritualism along with Enid.

The Celtic researcher with his fiancée (a perhaps self-conscious mirroring of *The Parasite*) encounters not danger in spiritualism, but acceptance. In fact, the true danger comes from the materialist world, as Malone faces persecution at work for writing seriously about spiritualism, and Enid faces the wit of her father, who outright denies spiritualism as a hoax. In fact, persecution plays a large role in the work, as the medium Bolsover faces charges of fraud after a police sting operation, as well as his brother, a former boxer, wishing to go into the family business of “fraud” using his brother’s name. At once this persecution is Conan Doyle’s way of defending spiritualists, the dangers making it seem unlikely that they are frauds or are deluding themselves, but more importantly it is a way to show the failures of those who should be leading: the vigorous, athletic white men who Conan Doyle consistently puts in the position of leadership. The ex-boxer, who in another work Conan Doyle might valorize, is a gambler who tries to use spiritualism for his own financial benefit. Malone and his friend from previous novels, Lord Roxton, try to use force against both the ex-boxer and an evil spirit in a haunted house, but their efforts come to naught, as they are relying on their own physical strength and power. The spiritualist achieves where they fail, as the spiritualist has power to communicate and elevate, rather than intimidate.

The true locus of Anglo-Saxon educated male power in the novel is Professor Challenger himself, who has changed much in his third installment. *The Lost World* and *The Poison Belt* portray him as a scientist on the outskirts of respectability, a rebel who pushes at the edges of science, despite his colleagues’ opinions, and as reward for his endeavors he discovers dinosaurs on a South American plateau and a cosmic toxic fog that puts the world to sleep for a day. Professor Challenger is the one who challenges, in

essence, and has no patience with the prosaic and limited. As such, his abrupt dismissal of spiritualism seems surprising, even out of character. The novel states that he is “not the same man” (303) as he was in the previous novels, but the novel itself seems inaccurate in its portrayal of even the previous Challenger, saying, “Life had much yet to teach him, but he was a little less intolerant in learning” (303). The Challenger of *The Lost World* and *The Poison Belt* is intolerant of many things, foremost the hidebound and the scoffers. Yet *The Land of Mist* has turned Challenger into a hidebound scoffer, laughing at even the possibility of spirits, refusing to research the literature when offered, and relying on the writings of other scientists: “And the sad fact emerged that Challenger was not in a position to answer. He had read up his own case but had neglected that of his adversary, accepting too easily the facile and specious presumptions of incompetent writers who handled a matter which they had not themselves investigated” (472). While the character consistency of Professor Challenger suffers in the work (which Conan Doyle explains in *The Land of Mist* by claiming the previous two works are fictional and romanticized), Challenger instead becomes a representative of Conan Doyle’s target audience, and even a representative of Conan Doyle himself. Those who are otherwise rational become irrational in the face of the spiritual, according to Conan Doyle, himself not excluded. And the most rational, according to Conan Doyle, are the male Anglo-Saxons, the ones most needed to take a leadership role in the cosmopolitan spiritualist empire. While the novel features the conversions of Malone, Enid, and Lord Roxton, the journey toward spiritualism is not complete until Professor Challenger’s dramatic conversion.

By the novel’s end, Challenger has entirely transformed:

Challenger had himself altered. [...] He was gentler, humbler, and more spiritual man. Deep in his soul was the conviction that he, the champion of scientific method and of truth, had, in fact, for many years been unscientific in his methods, and a formidable obstruction to the advance of the human soul through the jungle of the unknown. [...] Also, with characteristic energy, he had plunged into the wonderful literature of the subject, and [...] he marvelled that he could ever for one instant have imagined that such a consensus of opinion could be founded upon error. His violent and whole-hearted nature made him take up the psychic cause with the same vehemence, and even occasionally the same intolerance with which he had once denounced it, and the old lion bared his teeth and roared back at those who had once been his associates. (516)

Challenger has not only converted, but he has taken up the “mission” of Spiritualism, much in the same way Conan Doyle had at the time. He has now taken up a leadership role in Spiritualism, not as a medium, but as a teacher and “challenger,” as he fights against the detractors of spiritualism. This active role is the one Conan Doyle sees as the place of Anglo-Saxon males. While the more psychically gifted women, grocers, and Indians act as a channel for communication with the dead, the men act as interpreters, preachers, and defenders. The mission that Conan Doyle sets for himself and gives to Challenger is the mission that he expects all Anglo-Saxon men to take up, to transform the world to match the utopian afterlife, and to prepare everyone for that afterlife. The title of *The Land of Mist* is intentionally misleading: we assume that the eponymous “land of mist” refers to the afterlife, when it really refers to the material world, as implied by

the last chapter title, “Where the Mists Clear Away.” Once Challenger is converted, the mists have cleared away: he now sees the material world as a world in which people do not see and in fact actively resist the truth, much as they do not see their own equality and ties to other people. The material world is ruled by division, but Conan Doyle frames the role of spiritualism to do away with those divisions in a cosmopolitan replication of the afterlife.

Conclusion

Conan Doyle’s spiritual commonwealth is not without its problems. Even as he valorizes spiritual awareness, he bases the rightness of English male dominance on critical awareness and logic. In his earlier work, Conan Doyle’s concept of Englishness was defined as Anglo-Saxon, Christian, educated, and masculine, traits which he frames as tied to materialism and therefore in conflict with spiritualism. He has not completely changed his definition of English masculine identity. English men, in his spiritualist works, must be at once critical and receptive, logical and emotional, in this world and the next. The contradiction continues in how he frames the English educated male in relation to others: the English male must learn from others, but still be benevolent master. These contradictions put Conan Doyle in the difficult position of balancing “English” traits while still trying to create a more spiritual identity that is more global and inclusive. His recovery of English traits become central to his spiritualist work; his spiritualist work, which encompasses the last few decades of his life, performs a delicate balancing act between spiritual cosmopolitanism and English identity. Ultimately, Conan Doyle opts for a kind of spiritual British commonwealth of nations, going global with a more

inclusive and varied definition of Englishness, but still committed to a controlling, if more cosmopolitan and tolerant, role for the English.

His spiritualist vision, however forward-thinking it tried to be, could not find a home in post-World War I Britain. As I discussed at the beginning of this chapter, critics during his time and throughout the twentieth century both excused and derided Conan Doyle's dedication to spiritualism, mainly questioning his mental and emotional health. The main force of the criticism seemed to be that Conan Doyle was getting out of touch, or out of step with modernity. Spiritualism's consideration as a subject for serious scientific research saw its zenith in the 1890s, but by the 1920s, when Conan Doyle devoted most of his writing and speaking engagements to spiritualism, its scientific cache was waning. While vestiges of spiritualism persisted up through the current day, it remains in essence a Victorian invention. It can perhaps be seen as the afterlife of Victorianism in the twentieth century, and thus remains at odds with the more progressive socio-political constructs of British identity after World War I. Conan Doyle's spiritualist ideas in some way anticipate aspects of the British Commonwealth that was forming in the twentieth century, but his viewpoint remains essentially imperial and Victorian; Conan Doyle's sustainable British Empire, even in the spirit realm, could not last.

Afterword

I stated in the introduction that part of my project would be to help recover Arthur Conan Doyle's reputation as a writer by contextualizing and analyzing works that became less popular after his death in 1930: his historical romances and his writings about war and spiritualism. The theme that connects these less-popular writings is that, while they do represent forward-thinking cosmopolitan "thought-experiments" in British identity, they remain firmly products of their own time, using socio-political ideas that would fall out of fashion in the twentieth century. After World War II, Britain's global power decreased dramatically. Over the decades, the colonies that Conan Doyle wished to see as more British slowly gained their independence and distinguished themselves from their imperial history. Globalization changed throughout the twentieth century in ways Conan Doyle could not anticipate, and his ideas became more and more prosaic, more entrenched in a Victorian viewpoint from which much of the world wished to distance themselves. Only Sherlock Holmes remains immediately relevant to the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, as his professionalism and eccentricity have come to form the baseline of the modern detective.

Conan Doyle in some ways realized his ideas of cosmopolitan bonds between nations was becoming unsustainable. As I discussed in chapter 4, Conan Doyle wished to see the British Empire, not as a military force, but as a united athletic team in the Modern Olympics. A British Imperial team, in which all colonies could serve "under one flag," could represent an "object lesson of [...] unity" (*Letters* 171). Conan Doyle became highly involved in the Olympics after a telegram from Lord Northcliffe, which, as he puts it, "let me in for about as much trouble as any communication which I have ever

received” (*Memories and Adventures* 229). Conan Doyle sums up this troublesome communication: “It was to the effect that Britain must regain her place among the athletic nations which had been temporarily eclipsed by the Olympic Games at Stockholm, and that I was the one man in Great Britain who could rally round me the various discordant forces which had to be united and used” (*Memories and Adventures* 229). This telegram says something about Conan Doyle’s reputation for inspiring British unity at the time (though perhaps the wording, which Conan Doyle called “flattering,” is meant more to convince Conan Doyle to take on this difficult job), but Conan Doyle’s regard for it as “troublesome” says more about the state of British, and global, unity at the time. Put into context, Conan Doyle’s optimism of colonial cooperation with a united athletic team is perhaps best understood as a reaction to the building antagonistic relationship between Britain and Germany, as the 1916 Berlin Olympics were cancelled after the outbreak of World War I. While he might have hoped that a British Imperial team could represent to Germany the ideal of international unity, an Empire that benefits all, World War I dashed those hopes as well as invalidated any work he accomplished in the British Olympic Committee. World War I represented everything that the Olympics didn’t: “In 1914, the forces of war proved stronger than the impulse of Olympism, *and* the ethos of internationalism on which this ritual edifice had been built” (Rupprechte 636). National identity became increasingly defined by violent nationalism, the globalization of the world led to war on a global scale, and chivalry and sportsmanship were framed as justifications for the wholesale destruction of young men on all sides.

One telling example of Conan Doyle’s wish for athletic cooperation and awareness of its insufficiency is his experience in the International Road Competition

organized in 1912 by Prince Henry of Prussia, an automobile tour/race between British and German drivers, ostensibly designed to promote relations between the two countries. Conan Doyle, in his autobiography, reflects, “I came away from it with sinister forebodings” (*Memories and Adventures* 282), which he proves by saying that he immediately withdrew money from a firm in Berlin. The driving tour may have worked as a sports competition, prompting Conan Doyle to reflect on his own performance and points, it did nothing to promote cooperation between Germany and England. For one, the race was probably arranged by Prince Henry in order to spy on England, which Conan Doyle says he dismissed at the time, but acknowledged as probable in hindsight. What made Conan Doyle particularly uneasy, though, was the hostility of the Germans (though he also notes that the English were no less distrustful of the Germans). Conan Doyle draws careful distinctions between the ostensible purpose of the race—sportsmanship and cosmopolitan cooperation, the same as the Olympics—and the hyper-competitiveness of the Germans. Many of the Germans treated it as a race: “Some of the Germans seemed to me to be a little mad, for they seemed consumed by the idea that it was a race, whereas it mattered nothing who was at the head of the procession or who at the tail, so long as you did the allotted distance in the allotted time” (*Memories and Adventures* 307). He goes on to recount Germans cars forcing a British car off the road, which happened to be driven by a middle-weight boxer, who “kept his temper” or else there “might have been trouble” (307). While he acknowledges the mutual tension between the British and Germans, he highlights unsportsmanlike conduct particularly and records the end of the race as an example of chivalrous conduct and cooperation: “As to the contest itself it ended in a British victory, which was owing to the staunch way in which we helped each other when

in difficulties, while the Germans were more of a crowd of individuals than a team” (282). While Conan Doyle is certain simplifying events in order to favor the British over the Germans, he is doing so to highlight both the tensions that can result in athletics without sportsmanship (or chivalry). He also recounts this incident after World War I as an indication that the coming war with Germany, and the nationalist tensions that led up to the war, would do much to counter any possibility of national political unity outside of the spiritual.

World War I was shattering to the worldview Conan Doyle was trying to build. He wrote about the Great War in letters and the six-volume *The British Campaign in France and Flanders* (1916-20), and he again tried to volunteer as a soldier, but his attention increasingly turned to spiritualism even during World War I. Tellingly, his eldest son, Alleyne, named for the knight in *The White Company*, died in battle, after which Conan Doyle continued to his speaking engagement about spiritualism. The sportsmanlike soldier could no longer serve as his cosmopolitan ideal, but perhaps chivalry had a second life in the afterlife.

However, as noted in chapter 5, spiritualism was too entrenched in Victorianism to serve as a viable worldview for the twentieth century. While Conan Doyle could see the unsustainability of a military/athletic cosmopolitan worldview, he could not see that similar problems rested with spiritualism. His spiritualism asked of people what they did not want to give. In his worldview, all identities became subsumed under a holistic worldview that proclaimed to represent all, but only represented some. He noted imperial abuses and British male culpability in those abuses (as represented in the imperial villains discussed in chapter 2), but he did not question the British male’s right and responsibility

to rule those colonies. He formed a moral code of chivalry for British masculinity through responsible decadence (as discussed in chapters 3 and 4), but in transforming British masculine identity he did not allow for the subjectivity of the Others that these British men were responsible for protecting. Finally, while his spiritualist worldview allowed for the predominance of women and non-British, their viewpoints were ultimately subordinated to those of British men. Conan Doyle, then, is best understood as transitional, with one foot in the Victorian Era and one foot in the twentieth century, but unable to step away from Victorian assumptions and power structures.

As I've noted several times, Sherlock Holmes alone out of all Conan Doyle's creations has survived as a thoroughly modern character. Benedict Cumberbatch from BBC's *Sherlock* (2010-present) and Johnny Lee Miller from CBS's *Elementary* (2012-present) play thoroughly twenty-first-century Sherlock Holmes's, both grounded in Conan Doyle's Victorian detective and completely at home with twenty-first-century values. Even Basil Rathbone's Sherlock Holmes from the 1940s slips comfortably between 1895 and 1942, fighting Victorian criminals and Nazis with equal success. If Sherlock Holmes is so relevant to modern values, perhaps it is a mistake to completely discount Conan Doyle's other writings and their relevance to global cosmopolitan worldviews. Professor Challenger, while seemingly grounded in the imperial adventure story, anticipates the modern scientific explorer that we can find in, for instance, *Jurassic Park* (1994). Alleyne and Sir Nigel, while based in the nineteenth-century historical romances that have since fallen out of popularity, can be seen in light of the modern fantasy heroes like Harry Potter. These heroes, with their moral codes centered on preserving justice and pursuing scientific discovery, are still essentially relevant to our

modern construction of heroism. Likewise, Conan Doyle's cosmopolitan worldview—a construction based on civic responsibility, chivalrous treatment of everyone, and community despite ethnic/political/religious differences—can still be seen as relevant to the twenty-first century. Hopefully, as Conan Doyle's extensive literary output continues to be recovered, his cosmopolital worldview and its relevance will be recovered as well.

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