

Tigers in the Fog

The Foreign in Sherlock Holmes Adventures

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List of Abbreviations

To clarify citations, I have used and slightly adapted the system of abbreviations for each individual Sherlock Holmes story from Jann (706), originally from Jack Tracy, ed., *The Encyclopedia Sherlockiana, or a Universal Dictionary of the State of Knowledge of Sherlock Holmes and His Biographer, John H. Watson, M.D.* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1977). All story titles below have been edited to match how they appear in *The Complete Sherlock Holmes* (New York, Barnes & Noble, 2009).

ABBE: "The Abbey Grange"	MUSG: "The Musgrave Ritual"
BLAC: "Black Peter"	NAVA: "The Naval Treaty"
BLAN: "The Blanched Soldier"	NOBL: "The Noble Bachelor"
BLUE: "The Blue Carbuncle"	NORW: "The Norwood Builder"
BOSC: "The Boscombe Valley Mystery"	PRIO: "The Priory School"
BRUC: "The Bruce-Partington Plans"	REDC: "The Red Circle"
CARD: "The Cardboard Box"	REDH: "The Red-Headed League"
CHAS: "Charles Augustus Milverton"	REIG: "The Reigate Squire"
COPP: "Copper Beeches"	RESI: "The Resident Patient"
CREE: "The Creeping Man"	RETI: "The Retired Colourman"
CROO: "The Crooked Man"	SCAN: "A Scandal in Bohemia"
DANC: "The Dancing Men"	SECO: "The Second Stain"
DEVI: "The Devil's Foot"	SHOS: "Shoscombe Old Place"
DYIN: "The Dying Detective"	SIGN: <i>The Sign of the Four</i>
EMPT: "The Empty House"	SILV: "Silver Blaze"
ENGI: "The Engineer's Thumb"	SIXN: "The Six Napoleons"
FINA: "The Final Problem"	SOLI: "The Solitary Cyclist"
FIVE: "The Five Orange Pips"	SPEC: "The Speckled Band"
GLOR: "The <i>Gloria Scott</i> "	STUD: <i>A Study in Scarlet</i>
GOLD: "The Golden Pince-Nez"	SUSS: "The Sussex Vampire"
GREE: "The Greek Interpreter"	THOR: "Thor Bridge"
HOUN: <i>The Hound of the Baskervilles</i>	3GAB: "The Three Gables"
IDEN: "A Case of Identity"	3GAR: "The Three Garridebs"
ILLU: "The Illustrious Client"	3STU: "The Three Students"
LADY: "The Disappearance of Lady Frances Carfax"	TWIS: "The Man with the Twisted Lip"
LAST: "His Last Bow"	VALL: <i>The Valley of Fear</i>
LION: "The Lion's Mane"	VEIL: "The Veiled Lodger"
MAZA: "The Mazarin Stone"	WIST: "Wisteria Lodge"
MISS: "The Missing Three-Quarter"	YELL: "The Yellow Face"

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1. Introduction

Sherlock Holmes, of 221B Baker Street, is one of the most well known and beloved characters of late 19th and early 20th century fiction. His popularity has endured from novels and short stories to the stage, the cinema and the television screen. The “Great Detective”, with his iconic silhouette of a deerstalker hat and calabash pipe, has imprinted himself indelibly into the popular consciousness. He is a part of the cultural shorthand for Britain, as English as Big Ben, black cabs or red buses.

The milieu of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle’s stories, his darkly picturesque London with its endemic fog, hansom cabs and gaslight, was one of social and national unease. The end of the Victorian era and the dawning of the 20th century saw the British Empire renegotiating its position in the wider world. At the time of Sherlock Holmes’s debut adventure (*A Study in Scarlet*, 1887) the British Empire had already been buffeted by significant winds of change, and would continue to be so in the decades that followed. Already in the mid-1800s, the Indian Rebellion and the Chinese Opium Wars had presented the Empire with new challenges, and the effects of these and other colonial conflicts continued to be felt for the remainder of the century. Key elements of this colonial unease became building blocks of the Sherlock Holmes canon. The chaos of the 1857 Indian Mutiny – the “first Asian rebellion against the empire of the Europeans” (Schama 234) – sets in motion the events in the second Holmes novel, *The Sign of the Four* (1890). The Boer Wars (1880–1902) were another moment of collective trauma, casting doubt over the capabilities of the Empire and raising fears of the possible degeneration of its citizens (Brookes 264), which in turn led to the rising prominence of eugenics as the nation tried to understand and counteract what they perceived as its racial and cultural decay.

A recurring theme in Doyle's Holmes narratives is the arrival of people and ideas inwards into London, formerly the epicenter of the great outward push of colonialism. It is in this sense that London is first introduced in *A Study in Scarlet* (1887), described by Dr. Watson as "that great cesspool into which all the loungers and idlers of the Empire are irresistibly drained" (STUD, 4)¹. There is gentle irony in the phrase, for Watson himself, lately returned from India, is just such an idler, but there is truth lurking behind the jest. The cast of characters chronicled by Watson during his illustrious partnership with Sherlock Holmes are a motley sort, containing more than just the "idlers and loungers" the doctor describes. They include newcomers to England from all over the world, from American gangsters and Klansmen to South American revolutionaries, and a murderous native from the Andaman Isles. Many of those who return have brought something of the colonies with them, material or immaterial, that causes havoc when unleashed.

Anyone acquainted with the history of crime, cannot but be struck by the outlandishness of the cases solved by the great detective. With their exotic clients and suspects, and brilliant twists, they are a far cry from the fumbling and ineffective reality of period police work. Another aspect that becomes readily apparent is the problematic nature of these portrayals. Modern readers cannot help reacting differently to what were originally intended as rousing tales of heroism and adventure, because so many of them rely on attitudes and assumptions no longer acceptable in contemporary society. When faced with outright racism or Victorian pseudoscience about degenerate criminals, one's first instinct is simply to dismiss them as objectionable and leave it at that, but what I instead wish to do with this thesis is to look at the context in which these views arose. Why does Conan Doyle employ these stereotypes? What were some of the popular ideas about race among his readers and how do the adventures of Sherlock Holmes reflect them? Can

¹ All page references to the Holmes stories refer to *The Complete Sherlock Holmes* (New York, Barnes & Noble, 2009).

we understand some of the most openly distasteful encounters in the Holmesian canon better through understanding this context?

Any efforts to answer these questions must explore several avenues that all contributed to the Holmes adventures and the kinds of foreign characters and elements therein: the detective as a champion of the status quo, the struggles of a faltering imperial superpower, internal fears of degeneration, and an outward enemy that would thrust the country into a destructive war, all play a part in contributing to the composition of Conan Doyle's rogues gallery.

Firstly, as Rosemary Jann observes, Holmes was a reassuring figure for his contemporary readership, his quintessential acts of identifying and classifying people by their outward appearance instilling belief in the fixedness of social codes and conventions (Jann 685). In the turbulent times of his creation, Sherlock Holmes is the man standing in the doorway of the Empire, casting a judgmental eye on those who wish to enter and maintaining the prevailing status quo. By being able to reduce everyone in his survey into the "calculable man" of Foucault (Jann 687), Holmes is able to mollify contemporary anxieties about the social order: his elaborate observations of the bodies and manners of his fellow Englishmen "create the distinctions they purport to observe" (Jann 686–687). The Holmesian deduction, where exact details of a person can be construed from miniscule clues on his body and manners, is only possible in an age where rigidity of the social order was considered an unequivocal moral good.

Holmes is a fixed point in a changing age, to make use of his own description of Watson in "His Last Bow" (1917), reassuring the reading public that crime could be solved and understood with the methodical use of logic (Jann 705), even as they were reeling from the memory of the most infamously illogical crimes of the entire century, perpetrated in Whitechapel in 1888 by a man known only as "Jack". Holmes's reliably and securely

unchanging nature is what created the character's continuing endurance, as Christopher and Barbara Roden argue in their introduction to *The Complete Sherlock Holmes* (Conan Doyle xvi). In *Teller of Tales*, the biographer Daniel Stashower quotes a more poetical expression of the same sentiment, in the form of a stanza from "221B" by Vincent Starrett:

Here, though the world explode, these two survive,
And it is always eighteen ninety-five. (242)

Even after the First World War, when much of Europe did indeed explode, the tone of the stories stayed very much the same, though the same cannot necessarily be said of their quality (Stashower 406–407). The Holmesian criminal, however, is a much more elusive beast. In the various retellings and adaptations of Holmes for new and ever-changing audiences he is seldom transmitted to new formats in a recognizable shape.

Much of this is due to a changing sense of the nature of criminality. In the late Victorian age of empiricism and the scientific rationalism which the detective himself embodies, the criminal being discernible from "normal people" through his observable anatomical traits was a seductive idea. It was empowered by the publication of Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* (1859) and *The Descent of Man* (1871), which brought to popular attention not only the idea of evolution, but of Man's close relationship with lower animals, and, the most disconcerting of all, the possibility of *devolution*, of reverting to the primitive state from whence humans had ascended. Late 19th century criminal anthropologists like Havelock Ellis and Cesare Lombroso were keen to link criminality to biological degeneracy and atavism, thus overlapping and muddling the category with that of the savage. To be a savage was to be a criminal, or at least closer to such than ordinary, respectable folk, and to be a criminal was to be foreign and primitive. In defiance to Duncan's wisdom in *Macbeth*, the respectable scientific establishment was determined to find "the mind's construction in the face".

The socially and politically turbulent years of Conan Doyle's life also threw up another enduring image of foreigners into the public consciousness. As tensions mounted in Europe, Germany assumed the position of a bogeyman, a devious and ruthless enemy against whom England was to be inexorably matched. Unlike the nonpolitical foreign criminal, this enemy is portrayed as cunning, patient and dangerous, a true threat to not only honest, hard-working Englishmen, but the country itself, more and more so as the nation marched to war. This would culminate in the last story in the Holmesian chronology, "His Last Bow" (1917), where Holmes comes out of retirement to assist in the capture of a German spy and undermining his plots.

In addition to the geopolitical balance of power shifting during Holmes's "lifetime" in literature, there was also another change underway, no less dramatic, in the mind of his creator. Conan Doyle's deepening commitment to the cause of spiritualism put him more and more at odds with his rationalist creation who famously said that "no ghosts need apply" (SUSS, 992) at his Baker Street residence. At the same time, this crusade of the author's is probably responsible for much of the later work in the series, it was a well that he could always return in order to fund more esoteric pursuits. To that end, Holmes needed to remain where he was, in Starrett's eternal "eighteen ninety-five", to continue to be the popular character that could be relied on to generate income. Thus, by authorial intent, too, Holmes and Watson are liminal figures, existing at the borderlands between one age and the next.

Lastly, the difference between engaging in racist apologetics and merely attempting to place racist discourse into its proper historical context needs to be made clear. While some characters might be rendered slightly more palatable with knowledge of the elements that went into their making, my aim is not the rehabilitation of Conan Doyle's more problematic creations, for I do not see it as desirable or even possible.

With that caveat out of the way, let us first look at the stage on which many of the stories are set, Britain in the twilight years of the nineteenth century, and the changes taking place among its population.

2. Background

2.1. A nation of immigrants

Though nobody would have called it globalization or multiculturalism at the time, the England of Conan Doyle and his most famous creation was far from homogenous ethnically, culturally or religiously. What we would today call immigrants were present and at places numerous on every level of society, from abject poverty to the drawing-rooms of high society. Indeed, the latest in a long line of Hannoverian monarchs, the court of Victoria and Albert had a distinctly German air, a cause of some consternation to her subjects. Eventually, the crown of England being held by a German dynasty was a source of domestic tension powerful enough that it prompted George V to change the name of the royal house from Saxe-Coburg-Gotha to Windsor in 1917, following “a bit of discreet market testing” (Starkey xxxiv).

As they are today, questions of immigration and foreign labor were a constant source of political debate and public unrest. The idea of continental Europeans, Jews or colonials coming to England and competing for jobs with the native population is a fear that has remained in the popular consciousness into our present day. It is no surprise, then, that prejudices about the innately unclean, un-English or criminal nature of foreigners were rife. Foreign immigrants were dismissed as idlers and malingerers, their very presence construed as a threat and a dangerous example of “successful idleness” to working-class British subjects (Ackroyd 578). In actuality and in defiance to the stereotype, the

improvement of some districts can be traced to the influx of new Londoners, such as the “quiet, law-abiding and clean” Jewish streets in Whitechapel (Sugden 68).

The issue of immigration control was much discussed and agitated for on all levels of British society. Urbanization and industrialization were changing the nature of living and employment all across the land, and additional competition from foreigners moving to England in already tense times was seen as the last straw, and . The British Brothers’ League was an early 20th century activist organization formed to resist what was seen as uncontrolled immigration from Eastern Europe. Their history as an active organization appears to have been brief, their influence peaking during the passage of the restrictive Aliens Act in 1905. What makes this organization particularly interesting to us is that Conan Doyle apparently supported the Brothers’ League cause, at least enough to make a donation of ten and sixpence (Winder 264).

That there was a substantial classist element at work in British racism comes as a no surprise when discussing such an economically unequal society. An incidental though thematically apt illustration of this tendency at work is the career of one Michael Ostrog, a “Russian-born multi-pseudonymous thief and confidence trickster” (Arnold 225), whose unwilling claim to fame is to have been one of the three better known contemporary suspects in the Jack the Ripper murders. Ostrog’s actual criminal exploits were simply accomplished; he feigned respectable or even aristocratic antecedents to inveigle himself into polite society and to live at others’ expense, helping himself to any portable valuables on his way out. Using such outlandish identities as that of “Count Sobieski”, the exiled son of the late King of Poland (Sugden 427), Ostrog managed to charm and defraud his way into something of a comfortable lifestyle. How shocking, then, is to see his transformation – in a report on the Ripper suspects by Melville Macnaghten of Scotland Yard – into a “mad Russian doctor & a convict & unquestionably a homicidal maniac” (Sugden 379). In his short

history in public record, then, Ostrog occupies two stereotypes for foreigners, both equally fictitious: either the charming aristocrat-in-exile or the savage, bloodthirsty lunatic.

For feelings towards foreigners in England in the early 20th century, the Great War struck a devastating blow. Immigration legislation was tightened – an Aliens Restriction Act was passed a mere day after the declaration of war (Winder 264) – and anti-German sentiments rose to a fever pitch. For world opinion of the war and Germany, it was the sinking of the RMS Lusitania in 1915 that galvanized popular opinion against “the Hun”. For Conan Doyle, too, the tragedy must have struck a heavy blow, for he had predicted submarine war being used against England to devastating effect in a 1914 cautionary tale called “Danger!” (Stashower 299). For the public at large, the sinking of the Lusitania was an act beyond the pale in civilized warfare – parallels to the infamous events of 2001 are obvious – and they reacted violently, by smashing shop windows, and driving out neighbors suspected of being German spies. The rhetoric, espoused among others by the nationalist weekly *John Bull*, was harsh, calling for the complete extermination of the “unnatural beasts” and “human abortions”. In such a heated climate it is a wonder that not one German met their death at the hands of an angry mob (Winder 267–270)².

The sinking of the Lusitania is one occurrence where placing the blame for a traumatic event on foreigners was at least factually defensible, even if its expressions crossed the line into racist fear-mongering. In other cases, however, the foreign Other simply made for an easy scapegoat, which is what we will look at in the next section.

2.2. The criminal Other

When it came to the most infamous crimes of the nineteenth century, the Jack the Ripper murders of 1888, the English eagerly turned to a foreigner as an explanation for acts

² A footnote of the sorry affair, and a fitting expression of the self-defeating nature of violent nationalism to boot, is the fact that by 1917, the harassment of bakers, most of them German, by angry mobs recoiled back on the population by causing a shortage of bread. (Winder 271)

that seemed too beastly to comprehend: all seemed convinced that no Englishman could commit them (Sugden 302; 370). Many theories and suspects were circulated and debated first all over London and then the world, and even captured in contemporary broadsheet poetry:

Some say it was old Nick himself,
Or else a Russian Jew.
Some say it was a "cannibal" from the
Isle of Kickaiboo
Some say it must be Bashi-Bazouks,
Or else it's the Chinese
Come over to Whitechapel to commit
Such crimes as these. (Sugden 302–303)

Of this motley assortment, it was the Jews especially who came under suspicion. As a kind of a grisly overture, the murder of Miriam Angel in the East End in the previous year had provided much fuel for simplistic anti-Semitic sentiment. Unlike in the murders to come, here the case seemed simple enough, with one Israel Lipski being instantly arrested for the murder. Though the case against him was weak and his motives for murdering Angel with nitric acid and then apparently attempting suicide were contrived at best, Lipski had the bad fortune of belonging to a doubly suspicious category by being a working class Jew, and thus was eventually executed, though not without significant protest (Flanders 415–421).

The Jack the Ripper murders added one crucial ingredient to those already in evidence in the Lipski case. Like the murder of Miriam Angel, they took place in the East End among the ranks of the most desperately poor, but what made Jack the exception was his anonymity. With no suspect, arrest and trial, he became a blank canvas onto which society, then and since, has been able to project its own fears and beliefs. Faced with such an unspeakable crime, it is scarcely a wonder that contemporary modes of policing were simply not up to the task. As they had in the Lipski case a year before, anti-Jewish sentiments occasionally boiled over, the brutal characteristics and apparent taking of grisly

trophies by the murderer suggesting magical or ritualistic motivations. The unknown, in the form of Jewishness with its strange ceremonies and an alien language, was easily demonized, and together with the fact that the murders took place in an area frequented by many Jews, was enough to plant the seeds of doubt in the minds of many (Flanders 441-442).

It is possible that even the murderer wanted to pin the burden of guilt on foreigners. An infamous piece of wall graffiti, discovered on the night of Jack's infamous "double event" murders of Elizabeth Stride and Catherine Eddowes, proclaimed that "The Juwes are the men that will not be blamed for nothing". In Judith Flanders' opinion, morbidly gratifying to a student of Conan Doyle's work, the scrawl was "most likely" the work of an unscrupulous journalist possibly influenced by the "Rache" written in blood on the wall in *A Study in Scarlet* (Flanders 441). Others disagree with this too-good-to-be-true story of life imitating art, leaning towards the writing on the wall to have been the murderer's own proclamation after all (Sugden 254-256). Whatever its origin or intent, the writing was considered dangerous to the public order to the degree that it was more or less instantly expunged to avoid the rousing the ire of an anti-Semitic mob (Sugden 183-186). In a later reminiscence about the case Robert Anderson of Scotland Yard went as far as to blame the Yard's failure to bring the Ripper to justice on the reticence of the Jewish community not to betray one of their own to Gentile justice (Sugden 398)³. Though ultimately there is little evidence for the foreignness of Jack (Sugden 370-371), that he became a figure of horror, an inhuman and definitely un-British bogeyman is unquestionable.

³ As Sugden points out, however, the memoirs of Commissioner Anderson are notoriously unreliable, and seemingly motivated more by a desire to exonerate the Yard from any charge of incompetence than to dispassionately record the facts. Defending his belief that the murderer was Aaron Kosminski, a Jewish mental patient, since safely locked away in an asylum, Anderson went on to make a bold statement that would have well befitted Conan Doyle's officious inspectors Gregson and Lestrade, stating that "[d]espite the lucubrations of many an amateur 'Sherlock Holmes', there was no doubt whatever as to the identity of the criminal" (Sugden 399).

Even as victims of British criminals, foreigners could not always expect sympathy. The Glasgow socialite Madeleine Smith poisoned her French lover Pierre L'Angelier in 1857 in a case much sensationalized due to its extraordinary murderess, an architect's daughter. Faced with such an eminently respectable criminal, the press was all too keen to push the responsibility for the sordid affair on the shoulders of the deceased, focusing on the "un-British character" of the crime (Flanders 286) and absolving her of responsibility of the murder itself, if not for her dalliance with a suspicious character in the first place. The public opinion and a succession of muddled evidence went in Smith's favor in her trial, and the court returned a verdict of "not proven". The media prejudice against L'Angelier did not last, however, and the *Glasgow Herald* among others performed an effortless *volte-face*, bestowing on the man they formerly dubbed a blackguard and lothario the virtues of studiousness, amiability and the approval of his employers, appropriate for any member of his class (Flanders 286).

It was in the course of another criminal case, this one an infamous miscarriage of justice, that Conan Doyle himself tried his skills at Holmes's profession and came into contact with both crime and prejudice in the real world. The case of George Edalji, a young lawyer convicted on dubious evidence in 1903, of sending threatening letters and cattle mutilation, roused the activist spirit of the author. Though Edalji was released after three years of public outcry even before he took up the cause, Conan Doyle became a staunch advocate for his full exoneration, writing letters, employing experts and throwing the weight of his literary fame behind the effort. He was ultimately only partially successful: Edalji was pardoned, but not compensated for his imprisonment (Stashower 255–259). The story of George Edalji can be seen as an illustration of two competing impulses in the British attitude towards foreigners, on one hand a "racist reflex" of leaping to a snap judgment, and on the other, the ability and willingness of elements of the civilized society to combat

these prejudices (Winder 251). It also was this same racist reflex at play with the Jack the Ripper case, when it came to the famous graffiti, necessitating the destruction of potentially vital evidence to maintain public order.

Conan Doyle repeated his performance as an advocate for the unjustly wronged in the case of Oscar Slater, a German immigrant and a petty criminal charged with and convicted of the murder of Marion Gilchrist in 1908. As with Edalji, the evidence was dubious at best, and the police proved every bit as obstinate, much to Conan Doyle's dismay. In a *tour de force* demonstration of prejudice and ineffective policing, evidence was misinterpreted, key witnesses ignored and a police officer who presented crucial facts conducive to Slater's innocence was summarily dismissed from the police force. Despite the publication of Conan Doyle's *The Case for Oscar Slater* (1912) rousing new interest in the case, it would not be until 1928 that the conviction was overturned. (Stashower 262–264)

Whether the reticence of officialdom towards admitting any injustice in Slater's case was more to do with his being a foreigner than with him being a known criminal and of meager means is nebulous. Crucially, in the scientific and political atmosphere of *fin-de-siècle* England, the categories of criminal and foreigner were beginning to merge. In the eyes of many, poverty and crime were not economically driven states of being, but moral and genetic failings, the signs of physical and mental degeneracy and deviations from true, honest, hardworking Englishness.

2.3. Eugenics and atavism

The publication and elaboration of the Darwinian theory of evolution in the mid-1800s was a pivotal development not only in biology, but societal attitudes to race. Even before Darwinism stepped into the limelight, popular attitudes to race in humans had diverged from their Enlightenment roots. In response to unease brought along by the

inklings of revolution from among the lower downtrodden, classes and nationalities were starting to be seen as intrinsically unequal in value and capabilities by establishment-minded thinkers. As Brookes puts it in his biography of the Victorian polymath and eugenicist Francis Galton: “social hierarchies... were seen as a reflection of an underlying natural order” (Brookes 113), and so, supposedly dispassionate science was harnessed as a bulwark against any challenge to the status quo.

The Darwinian theory shocked intellectuals in Britain and beyond, but particularly energized Galton (Brookes 142). His principal idea would eventually be called eugenics, meaning the improvement of the human species by means of artificial selection. From a literary perspective, it is noteworthy that the idea captured the attention of several authors, such as George Bernard Shaw, who saw in “eugenic religion” nothing less than the salvation of humanity itself, and H.G. Wells, who callously wrote how “those swarms of black, and brown, and dirty white, and yellow people” should be driven to extinction before the white race (Marr 24–25)⁴.

The Darwinian coin also had a flip side. If humans had evolved from base ancestors (and by eugenics, could be made to evolve even higher), then surely they could also *devolve* back into those primitive ancestral forms? If genius was inheritable, as Galton firmly believed it to be, then so was its opposite. The identification of degenerates and deviants, especially those of a criminal sort, became a prolific field of study, criminal anthropology. This was headlined by the Italian social Darwinist Cesare Lombroso, who was convinced, based on physiognomic and psychological research, that the criminal formed an atavistic sub-race of humankind, who “reproduces in his person the ferocious instincts of primitive humanity and the inferior animals” (Brookes 209).

⁴ As Marr points out, Wells would disown these statements a few years later, but their vehemence is a good indicator of the gusto with which many of the great minds of the age took to the notion.

Lombroso's conclusions were summarized and built upon in Britain by Havelock Ellis's *The Criminal* (1890). In his book, Ellis compares and contrasts physical and mental characteristics primarily between three classes of persons, the "criminal," the "normal" and the "imbecile," and in almost every case finds some particulars of separation between them. Following the lead of Lombroso, Ellis subscribes to an atavistic theory of crime, where the criminal body is marked with "stigmata of degeneration" (Ellis, *passim*). Comparisons of "degenerate" criminal bodies to foreign or animal traits are commonplace:

This insensibility shows itself in disvulnerability, or rapid recovery from wounds, first pointed out by Benedikt, which appears to be a frequently observed phenomenon among criminals ... In this respect the instinctive criminal resembles the lower animals as well as the lower races of man; among the Egyptians, Chinese and Annamites, and other races, wounds heal much more rapidly than in Europe. (Ellis 125)

The constant comparison of criminal bodies to those of "the lower races of man" suggests that Ellis's intention to be objective and dispassionate, expressed in his reasons for the exclusion of the nebulous and changing category of "the political criminal" from his attention, is compromised by imperialist political considerations (Thomas 662–663). The same also occurs on the chapter on the intellectual and moral traits of criminals, with the involuntary impulse to steal and commit other crimes – what we today might term kleptomania – mentioned as endemic among "various lower races" (Ellis 181).

Taking each of Ellis's categories at face value, an image is formed of the criminal as a kind of deeply atavistic sub-human. What categories they are reported to excel at only reinforce the image of a loathsome, inhuman monster, such as criminals' "extraordinary and ape-like agility" and the prevalence of prehensile feet amongst them (Ellis 117). Ellis only grudgingly admits that not all criminals fall into the physically atavistic type. He sets apart examples of respectable-looking faces in prison as belonging to "the aristocracy of crime," a rare breed whose success at criminal pursuits relies on being able to present a

credible front, but even of those “the proportion of faces that will bear examination is by no means large” (Ellis 88).

The idea of criminals as a race unto themselves was also supported by the supposed uniformity of criminal appearance regardless of their nationality and some, such as Marro and Lombroso, took this idea even further, suggesting distinct physical expressions for different crimes (Ellis 89–90). Here the science of criminal anthropology makes way for the art of theatre, for the types presented are so vivid as to beggar belief: habitual murderers have “glassy, cold and fixed” eyes and beaked noses, sexual deviants are said to possess physical deformities, whereas forgers and poisoners Lombroso credits with an air of benevolence and *bonhomie* (Ellis 90).

Alongside the identification of criminals as a class or race of humanity, there also developed methods for the identification of criminal individuals. One of these was Alphonse Bertillon’s anthropometric system for the identification of criminals, which earned Sherlock Holmes’s “enthusiastic admiration” (NAVA, 430). This system, while remarkable, was eventually supplemented and superseded by another innovation, the practice of fingerprinting, as first popularized by Francis Galton’s landmark work, *Finger Prints* (1892), based on the earlier efforts by William Herschel and Henry Faulds (Brookes 249–250). This promising new method was swiftly made use of Conan Doyle in “The Norwood Builder” (1903), hot on the heels of the first English criminal conviction obtained by means of fingerprint evidence only the previous year (Flanders 465).

Though not as subject to generalizations and stereotyping as the Lombrosoan classifications of criminal types, these individual identifications of criminals were still biased by prejudice. Thomas furnishes several telling examples, of which Galton’s insistence on

seeing racial differentiations in fingerprints is perhaps the most damning⁵. Despite empirical data showing no such distinctions, Galton refused to let go of his belief that there was some subjective *je ne sais quoi* that he could use to discern between prints from members of different races (Thomas 666).

Galton's eugenical theories did not find an immediate audience, and it was not until British defeats in the Boer War started eroding public confidence in the imperial project that his views started garnering popular support. The Empire's poor performance in its most recent colonial war, together with the problems of rising urbanization (Brookes 264), fed a bogeyman of national degeneration that would serve as a catalyst of the rising popularity of eugenics among intellectuals and the general public. Degeneration, linked to city living and to close contact with cultures differing from the British country idyll, was also an overarching theme for much of contemporary fiction.

2.4. Fiction, race and the Empire

Exotic foreign characters and locations were a prolific theme for many of Conan Doyle's literary contemporaries and predecessors. One reason for this was the romance revival the 1880s, which was due to pushback against the "high realism" of the previous decade, which authors felt waded too deeply in the seamy side of life and failed to leave any room for the workings of Providence or an edifying moral message (Spencer 201–202). A feature of this new romance was its use of contemporary interests, such as exotic reaches of the Empire, the latest scientific theories and the simultaneous revival of occult belief (which would eventually reach Conan Doyle as well) (Spencer 203). Popular adventure stories concerned themselves with European protagonists exploring the foreign wilderness, often by conquering harsh terrain and ferocious beasts, in the vein of H. Rider Haggard's

⁵ Indeed, Galton's attention had turned to fingerprints not as a tool for criminal investigation, but because he was looking for ways to show "eminence" or good breeding, and thus eugenical desirability in some objective, measurable sign in the body (Brookes 252–253).

popular and influential *King Solomon's Mines* (1885). Other examples of the type include Conan Doyle's *The Lost World* (1912) and, perhaps the most famous example of the genre to modern readers, Edgar Rice Burroughs' Tarzan series (starting with *Tarzan of the Apes*, 1912).

Fundamentally, the adventure story appears as a celebration of colonialism, offering simplistic narratives where the civilized and the savage clash, and the innately superior white protagonists emerge triumphant. Though the novels as a rule avoided a realistic treatment of their topics, the scenes they painted still betrayed contemporary anxieties, and many influential adventure novels, such as Haggard's *She: A History of Adventure* (1886) also fall into a classification Patrick Brantlinger calls "Imperial Gothic". Its three hallmarks are the individual regression or "going native" of civilized characters, the invasion of civilization by barbarian outsiders, and the diminution of the opportunities for adventure in the modern world (Wynne, *The Colonial Conan Doyle* 10). In *She* for example, the colonized strives to become the colonizer, the otherworldly figure of She-Who-Must-Be-Obeyed wishes to rise to world domination. As we shall see in the next chapter, the villains in the Sherlock Holmes adventures also clearly embody at least two of the three telltale stigmata of Imperial Gothic: namely individual regression and the threat posed to civilization by outsiders.

With regard to Sherlock Holmes, the link to the adventure story genre is explicit and foregrounded – each Holmes story is labeled an "adventure" (Haynsworth 459) – but they are also influenced, Haynsworth contends, by the earlier genre of the sensation novel, concerned with shocking themes juxtaposed on a respectable English family setting, and it is this interplay between what she calls imperial and affective themes that gives the stories their power (460; 480). A key difference is also formed by traditional adventure stories having a strong gynophobic streak (Haynsworth 469), celebrating male heroes operating

near exclusively with in the company of other men, whereas Holmes narratives move much more comfortably in the traditionally female sphere of family, and the private and often embarrassing scandals hidden therein. We can see a similar interaction between themes in another example of a story where the foreign exotic comes crashing into British scenes of familial respectability: Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897).

Dracula's theme of a monstrous foreigner entering England lends itself to numerous critical interpretations; Arata sees in the novel an illustration of a faltering British empire under siege from a monstrous outsider, an idea very much in line with of imperial Gothic⁶. The vampire's bloodlust thus comes to signify both his physical and sensual hunger and the "warrior's desire for conquest" (Arata 630), both of which are putting Britain into peril. This reading, in turn, is contested by Viragh in his "Can the Vampire Speak? *Dracula* as Discourse on Cultural Extinction" (2013), where he posits that the count, far from being a credible threat to the British establishment, is "more like a refugee asserting the death of his identity" (Viragh 239), an immigrant whose attempts at assimilation are doomed to failure, ultimately stymied by the relentless pursuit of Van Helsing and his friends. The vampire hunters, in this respect, occupy a role similar to that of Holmes and Watson as detectors and repellers of foreign incursion. Even though *Dracula*, possibly uniquely for non-Western foreigners in Victorian fiction, can "pass" in English society (Arata 638-639), it is still not enough to escape the attention of the watchdogs of the Empire.

If even the vampire, whether he is the vigorous and masterful reverse-colonizer of Arata's, or the "culturally tragic figure" of Viragh's (242), is subject to being ferreted out and neutralized, then the true threat to Britishness must be looked for elsewhere. Offering a perhaps more credible vision of England under threat, invasion novels of the 1880s and 90s had the nation under siege by industrialized enemies from Europe or North America

⁶ This identification is not uncontroversial, as Wynne points out, arguing that Brantlinger's "imperial Gothic" is too broad a definition, and that its use to frame novels as expressions of specific imperial themes eclipses alternative readings (Wynne, *The Colonial Conan Doyle* 10).

(Arata 623-624). As we have already seen with *Danger!* Conan Doyle was no stranger to this kind of tale, turning more propagandist as the ghost of war loomed ever closer in the 1910s. Another prominent example of the type was Erskine Childers's *The Riddle of the Sands* (1903), whose plot features British protagonists foiling a secret German invasion plan (Black 212).

Another theme of suspicious and dangerous foreignness is the idea of the colonies as a venue for transformations and degenerative influences, a place where superior white Europeans are under threat. The archetypal example of this is Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1899), with its portrait of Kurtz, a European colonial agent said to be a cultured and many-talented man, whose experiences in the African wilderness have brought out a monstrous dark side (Elbarbary 116; 119). Though Conrad's story shares elements with gothic adventures like Haggard's *She*, it introduced a crucial difference into the formula of gothic adventure, in that Kurtz is a specifically European villain, and the darkness he brought to Africa was his own. Instead of confronting an external corruptive influence, Marlow, Conrad's protagonist, is "left looking into the ever-present darkness of his own heart" (Tabachnick 198). Compared to Conan Doyle's work, Conrad's ideas and the scathing critique of European colonialism that accompanied them feel much more modern, though a few Holmesian characters merit comparison to them, as we shall see in the next chapter.

Towards the end of his life, the father of eugenics himself, Francis Galton, also took up the novelistic pen to describe his own ideal of a utopian society. In an unpublished manuscript that only partly survives, he tells the story of Professor I. Donoghue, an explorer who comes across the peaceful community of "Kantsaywhere" and has to prove his worth in the eyes of the Eugenic College that rules over it. Though the end of the story has been lost, it is reasonable to assume, as Brookes does, that the intended outcome would have

been to raise Donoghue as one of the eugenic Übermenschen of Kantsaywhere and a role model for all Britons to follow (Brookes 289–290).

Late Victorian fiction embodied many different and sometimes even contradictory attitudes to the relationship of Britain and the wider world, which have all left their mark on the Sherlock Holmes adventures. From colonial tales of adventure and British supremacy to invasion novels pitting the island against continental foes, these influences can each be seen embodied in one or more Holmes narratives, as the next section with endeavor to show.

3. Analysis: The many faces of the foreign

The most common breed of criminality in the historical London of Holmes's day is the type the stories concern themselves with the least: the petty, everyday crime Conan Doyle and his contemporaries would have grown up living amongst. Holmes is instead particularly driven to take on cases that contain some feature of the exotic. An example of this can be seen in the beginning of the remarkable adventure of "The Yellow Face" (1893), where it is the monstrous face in the window that attracts the detective's attention to the case that he might otherwise dismiss entirely as beneath his notice (Cunningham 113–114).

Ever craving for more and more exotic fare, Holmes is frequently seen lamenting the lack of ambition and skill among the criminal world: "The London criminal is certainly a dull fellow," he remarks, "in the querulous voice of a sportsman whose game has failed him," at the start of one adventure, and continues with a poetical observation of the possibilities afforded to criminals by the London fog: "The thief or the murderer could roam London on such a day as the tiger does the jungle, unseen until he pounces, and then evident only to his victim" (BRUC, 874). The hunting metaphor is common throughout the series: "I knew not what wild beast we were about to hunt down in the dark jungle of criminal London,"

writes Watson in “The Empty House” (1903), describing the vocation of the Baker Street duo (EMPT, 458). That story ultimately culminates in the capture of just such a “tiger in the fog” that Holmes has been yearning for, in the person of Colonel Sebastian Moran⁷.

Like any hunter, Holmes is not satisfied with merely ordinary prey, being “only momentarily challenged by the machinations of such genetically programmed thugs” (Jann 700). The lure of the exotic quarry, the tiger in the fog, motivates him onward like it did the big game hunters and heroic adventure-story protagonists of his day. This reframing of the work of the detective as a hunt for exotic beasts combines two of the features of imperial Gothic: not only are Holmes and Watson engaged in combat against an invasive, subhuman force, but by casting their occupation into such an imperial frame of reference they are reacting to what Brantlinger called the diminution of opportunities for adventure, by creating colonial adventures anew in the streets of London.

The most dramatic example of the kind of exotic quarry Holmes particularly relishes is the figure of the savage, a sub-human endowed with some particular feature that sets them apart from ordinary respectable humanity. Another recurring theme is Englishmen who have been corrupted or who have willingly “gone native”, men who, like Kurtz in *Heart of Darkness*, have been embraced by the wilderness and, in Conrad’s own phrases, claimed by the powers of darkness as their own (Elbarbary 119). The third kind of foreignness and danger in the Holmes stories is the threat the foreign poses of the sacred Victorian institution of the home. After that, we turn our attention of the category of exceptional criminals I’ve called the mastermind, a creature who instead of being diminished by his degeneracy, transcends it. The final category of foreignness I wish to discuss is the recurring theme of the foreign agent, a cunning and dispassionate criminal acting in the interests of Britain’s continental enemies.

⁷ This capture is discussed in greater detail in section 3.4.

3.1. The throwback and the savage

Of all the elements in nineteenth century writing, few come across as immediately problematic to modern readers as descriptions of the savage. When it comes to crime fiction, it is also closely allied to the Lombrosoan idea of the criminal degenerate, and the Sherlock Holmes series is well furnished with examples of both of these dehumanized categories. Tonga, Jonathan Small's foreign accomplice in *The Sign of the Four*, is the earliest and most dramatic embodiment of contemporary prejudices about race.

Tonga has few real characteristics of his own, his savagery is the only noteworthy thing about him (Isokoski 40), and Watson is meticulous in pointing out how different this colonial creature is from respectable (English) humanity. Thus, we are informed that the native has a "great, misshapen head and a shock of tangled, disheveled hair", and a face that can "give a man a sleepless night" with "features marked with bestiality and cruelty" (SIGN, 122)⁸. Like Ellis's anthropologically measured criminals, Tonga also possesses extraordinary physical abilities that link him closer to the ranks of the lower animals than civilized humanity. Though Watson exclaims it to be "absolutely impossible" (SIGN, 96), Tonga can ascend sixty feet of sheer wall with no need for footholds. The physical traces he leaves behind are also singular, his footprints are "clear, well defined, perfectly formed, but scarce half the size of those of an ordinary man" (SIGN, 97), leading an astonished Watson to first suspect a child for the crime, and even momentarily discombobulating Holmes.

Mentally, too, Tonga is described in animalistic terms. He is never shown speaking or reasoning, and Jonathan Small tells how the native "took a kind of fancy to [him]" (SIGN, 138) after Small saved his life, and henceforth refused to be parted with his rescuer. Small characterizes his companion as being "staunch and true" and states "no man ever had a

⁸ The characterization of Tonga is supposedly rather inaccurate and unfair to the real inhabitants of the Andaman islands, whom one admirer of Conan Doyle's describes as being in reality "an amiable people" (Haynsworth 485), though in Darwin's *The Descent of Man*, mention is made of the "low and degraded inhabitants" (218) of that region.

more faithful mate" (SIGN, 138), undoubtedly positive characteristics, but as applicable to a faithful hound as a fellow human being. Small's description of Tonga murdering Bartholomew Sholto also shows the native as being deficient in his moral characteristics even by Small's criminal standards:

Tonga thought he had done something very clever in killing him, for when I came up by the rope I found him strutting about as proud as a peacock. Very much surprised was he when I made at him with the rope's end and cursed him for a little blood-thirsty imp. (SIGN, 139)

Like a wild animal, Tonga has acted without his master's consent. Though Small and the savage share some kind of a language – he mentions learning "a little of [Tonga's] lingo from him" (SIGN, 138) – the former convict cannot fully control his companion's bloodthirsty nature, even he's successfully used his other talents to his advantage. Tonga's misplaced "cleverness" only succeeds at putting the pair into greater jeopardy, and serves to justify his own death at the hands of the detectives.

As the responsibility for Sholto's murder is placed so squarely on Tonga's shoulders, the English criminal escapes some of its repercussions: it is Tonga's body, and not Small's, that ends up in the murky depths of the Thames after the detectives' nightly pursuit. The responsibility for the original theft of the Agra treasure and the murder of its guards is likewise not really Small's: the plan is presented to him by Abdullah Khan and Mahomet Singh, and he is persuaded to go along with it on pain of death. Ironically, it is only due to his Englishness that he even survives his encounter with the Indian conspirators, because his nationality lends him a kind of respectability and trustworthiness in Abdullah Khan's eyes:

The thing stands thus, Sahib, and I tell it to you because I know that an oath is binding upon a Feringhee, and that we may trust you. Had you been a lying Hindoo, though you had sworn by all the gods in their false temples, your blood would have been upon the knife, and your body in the water. But the Sikh knows the Englishman, and the Englishman knows the Sikh. (SIGN, 131)

Apparently Khan is willing to take Small into their confidence in a matter regarding a priceless fortune merely on the basis of his nationality, because Small's status as an Englishman automatically confers him a kind of respectability that their Hindu countrymen, considered duplicitous as a matter of course, could never attain.

Elsewhere in the Holmes canon, negative portrayals of Indians are likewise prevalent. In Watson's reminiscences of his Indian career that open the first chapter of *A Study in Scarlet*, the natives are almost an afterthought: "the murderous Ghazis" are merely a hostile feature of the landscape, no more narratively significant than the enteric fever that forces Watson's return to England (STUD, 3). It is scarcely a surprise that the stories most concerned with the Indian Mutiny, *The Sign of the Four* and "The Crooked Man" (1893) offer a rather one-sided description of events in that conflict, neglecting to mention any British actions or atrocities, and instead painting a lurid picture of savagery and "two hundred thousand black devils let loose" (Isokoski 40).

The Sign of the Four, in addition to a biased view of the Mutiny itself, also delegitimizes the institutions of India. The plot of the mystery concerns a fabulous treasure, stolen from an Indian rajah by Jonathan Small and three Sikhs, and in turn swindled from them by two British officers with whom Small had tried to cut a deal for his release from a penal colony. What is important from our perspective is the observation made by Isokoski that at no point does anyone concerned in the affair raise the possibility of returning the treasure to its rightful owner, the rajah (Isokoski 41). Holmes and Watson seem perfectly content to give it to the daughter of Captain Morstan, himself a man with no legitimate claim to it, merely on the basis of her social class and virtuous character compared to the other actors in the mystery. The outcome of the affair is more impartial than Holmes and Watson would desire, however (Isokoski 41-42). In a rare case of the detective being

denied satisfaction, the Agra treasure is irrevocably lost, swallowed into the mud of the Thames along with the body of Tonga.

In addition to colonial subjects, the same kind of dehumanizing epithets can also be applied to characters closer to home. One example is Steve Dixie in "The Three Gables" (1926), who is the victim of a period stereotype applied to black people in particular, the minstrel-show caricature. Dixie's very entrance at the Holmes's Baker Street lodgings is reported in terms that undermine his humanity. After first referring to a "visitor" entering the room, Watson immediately corrects himself: "If I had said that a mad bull had arrived it would give a clearer impression of what happened" (3GAB, 981). The thuggish behavior and physical intimidation which Dixie exhibits should by rights make for an intimidating figure, but this too is immediately undercut: due to his garish wardrobe, Watson remarks of him, "He would have been a comic figure if he had not been terrific" (3GAB, 981).

Watson's description of Dixie's appearance is scarcely an improvement from that which he gave of Tonga. Dixie is labeled a "savage", with a physiognomy to match: he is remarked on as having a "broad face and flattened nose" and "sullen dark eyes, with a smouldering gleam of malice in them"; his fist is a "knotted lump", his mouth "hideous" and even his way of moving is both "stealthy" and "unpleasant" (3GAB, 981). Like the dwarvish Andaman islander, Dixie is marked by his physical attributes in particular, as does his identification as a "bruiser" (3GAB, 981) and "prize-fighter" (3GAB, 985), suggestive of how the only use for such a brute of a man is for his animalistic prowess.

Unlike Tonga, though, Steve Dixie can speak and interact with Holmes and Watson. His purpose in the story is to come to threaten Holmes with violence on behalf of his employer, but with his characteristic composure, if an uncharacteristic measure of sarcasm, Holmes is able to turn the tables on the criminal. Unusually, Holmes accomplishes this end with a combination of his usual reasoning with regards to Dixie's past crimes, but also by

directly insulting the man. Dixie's response to this browbeating is hardly admirable: he is instantly cowed and assumes a deferential air, going so far as to "hope there ain't no hard feelin's about this 'ere visit" (3GAB, 982). These mental characteristics lead Holmes to describe Dixie in quite scathing terms:

But he is really rather a harmless fellow, a great muscular, foolish, blustering baby, and easily cowed, as you have seen. (3GAB, 982)

Dixie is reduced to infantilism in terms that would befit a great Victorian explorer describing a tribe in darkest Africa, or a racist Southerner describing his African-American countrymen⁹. The muscles and bluster of Dixie do not constitute a real threat because they are not backed with a matching intellect. Instead his intrusion at Baker Street only provides for a "comic interlude" (3GAB, 982), and like Tonga's "cleverness" in murdering Bartholomew Sholto, only impels Holmes to look more deeply at the affair under consideration, "for if it is worth anyone's while to take so much trouble, there must be something in it" (3GAB, 982). The savage's interactions with civilized humanity are, again, self-defeating.

Given the savagery of Holmes's verbal attacks on Dixie – "I won't ask you to sit down, for I do not like the smell of you," he quips (3GAB, 981) – the story has been seen as a deliberate attempt by Conan Doyle to rid himself of Holmes by deliberately putting readers off (Cunningham 123). However, given the deliberately buffoonish nature of Dixie's speech and dress – peppered as it is with the refrain of "Masser Holmes" – and the prevalence of sarcastic gibes in the story, Cunningham's alternative hypothesis that instead of trying specifically to express racist views, Conan Doyle was simply "going out of his way to be funny" (123) by drawing on the minstrel-show tradition is at least plausible. Given the difference between the portrayal of Dixie and Conan Doyle's own personal account of an

⁹ Cunningham includes an interesting parallel in the form of one defender of minstrel-shows classifying all black people as having peculiar names, being jealous of each other and enjoying music, dancing and fancy dress (123).

encounter with an African-American abolitionist, Henry Highland Garnet, during a voyage to Africa (Cunningham 120), Dixie is unlikely to be a mere expression of racism by the author¹⁰. In an attempt to reconcile the buffoonish and caricatured Steve Dixie with Conan Doyle's admiration of Garnet, Cunningham also makes the argument that Dixie was intended to be seen as influenced by and critical of the flamboyant black heavyweight boxer Jack Johnson, distinguished through "brawn and audacity" instead of Garnet's eloquence and learning (124). This interpretation would give the character another purpose in the story besides merely being a clownish figure, becoming a critique of black Americans thriving by appealing to savage stereotypes instead of applying themselves and being accepted by white society and intellectuals, like Garnet had been.

The case of the escaped convict Selden in *The Hound of the Baskervilles* (1902) presents an interesting counterpoint to the exotic savages we have looked at so far, and a parallel in terms of how he is dehumanized. His background is less exotic, but ultimately Selden is described in very similar terms to Tonga and Dixie. Though it is revealed that he is the brother of Mrs. Barrymore, Baskerville Hall's housekeeper, and that she and her husband have been endeavoring to keep him hidden, Selden is nonetheless portrayed as unrepentantly monstrous. The discovery of the Barrymores' secret amazes Watson, as if a trusty domestic servant having a disreputable family member were a thing utterly unthinkable: "Was it possible that this stolidly respectable person was of the same blood as one of the most notorious criminals in the country?" (HOUN, 688). Mrs. Barrymore's explanation of Selden's childhood emphasizes his commonplace origins, telling how he became a criminal from being too pampered in his childhood, acquiring wicked companions and finally, how "the devil entered into him" (HOUN, 688).

¹⁰ This surmise is also supported by Conan Doyle's earlier, more admirable stance on mixed-race marriage in the story of "The Yellow Face" (1893), which I will look at more closely in section 3.3.

Later, when Watson confronts Selden, it is by these devilish traits, not by any association to respectable humanity, that he is described. Selden has an “evil yellow face, a terrible animal face, all seamed and scored with vile passions” (HOUN, 690). Drawing upon his own earlier musings on the Neolithic inhabitants of the barren moors, Watson goes on to equate the murderer with the primitive past: “Foul with mire, with a bristling beard, and hung with matted hair, it might well have belonged to one of those old savages who dwelt in the burrows on the hill-sides” (HOUN, 690). Watson’s earlier reaction upon hearing of Selden’s escape, is phrased along similar lines: “Somewhere there, on that desolate plain, was lurking this fiendish man, hiding in a burrow like a wild beast, his heart full of malignancy against the whole race which had cast him out” (HOUN, 666). The criminal is explicitly called out as being subhuman, a throwback to an age of primordial savagery.

Like Tonga, Selden is denied a voice with which to express himself, and in his confrontation with Watson and Sir Henry he is described merely as uttering curses and inhuman shouts. With regard to his mental faculties, it is also revealed that the only reason Selden escaped the hangman was due to “some doubts as to his complete sanity” in light of the savagery of his crimes, which are characterized by “peculiar ferocity” and “wanton brutality” (HOUN, 666). Thus Selden is marked out with the telltale signs of a criminal mentality, making him the purest example of the Lombrosoan throwback in the series. By himself, he’s not enough to engage Holmes’s interest (as evidenced by Holmes’s indifference to having him brought to justice even though the detective knows his whereabouts on the moor), only serving as a minor feature of the larger overall mystery of the Hound of the Baskervilles.

Selden’s family background does grant him one indulgence other examples of the criminal savage are denied, though, since both Watson and Sir Henry Baskerville consent to the Barrymores’ plan of having him flee English justice by boarding a vessel bound for South

America. As it transpires, however, this is ultimately thwarted by Selden's death, fleeing from the infamous hound¹¹. Thus, the interests of justice seem to be served after all, and Watson even muses that though the convict's death was gruesome, "this man had at least deserved death by the laws of his country" (HOUN, 710). Watson's reporting of Mrs. Barrymore's reaction upon hearing of his death, however, is not untouched by sentimentality.

To all the world he was the man of violence, half animal and half demon; but to her he always remained the little willful boy of her own girlhood, the child who had clung to her hand. Evil indeed is the man who has not one woman to mourn him. (HOUN, 713)

By the presence of a family, and his sister's recollections of him, Selden is given a deeper personal background than most criminals in the canon. Watson's somber musings about the man who he thought of and treated as a savage monster do something to reclaim Selden from the race of savages into the ranks of civilized society, which is more than can be said about Tonga, his body lost in the murky depths of the Thames thousands of miles away from his kin and homeland.

Occurrences of the savage and the foreigner, though rare in the canon, are particularly striking to us given how strongly and vividly they reflect contemporary values. In Tonga, one can see a violent embodiment of Victorian racial attitudes, and in the story's ignoring of the original owner of the Agra treasure, the British colonial enterprise asserting its supremacy over India. Comparing Tonga with Steve Dixie, one can see a change in attitudes between the series' earliest and latest phases: the cannibal has been replaced by the prize-fighter, and though he is still met with disgust by the protagonists, and easily

¹¹ It's rather telling that Holmes chides Baskerville and Watson for allowing Barrymore to aid his brother-in-law during his flight. He even goes as far as to declare "I am not sure that as a conscientious detective my first duty is not to arrest the whole household. Watson's reports are most incriminating documents." (HOUN, 713). Considering Holmes' own disregard of the law when it is contrary to his purposes, these words stand out as particularly hypocritical.

thwarted by Holmes's intellect, his portrayal allows for slightly more nuance than the one-note condemnation of the irredeemably animalistic Tonga.

3.2. The degenerate aristocrat

Much more common than the savage in the adventures of Holmes is another colonial danger, emphasizing the corruptive effect of the foreign on respectable British bodies and minds. The colonies in Sherlock Holmes, argues Derek Longhurst, are characterized as scenes for "deviant acts of betrayal" (Isokoski 35), and this is reflected in the stories, where a colonial association or past more often than not bears relevance to the present mystery in England. Crucially, it is commonly the aristocrat – envisioned by contemporary thinkers as the highest breed of humanity (Brookes 209) – who is the most at risk from these contagious episodes, and the degenerated or otherwise compromised members of the upper or middle classes make for a substantial amount of Holmes's adversaries or other noteworthy encounters.

In addition to close association with inferior cultures bringing about degeneration, there is also a subtler threat to Britishness at play: the economical exploitation of the colonies presents a new method for the acquisition of respectable status, a *nouveau-riche* path to wealth at odds with the traditional social norms of Victorian England (Isokoski 36–37). This acquisitive attitude of the colonizer is put to words by Abdullah Khan in *The Sign of the Four*, as he is trying to persuade Jonathan Small to join in their conspiracy: "We only ask you to do that which your countrymen come to this land for. We ask you to be rich" (SIGN, 131). By its very nature, colonial activity comes across as a dishonorable pursuit.

There are numerous occasions of the aristocratic degenerate in the Holmesian canon, but an excellent exemplar of the type occurs in what Conan Doyle called his favorite Holmes story, "The Speckled Band" (1892). Its villain, Dr Grimesby Roylott is exceptional

due to his supposedly faultless pedigree as “the last survivor of one of the oldest Saxon families in England” (SPEC, 240), and his eminently trusted and respected occupation as a doctor – the only example of a criminal doctor in the Holmes canon (Isokoski 46). The unease caused by such a respectable figure harboring ill intent is foregrounded by Holmes himself: “When a doctor goes wrong he is the first of criminals. He has nerve and he has knowledge. Palmer and Pritchard were among the heads of their profession” (SPEC, 251)¹².

Angrily storming into Holmes’s lodgings, Roylott also has a singular physical presence. Watson describes him as being tall enough for his hat to brush the top of the doorway, and wide enough to span its full width. The threat of physical confrontation is intensified by Roylott furiously bending the fireplace poker out of shape as his final feat of intimidation. This physical prowess is contrasted with the doctor’s moral degeneracy, inscribed on his body in clear, Lombrosoan signs: his large, sunburned face is “marked with every evil passion” and his deep-set eyes and thin nose remind Watson of a “fierce old bird of prey” (SPEC, 245), the exact telltale mark of the “habitual homicide” according to Ellis (90).

Roylott’s case embodies the colonies as a degenerative influence, as “the evil in him stems from his connection with the East”, which has amplified his hereditary violent temper and brought out the worst in him (Favor 399–400). In addition to this, he has also become “subsumed within the Orient” (Isokoski 47) by adopting its outward trappings in the form of the exotic animals he keeps or the Turkish cigars he enjoys. The attempt by Holmes to frame even Roylott’s method of murder, the use of undetectable poison, as “just such an [idea] as would occur to a clever and ruthless man who had had an Eastern training” (SPEC, 253) is less convincing: the specifics of his crime are unique and link to the Empire, but such poisonings were not uncommon in the annals of English crime. Indeed, the topic of “Middle-class Poisoners” makes up an entire chapter of Judith Flanders’ Victorian crime

¹² As Flanders points out, the assertion made by Holmes here is far from true for the medical credentials of either man (Flanders 267), but it reflects a contemporary fear of the murderous physician.

history, *The Invention of Murder*. In those seventy-odd pages of case histories, there are several of particular notoriety, such as that of the villainous doctor William Palmer, who was executed in 1865. Murder by means of undetectable poison for monetary gain was by no means a crime that required any special association with the East, as Holmes claims. Instead the exotification of the poisoner's methodology perhaps rendered the sordid business of poisoning more palatable for Conan Doyle's middle-class readers¹³. The use of a venomous snake as the instrument of death is also rich in ambivalent symbolism, a topic addressed in great detail by Wynne (*The Colonial Conan Doyle* 115–130).

The stories also touch upon a more physical agent of corruption: trade in opium and cocaine, both products of European colonial exploits¹⁴. The degeneracy it could bestow upon a respectable subject is illustrated in the opening pages of "The Man with the Twisted Lip" (1891). The description of Watson's addict friend, Isa Whitney, is particularly evocative of the kind of physical and moral decay contemporary authorities ascribed to users of the drug:

He found, as so many more have done, that the practice is easier to attain than to get rid of, and for many years he continued to be a slave to the drug, and object of mingled horror and pity to his friends and relatives. I can see him now, with yellow, pasty face, drooping lids and pin-point pupils, all huddled in a chair, the wreck and ruin of a noble man. (TWIS, 211)

The short passage illustrates the effects of the practice of opium-smoking: aside from the telltale physical signs which Watson enumerates, there is also a social dimension. The reaction of "mingled horror and pity" of Isa Whitney's friends and relations, and terming addiction as "slavery" speak of the subversive and degenerative potential of the drug, which can so ruin English nobility and manhood. The opium den where Watson finds

¹³ The use of exotic venom was also a practical necessity, since by the time the story was written strychnine in particular had achieved widespread notoriety. Formerly all but undetectable in poisoning cases, by the time the Holmes series came to be written, its symptoms were familiar enough to medical professionals, including Watson in *The Sign of the Four* (Flanders 267-268).

¹⁴ And they were extraordinarily profitable products too. Pound-for-pound, opium was the most lucrative trade product within the Empire, and in 1851, the year of the Great Exhibition, it made up 40% of India's exports (Schama 242).

Whitney, in a dingy alley near the dockyards, is a scene where the foreign and the exotic hold sway over such degenerate Englishmen. Upon entering this dimly lit world of corruption, Watson is met with scenes of English addicts submitting to the slavery of opium: a “glimpse of bodies lying in strange fantastic poses” or “here and there a dark, lack-lustre eye” (TWIS, 212). In this twilight world, a part of England has been conquered by the alien. Despite the imperial associations of the opium trade, its vendors here are foreigners: the “sallow Malay attendant” encountered by Watson, and the “rascally Lascar” described by Holmes (TWIS, 213–214).

Watson’s description of Whitney’s addiction is remarkable, too, in being so dissimilar to his more famous description of Holmes’s drug habit. The detective, a habitual user of cocaine and morphine, retains the full use of his faculties despite Watson’s concern over the potential for lasting damage in the opening pages of *The Sign of the Four*. This concern reflects the attitude of contemporary authorities, whose earlier enthusiasm for the drug was turning into distaste (Keep & Randall 209). Unlike Whitney, Holmes is not simply a passive, pitiable “wreck and ruin,” but speaks out in response to his friend’s critique in an oft-quoted passage:

“My mind,” he said, “rebels at stagnation. Give me problems, give me work, give me the most abstruse cryptogram or the most intricate analysis, and I am in my proper atmosphere. I can dispense then with artificial stimulants. But I abhor the dull routine of existence. I crave for mental exaltation. That is why I have chosen my own particular profession, or rather created it, for I am the only one in the world.” (SIGN, 76)

For Holmes, drug addiction is not a problem or a sign of weakness, but a solution to his true problem, an obsessive need to keep himself occupied. In an industrious and industrial society where many considered hard work an absolute moral good – such as Thomas Carlyle’s definition of work as purification (Keep & Randall 210–211) – Holmes has gone one step further than most and created his own vocation, engaging himself passionately in work that many do not consider work at all. Though there’s something

pathological about Holmes's relentless pursuit to keep himself occupied, his drug habit has not reduced him to Whitney's lamentable state.

Later on in the series, in "The Missing Three-Quarter" (1904), Watson is said to have weaned him off his use of artificial stimulants in lieu of work, but even that is said to be a potentially temporary thing: "the fiend was not dead but sleeping, and I have known that the sleep was a light one" (MISS, 589). Despite Watson's fears, Holmes's mastery over the specter of narcotics can be seen in the very opium den which Watson visits in search of Whitney. As Watson's discovery of his friend disguised among the reprobates in the club shows, the detective can counterfeit the bodily signs of the addict when required, and with equal ease, discard them.

His form had filled out, his wrinkles were gone, the dull eyes had regained their fire, and there, sitting by the fire and grinning at my surprise, was none other than Sherlock Holmes. He made a slight motion to me to approach him, and instantly, as he turned his face half round to the company once more, subsided into a doddering, loose-lipped senility. (TWIS, 213)

The consummate master of disguises and observer of degenerate bodies, then, can feign the degeneracy that has all but ruined Isa Whitney. Significantly, Holmes's masquerade as an opium addict is not the only instance of feigned degeneracy in the story. Another is presented in the person of Hugh Boone, the disfigured beggar. His "repulsive ugliness" (TWIS, 223) becomes all the more shocking at the mystery's climax, when it is revealed that the filthy, disheveled figure is nothing but a counterfeit himself. With the quick application of a sponge, Holmes expunges the filthy degenerate and leaves in his place a "pale, sad-faced, refined-looking man" (TWIS, 223). Instead of having been violently murdered, as Holmes feared at the story's outset, Neville St. Clair has in fact been making a living in the trade of beggary by assuming the persona of a degenerate, examples of which have also recorded in the annals of London, possibly even inspired by this very tale (Ackroyd 231–232). The story ends amiably with Neville St. Clair rejoining his family, but

this has a cost: Hugh Boone must disappear. Though no real crime has been committed by the charade, Inspector Bradstreet insists that the false mendicant not be allowed to continue. Like the colonial adventurers whose acquisitions abroad allow them to circumvent the traditional paths to respectability, St. Clair's ingenious ruse has enriched him unjustly.

The theme of unmasking continues in the late Holmes story of "The Blanched Soldier" (1926), where the dread infection of leprosy, unwittingly contracted in Africa, is enough to force a blameless English gentleman into hiding from society. The afflicted man, Godfrey Emsworth, belongs to the British colonial machinery by his rank as a soldier and deployment in the Boer Wars. Unlike the many less savory examples of colonial degeneration, Emsworth is described by his comrade Dodd as morally uncorrupted: there was "no finer lad in the regiment" in his estimation (BLAN, 959). His physically metamorphosed state, too, shows elements of upstanding Englishness shining through:

One could see that he *had indeed been a handsome man* with clear-cut features sunburned by an African sun, but mottled in patches over this darker surface were curious whitish patches which had bleached his skin. (BLAN, 967, emphasis mine)

Holmes's words are suggestive: the fine lad that Emsworth was has now been turned into something other than handsome, and perhaps something other than a man, too. This is the same theme as can be seen in Emsworth's own description of the lepers he saw in Africa: "Not one of them was a normal human being. Every one was twisted or swollen or disfigured in some strange way" (BLAN, 968). The fact, pointed out by Edmond, that the lepers aren't African but rather Boer, both underscores the conflict between two colonial powers (Edmond 513-514) and acts as a frightful prophecy-in-the-flesh of the fate that's awaiting Emsworth. The intimate closeness of the leper is presented as a source of mortal peril: upon discovering the Englishman in one of his beds, the leper hospital's administrator tells him "you are in far greater danger here than ever you were in the battlefield" (BLAN,

968). A bullet, it seems, can only kill you, but the touch of a leper can turn a man into what Emsworth calls a “strange monstrosity” (BLAN, 968).

The English spirit of Godfrey Emsworth, however, turns out to be more resistant to the contagious touch of the colonies than he believes: Holmes has brought along an expert who reveals that the young man is in fact suffering from a treatable case of ichthyosis instead of the incurable scourge of leprosy. In constructing such a bait-and-switch ending, Conan Doyle gets to both play with the idea of the leper as a fearsome outcast of society, and exempt his noble Englishman, blameless as he is, from the fate of the “monstrosities” he encountered in Africa. In first identifying and then banishing the specter of leprosy in the story, Sherlock Holmes again functions as a detector and controller of foreign influences as he did in the case of the Agra treasure in *The Sign of the Four* (Isokoski 41). Emsworth’s occupation also casts the resolution as Holmes soothing over a national trauma of imperial conflict, recovering a soldier from “the haunted house of war” (Wynne, *Sherlock Holmes and the Problems of War* 49). The story’s victory over the corruptive force of leprosy, though, is made incomplete by its reliance on a key moment of uncertainty: that Emsworth’s disease is not leprosy after all, which is beyond Holmes’s ability ascertain. “Medical science,” as Edmond concludes, “can allay some of the phobias of colonialism, [but] it is helpless when faced with real infection” (Edmond 515).

A more gruesome moment of unmasking of a dehumanized face takes place in “The Veiled Lodger” (1927). There, the foreign agent of transformation is also present, but in a more savage guise: a lion has mauled an adulterous wife who, together with her lover, had plotted to murder her husband, the owner of a circus. A part of the couple’s plot had been to mask their bloody deed as a lion attack, and so the beast inflicts a kind of karmic justice on Mrs. Ronder by turning on her. She survived, but as proved by Watson’s description of

her face when she removes her veil, Mrs. Ronder has, like the African lepers, become a monstrosity, made even more terrible by the presence of traces of her original beauty:

It was horrible. No words can describe the framework of a face when the face itself is gone. Two living and beautiful brown eyes looking sadly out from that grisly ruin did but to make the view more awful. Holmes held up his hand in a gesture of pity and protest, and we left the room. (VEIL, 1057)

Unlike Godfrey Emsworth's blanched face, Mrs. Ronder's inhuman condition cannot be alleviated or explained away. Incidentally, Holmes does not detect in the story; with regard to Mrs. Ronder, he and Watson are present merely as witnesses to her confession. Reflecting this story back to Leslie Haynsworth's point about the interplay of the affective and imperial themes being the main dichotomy of the Holmes stories in general, it becomes apparent that something is missing. The adventure of the veiled lodger is not really an adventure, since what little plot it has unfolds with through no action from its main characters, and neither is the story satisfactory as a "sensation story," as it lacks the key element of grounding its ghastly happenings into a respectable, relatable family context. Bereft of any human relationships and even a human face and identity, the lodger is a lone anomaly for whom Sherlock Holmes can do nothing. Indeed, his only real action in the story is to advise against her killing herself, perpetuating her lamentable condition by telling her "Your life is not your own" (VEIL, 1057). Mrs. Ronder's crime has permanently othered her from the ranks of humanity to the point that her continued existence is forced to serve the interests of others, as an "example of patient suffering" to "an impatient world" (VEIL, 1057).

Professor Presbury, in "The Creeping Man" (1923), represents an extreme case of the noble, aristocratic character being utterly transformed into a lower, animal state. In this story the fears of degeneration and atavism are brought to an incredible conclusion¹⁵ when the respectable professor is shown to have devolved into an apelike state. As is the case

¹⁵ So much so that the story has been excoriated and all but disowned by Conan Doyle aficionados over the years.

with Mrs. Ronder's abhorrent face, the transformation of the Englishman into a savage is the consequence of a deliberate misdeed. Though the professor is not a criminal, he is guilty of a social *faux pas*, in that he's an elderly man who has scandalously married a young woman.

The method of Presbury's degeneration is what lends the story its rather peculiar air and unfavorable reputation among fans of Holmes. At the end of the story it is discovered that Presbury has been taking a "wondrous strength-giving serum" (CREE, 1038) concocted by Doctor Lowenstein of Prague, who creates it from an extract from a langur monkey. Under its influence, the professor is shown as having been wholly devolved into a base form:

The Professor was clearly visible crouching at the foot of the ivy-covered wall. As we watched him he suddenly began with incredible agility to ascend it. From branch to branch he sprang, sure of foot and firm of grasp, climbing apparently in mere joy at his own powers, with no definite object in view. ... In all our adventures I do not know that I have seen a more strange sight than this impassive and still dignified figure crouching froglike upon the ground and goading to a wilder exhibition of passion the maddened hound, which ramped and raged in front of him, by all manner of ingenious and calculated cruelty. (CREE, 1037)

Lowenstein's elixir has given the professor inhuman agility which calls to mind the similar prowess exhibited by the savage Tonga in *The Sign of the Four*, who likewise could ascend the wall of a house with little difficulty. That the increased physical ability has come at a cost to Presbury's mental faculties, however, can be seen in Watson's description of him lacking any purpose or design in his feats of strength, but purposelessly reveling in his abilities. What renders Presbury's transformation sinister, however, is his mistreatment of his own dog and the "ingenious and calculated cruelty" he uses to senselessly torture it. Rendering the savagery and immorality of the transformed professor even stranger is his outward aspect, that despite his extraordinary actions and animal mentality, Watson describes him as "impassive and still dignified". As with Godfrey Emsworth's transformed

body bearing signs of his previous good looks or Mrs. Ronder's beautiful eyes staring out of her marred face, the degenerate here still retains some admirable qualities. In his final summation of the events, Holmes separates the animal from the respectable, and absolves the professor from the responsibility for the actions of the former: "It was the monkey, not the professor, whom Roy attacked, just as it was the monkey who teased Roy" (CREE, 1039).

Though Presbury's metamorphosis has a relatively benign motive, Holmes censures the professor for his intention of overcoming his natural frailties:

"The real source," said Holmes, "lies, of course, in that untimely love affair which gave our impetuous professor the idea that he could only gain his wish by turning himself into a younger man. When one tries to rise above Nature one is liable to fall below it. The highest type of man may revert to the animal if he leaves the straight road of destiny." (CREE, 1038-1039)

Here the physical degeneration of Presbury under the effects of Lowenstein's serum is explicitly linked with base carnal desires. That the professor's courtship of Alice Morphy is seen as "untimely" and results in such a calamity are indications of how the upper classes were expected to behave: civilized men of high status, the "highest type of man", had no business falling in love with young ladies. Deviation from social norms of acceptable courtship results in the unleashing of a savage, pre-human monster inside Presbury.

Unlike with other stories, the agent of degeneration arises from the supposedly respectable field of medical science. However, Lowenstein is both a foreigner and an outcast in his own profession for his refusal to share the secrets of his miracle treatment, and as such doubly suspicious. His discovery of the serum is unequivocally condemned by Holmes, who considers it a "very real danger to humanity" (CREE, 1039) that persons of an undesirable sort could so use scientific means to circumvent the natural order of things, a development he calls "The survival of the least fit" (CREE, 1039). Foreign degeneration,

therefore, would here threaten the course of life and death itself, were it not for Holmes' timely intervention.

From the far-reaching consequences of Lowenstein's miracle serum to the personal, private horror of the fear of leprosy or slavery to opium, the notion of degeneration is a constant thread running the length and breadth of the adventures. Professor Presbury's transformation into his simian aspect is also noteworthy as it leads us towards our next topic. In revealing and putting an end to Presbury's drug-induced wanderings, Holmes forces him back to the appropriate role for an elderly father of the family, which his unseemly desires for Alice Morphy displaced him from. In the next section, we will look more deeply at cases where foreignness similarly disrupts British family life, and at Holmes's role in rectifying these situations.

3.3. The foreign and the domestic

As some of the examples above have already indicated, foreignness and degeneration in the Holmes adventures often pose a threat to respectable folk in the domestic sphere. For the Victorians the home, as "the temple of a new religion" (Spencer 205) was a space of tremendous cultural importance entrusted to the care of the woman in her guise of the Angel in the House, and foreign or foreign-influenced femininity is the unifying characteristic that sets the examples in this section apart from all other occasions under my purview.

Upsetting the ideal of the English home by marrying into foreign blood is the most striking threat to the English family, and miscegenation is the theme of a few noteworthy adventures. The story of "The Yellow Face" (1893) is famous for its sympathetic portrayal of just such a marriage, and the seeming didactic purpose of the narrative is so strong it undermines its detective-story credentials (Cunningham 113). Strikingly, in order to explain the appearance of a terrifying yellow face in the window of Grant Munro's neighbor, and

his wife's mysterious connection with that face, Holmes presents a theory of the case that's incorrect in every particular:

The facts, as I read them, are something like this: This woman was married in America. Her husband developed some hateful qualities; or shall we say that he contracted some loathsome disease, and became a leper or an imbecile. (YELL, 335)

Just like the yellow face in the window, the monstrous, possibly deformed husband Holmes posits into existence is nothing more than a fiction based on appearances. Holmes builds his case to "cover all the facts" (YELL, 336), inventing a disfigured American blackmailer to explain for Mrs. Munro's silence and secretiveness, and in so doing falls foul of the kind of "racist reflex" described by Winder (251).

Following Holmes's "ritual unmasking" (Edmond 515) of the yellow face – and its literal unmasking as well – two real faces are revealed. The wearer of the mask is demystified and rendered benign: the unearthly, impassive visage that had caused Watson moments earlier to react with "surprise and horror" (YELL, 337) is transformed into that most harmless human figure, the laughing child¹⁶. The other revealed visage, that of Mrs. Munro's dead husband in the picture inside her locket, is described in tones of somewhat qualified admiration by Watson, as "a man strikingly handsome and intelligent-looking, but bearing unmistakable signs upon his features of his African descent" (YELL, 337). The contrast between these black faces and that of Steve Dixie could not be clearer. Both the late John Hebron and his daughter are presented to the reader in such favorable tones and following such terrifying false images (the yellow face and Holmes's fictitious blackmailer) that the reader's sympathies cannot but help to be aroused (Cunningham 120).

Even when he errs, though, the great detective does, at least, recognize his limitations. Of his blackmailing-husband theory, Holmes says to Watson "When new facts

¹⁶ The transformation of the extraordinary to the mundane is not complete. In Watson's description of Lucy, she is multiply labeled with colored terms, a "coal-black negress" (YELL, 337), underscoring her otherness.

come to our knowledge which cannot be covered by it, it will be time enough to reconsider it" (YELL, 336), and in so doing leaves himself open, at least, to that other half of Winder's conceptions of instinctive racism: the possibility of overturning prejudice (Winder 251). Holmes's final instruction to Watson, to remind him of the Norbury affair whenever he gets too complacent (YELL, 338), seems to illustrate just this kind of mechanism at play.

In another case related to a mixed-race marriage, it is not Holmes but his client who jumps to racist conclusions. "The Sussex Vampire" (1924), with its image of a monstrous foreign woman sucking the blood of an infant in a horrifying perversion of motherly ideals, brings to mind echoes of the Edalji case, where the senseless and bloody crime of cattle mutilation was pinned on an otherwise respectable foreigner. The evidence against Mr. Ferguson's South American wife, the titular "vampire," is stronger than that levied against George Edalji and her exoneration is in turn much more absolute. The case for vampirism, so persuasive to Holmes's initial correspondent the family lawyer, and even to the accused woman's husband, is rejected out of hand:

Rubbish, Watson, rubbish! What have we to do with walking corpses who can only be held in their grave by stakes driven through their hearts? It's pure lunacy. (...) But are we to give serious attention to such things? This agency stands flat-footed upon the ground and there it must remain. The world is big enough for us. No ghosts need apply. (SUSS, 992)

The idea of a vampire living in a respectable English household is a prejudice too far for the consummate man of reason. One of the reasons he can state his disbelief with such vehemence is geographical: Sussex is too firmly British to host such an abomination (Wynne, *The Colonial Conan Doyle* 73)¹⁷. It is ultimately revealed that Holmes has in fact formed a hypothesis of the case, eventually proven correct, even before he's left his office (SUSS, 1000).

¹⁷ Stashower makes a similar point, noting that the story's title "deflated any pretense of the unknown" (Stashower 408). The firmness of Holmes's materialism is particularly noteworthy as the story was written at the final years of the series, when Conan Doyle was trying to put Holmes behind him and focus on his spiritualist pursuits.

The terrible vampire turns out to be no such thing: Mrs. Ferguson's seemingly monstrous actions are given a rational motivation: she was sucking the venom from her child's wounds, inflicted by her jealous stepson by a South American poison dart. Her not protesting her innocence or explaining the true state of affairs without Holmes's intervention is likewise given the strongest possible motive in her overwhelming love for her husband and her desire to shield him from the truth. The suspicious foreigner is thus transformed into a virtuous figure of Victorian womanhood, rendering her acceptable in British society.

Young Jack Ferguson, the would-be murderer, is motivated, according to Holmes, by the mixture of an obsessive love for his father and late mother, and a hatred of the new baby "whose health and beauty are a contrast to his own weakness" (SUSS, 1000). His act is also readable in more symbolic terms, as the enfeebled offspring of an English household lashing out against a more vigorous strain of his own family who has dared to commit the sin of miscegenation. As often happens in the Holmes adventures, official justice is not called down upon Jack Ferguson, but instead Holmes takes on the mantle of a judge: "I think a year at sea would be my prescription for Master Jacky" (SUSS, 1001). Whatever else he might be, Jack is still a member of a respectable British family and this *de facto* sentence of transportation would spare his family the indignity of court proceedings. That Holmes gives the sentence a definite length also seems to indicate that Jack is still redeemable, that his hateful reaction to the otherness of his half-brother is capable of being overcome¹⁸.

Mrs. Ferguson is proved innocent, but the dramatic events of "Thor Bridge" (1922) cast a more uneasy eye over the notion of mixed marriages. In the story, the Brazilian wife of Neil Gibson, an American gentleman, is discovered to have committed suicide with the

¹⁸ This also goes together with the tendency in the Holmes canon for upper-class characters to both resist the exposure of their secrets, and to evade the penalties for their actions under the criminal justice system (Jann 687; 700). In the end of one adventure, Watson puts the matter rather euphemistically: "[W]hen an object is good and a client sufficiently illustrious, even the rigid British law becomes human and elastic" (ILLU, 958).

intent of framing Ms. Dunbar, the family governess, with her murder. Mrs. Gibson's motivation of this extraordinary act is revealed to be her unhappiness being married to a man who did not love her, and her jealousy toward the governess, to whom her husband was attracted. From her first description, provided by Bates, Gibson's estate manager, the picture provided to the reader of Maria Gibson emphasizes her foreignness and the unsuitability of her marriage:

Tropical by birth and tropical by nature. A child of sun and of passion. She had loved him as such women can love, but when her own physical charms had faded – I am told they once were great – there was nothing to hold him. (THOR, 1014)

Neil Gibson himself also agrees with this assessment; he says his wife possesses a “deep rich nature, too, passionate, wholehearted, tropical, ill-balanced, very different from the American women whom [he] had known” but that as he grew older he came to realize he had “absolutely nothing” in common with his wife (THOR, 1017). Despite this, she still loved him fervently, which he attempted to dissuade by his ill-treatment of her, while at the same time becoming infatuated with Grace Dunbar.

The descriptions of the mentalities of the two women in the drama could not be more different. Neil Gibson describes his wife's mental state in deeply dehumanizing terms: “She was crazy with hatred and the heat of the Amazon was always in her blood” (THOR, 1018). Grace Dunbar, on the other hand, adheres much more closely to the angelic ideal of Victorian womanhood; Gibson tells Holmes she spurned all of his advances, and chose to remain in his household in order to influence Gibson to use his wealth and influence towards more humanitarian ends¹⁹.

As in the previous cases falling into this category, Holmes' intervention leads to the restoration of an ideal family. Though Maria Gibson's suicide erases her direct presence

¹⁹ A quote from Spencer seems particularly apt to describe her: “Woman, as the Angel in the House, was to save Man from his own baser instincts and lead him toward heaven” (Spencer 205). Though Dunbar is not yet married to Gibson in this point of the story, she has already assumed the wife's role as the moral compass for her partner.

from the household, the detective's presence is still vital to neutralize the lingering effects of her foreign and unsuitable nature, which would have condemned her blameless rival. Holmes's final musings on the case are on the possibility of Gibson and Dunbar's likely future marriage, and the improvement of the former's character by the lessons he has learned. For a contemporary audience, the lesson appears to have been clear enough: deviation from time-honored traditional patterns spells disaster.

3.4. The mastermind

By their very nature, the Holmes stories are a catalogue of extraordinary events, but some criminals in them go one step further and transcend their fellow creatures in intellect and resourcefulness. The master criminal or mastermind is an anti-Holmes, an educated man who puts all of his talents into the service of disreputable ends. Free of the telltale physiognomy of the Lombrosoan throwback (Jann 701), he is able to present an outward air of respectability unmarked by his base nature, and while often linked with colonies or other foreign influences, the mastermind's villainy is does not stem from an external corruptive influence. Of all of the characters in the Holmes series, the mastermind is the closest in nature to Conrad's Kurtz, a villain who is unequivocally "one of us" as opposed to a foreign or corrupted Other.

Foremost among this category is of course the "Napoleon of crime" himself, Professor Moriarty. A man of a high social class and considerable natural talents, the professor is also characterized by "hereditary tendencies of a most diabolical kind" and a "criminal strain" in his blood (FINA, 440), and it is the combination of these two opposites that make him the great detective's most infamous opponent. Moriarty is a synthesis of British respectability and a degenerative influence, and it is this interplay between the two halves of his nature that draws a distinction between Moriarty and the merely degenerated criminal like Dr. Roylott in "The Speckled Band". Something of the respectability of the

professor and his family is hinted at in the beginning of “The Final Problem” when Watson states that recent letters by the professor’s brother Colonel James Moriarty²⁰, in defense of the professor’s memory, have motivated him to write out the events of Holmes’s fatal encounter (FINA, 438-439). In opening chapters of *The Valley of Fear* (1915) it is revealed that Holmes has shared his suspicions with regards to Moriarty with Inspector MacDonald of Scotland Yard, but that the latter has seen nothing to corroborate them: “He seems to be a very respectable, learned and talented sort of man” (VALL, 739).

To thus escape detection by all but the most tenacious of observers, Moriarty’s criminality must be of an unparalleled subtlety, and that is exactly what Holmes credits his adversary with.

He is the organizer of half that is evil and of nearly all that is undetected in this great city. He is a genius, a philosopher, an abstract thinker. He has a brain of the first order. He sits motionless, like a spider in the center of its web, but that web has a thousand radiations, and he knows well every quiver of each of them. He does little himself. He only plans. But his agents are numerous and splendidly organized. (FINA, 440)

Holmes’s description of Moriarty paints him as a combination of scholar and fiend, crediting him with unique natural talents as well as an unparalleled wickedness in their use. The image of the professor as a spider in the center of his web is also a metaphor Watson uses of Holmes in “The Cardboard Box” (1893)²¹: “He loved to lie in the very center of five millions of people, with his filaments stretching out and running through them, responsive to every little rumour or suspicion of unsolved crime” (CARD, 849), which in turn Furthers

²⁰ It appears that by the time he got to writing “The Empty House” in 1903, Conan Doyle had forgotten all about this brother, since there the criminal professor himself is given the first name James (EMPT, 463). In addition, the two stories into which Moriarty figures the most, “The Final Problem” and *The Valley of Fear* also have other factual contradictions such as Watson being familiar with Moriarty in the second, but ignorant of him in the first, despite “The Final Problem” occurring later in Holmes’ fictional chronology.

²¹ As an aside, Wynne also quotes the passage likening Holmes to a spider, but she places it in “The Resident Patient”. This is due to “The Cardboard Box” having originally been suppressed from publication in *The Memoirs of Sherlock Holmes* (possibly due to its subject matter of adultery) and as such, the opening scene of that story was appended to “The Resident Patient”, a practice which the 1981 edition of *The Penguin Complete Sherlock Holmes*, quoted from by Wynne, has seemingly adhered to.

the parallels between master criminal and master detective, and lends something of a Gothic flair to the detective who is thus given a dark, twisted reflection to contend with (Wynne, *The Colonial Conan Doyle* 8). This doubling is intensified by the fact that Moriarty is only glimpsed in the narrative through Holmes's narration, so the reader can even be excused for starting to doubt whether this sinister but ephemeral figure is nothing but a figment of Holmes's imagination.

In the Holmes canon of villains, Moriarty stands out not only for the grand scope of his criminal actions, but for the veil of secrecy around him and his organization, both of which elude easy definition, though Wynne argues that based on his name and the association of Moriarty with the Scowrers in *The Valley of Fear* link him squarely with Irish secret societies and separatism (Wynne, *The Colonial Conan Doyle* 47–50). Wynne makes a thorough argument, though conclusive evidence for it is elusive. In the villainous professor's first outing in "The Final Problem," at least, such links are rather thin, with so little of the man and his possible motivations revealed in that story. Moriarty is not given any kind of justification for his criminality until his later appearance, in *The Valley of Fear*, where Holmes points to his meager means – an income of seven hundred pounds per year – being in conflict with the presence in his office of a French painting worth several times that sum. In the same passage, Holmes also mentions that the professor's only brother is employed as "a station master in the west of England" (VALL, 740), which directly contradicts Watson's account of Moriarty's brother occupying the rank of a colonel in the opening pages of "The Final Problem", and presents a somewhat shabbier picture of his family's means than that earlier description.

The juxtaposed factors, respectability and hints of an inward diabolical tendencies, that went into the making of Moriarty is also visible in his outward appearance:

He is extremely tall and thin ... [H]is two eyes are deeply sunken in his head. He is clean-shaven, pale, and ascetic-looking ... His shoulders are rounded

from much study, and his face protrudes forward, and is forever slowly oscillating from side to side in a curiously reptilian fashion. He peered at me with great curiosity in his puckered eyes. (FINA, 441)

The description is a juxtaposition of scholarly or monk-like features of the genius mathematician with atavistic hints of something unnatural and unwholesome. The extent of Moriarty's physical deviancy is open to interpretation: Thomas sees the professor's stooped posture and protruding face as manifestations of his criminal nature (Thomas 661), whereas Jann considers the professor's deviancy to manifest in the manner and expressions of an otherwise "respectable" physical body (Jann 701–702).

As befits his status as the "absolute criminal type" (Thomas 661), Moriarty's first reaction upon coming face to face with Holmes, commenting on his adversary's physiognomy²², draws strong parallels between the two men, following as it does Holmes's own observation of the professor's. Moriarty and Holmes are, as Jann puts it, "doubles in a class by themselves, capable of raising crime to a fine art" (Jann 702). Their following discussion hammers the point home, as both men understand the other to the point of being able to foretell their arguments, counterarguments and resolutions without having to utter them out loud (FINA, 441–442). Holmes's deduction relies on him putting himself in the position of the criminal, and Moriarty can do the same by putting himself in Holmes's position.

Moriarty's accomplice, Colonel Sebastian Moran, is likewise a man of consummate ability. Educated at Eton and Oxford, and the author of books with titles such as *Heavy Game of the Western Himalayas* and *Three Months in the Jungle*, he is given all the trappings of the colonial military adventurer. Like Moriarty's mathematical genius, Moran's bravery and skills as a marksman should have been sufficient to provide him a place amongst respectable society. Indeed, upon reading Moran's entry in Holmes's index of

²² This observation of the physical manifestations of Holmes' genius is repeated by Dr. Mortimer in the first chapter of *The Hound of the Baskervilles*. "It is not my intention to be fulsome, but I confess I covet your skull" (HOUN, 638).

biographies, Watson at once remarks on how much it reads like that of an honorable soldier (EMPT, 464). The reasons behind Moran's fall from honorable life are as obscure as those of Moriarty's, prompting Holmes to present to Watson his theory on how "the individual represents in his development the whole procession of his ancestors, and that such a sudden turn to good or evil stands from some strong influence which came into the line of his pedigree" (EMPT, 464), hinting at the involvement of inborn malign influences similar to those in the case of Moriarty. A further connection to the professor is made by Wynne, who points to the colonel, like Moriarty, possessing an Irish last name (*The Colonial Conan Doyle* 53) and the association of two such Irish-named villainous characters does lend more evidence in support of her idea that Moriarty's organization is intended to be seen as specifically an Irish secret society.

The case of Moran also returns us to the earlier discussion of colonial and hunting metaphors for the pursuit of criminals. In Moran, Holmes succeeds in capturing the kind of quarry, the "tiger in the fog" whose absence he laments in the opening pages of "The Bruce-Partington Plans". He goes as far as to make the comparison between Moran's feats of colonial adventures, the hunt for tigers, and his own successful ruse to capture Moran: "This empty house is my tree, and you are my tiger" (EMPT, 462). Holmes's capture of the great colonial tiger-hunter by using his own methods against him reaffirms the control of the urbanized English against the colonial-influenced threat, even in its fiercest manifestation.

A far less neat attempt at containing a foreign threat takes place in "The Illustrious Client" (1924), whose villain, the Austrian Baron Gruner, is a serial philanderer and murderer. In Gruner's perverted aristocratic nature, great intelligence and refined tastes, there is something of the sensation-novel villain reminiscent of Wilkie Collins' influential Count Fosco from *The Woman in White*, said to be a possible inspiration to Moriarty as well

(Flanders 293). Another sensationalist aspect of the character is his seemingly impregnable hold on his intended, Violet de Merville, whom Holmes is hired to rescue from a supposedly inevitable tragic fate. Gruner goes as far as to compare the effects of his charm with a post-hypnotic suggestion while gloating to Holmes, evoking echoes of another fictional mastermind, the hypnotic Svengali of George du Maurier's *Trilby* (1894).

Like other masterminds, Gruner merits some degree of respect from the detectives. Speaking to Watson of his meeting with the baron, Holmes refers to him as "a real aristocrat of crime with a superficial suggestion of afternoon tea and all the cruelty of the grave behind it" (ILLU, 947). Ultimately, though, his aristocratic status proves to be no defense from being the subject of dehumanizing observations, and Gruner's appearance is compared, like those of less affluent criminals, to more primitive forms: Holmes compares his mustache to the quivering antennae of an insect (ILLU, 947). Later on, Watson has a chance to make his own observations of Gruner, and they are noteworthy enough to record in full:

He was certainly a remarkably handsome man. His European reputation for beauty was fully deserved. In figure he was not more than of middle size, but was built upon graceful and active lines. His face was swarthy, almost Oriental, with large, languorous eyes which might easily hold an irresistible fascination for women. His hair and mustache were raven black, the latter short, pointed, and carefully waxed. His features were regular and pleasing, save only his straight, thin-lipped mouth. If ever I saw a murderer's mouth it was there – a cruel, hard gash in the face, compressed, inexorable and terrible. He was ill-advised to train his mustache away from it, for it was Nature's danger-signal, set as a warning to his victims. (ILLU, 955)

Like Moriarty, Gruner's description is somewhat ambivalent. Many of the details are perfectly respectable; Gruner is handsome, has a reputation for physical attractiveness and possesses a graceful physique and a countenance which elicits positive associations in Watson. The baron's positive inborn traits are juxtaposed with elements of disquieting foreignness, such as his dark complexion and the suggestion of a hypnotic power – a threat particularly to women, in Watson's estimate – in his eyes. The baron's strongest deviant

characteristic, the “murderer’s mouth” Watson observes is hardly the strong *a priori* sign he makes it out to be, since by the time he has a chance to meet his adversary face to face, revelations of Gruner’s inward nature would have irredeemably biased any estimation of the man..

In the catalogue of villains apprehended or thwarted by Holmes, what makes Gruner stand out is the nature of his crimes. Even amongst the extraordinary cases in the Baker Street chronicles, his casual cruelty, his habit of “collecting” women and his notebook cataloguing his conquests stands out in its wickedness and perversion. Normal rules of propriety afforded to the upper class (even foreign) are therefore suspended and the baron’s alliance into an English bloodline must be stopped. Nevertheless, Holmes’s initial encounter with his adversary is remarkably polite and deferential, a far cry from the treatment he gave Steve Dixie, comparatively a far less loathsome character on the basis of his deeds alone.

Baron Gruner’s eventual fate befits the wickedness of his crimes, though Holmes and Watson ultimately have only little to do with the grisly resolution. Holmes’s last ditch attempt against Gruner, the theft of his implicating notebook, is almost stymied when Gruner sees through Watson’s cover story of being a fellow collector of Chinese porcelain – another sign of his mastermind status – and events come to a horrifying end when the baron’s scorned lover disfigures him by throwing sulfuric acid at his face. Gruner’s transformation taking place before Watson’s eyes is as horrifying as it is rapid: “The features which I had admired a few minutes before were now like some beautiful painting over which the artist has passed a wet and foul sponge. They were blurred, discoloured, inhuman, terrible” (ILLU, 956). The horror of the crime is mollified by the immorality of the victim, however: “I could have wept over the ruin had I not remembered very clearly the vile life which had led up to so hideous a change” (ILLU, 957).

Faced with a criminal of eminent respectability hiding acts of unparalleled wickedness, the narrative finds Holmes somewhat powerless. In the Gruner case, the identity of the villain is never in question, so his normal feats of detection are not required, and he ultimately has to resort to the rather disrespectable method of burglary to gain the evidence he requires of Gruner's criminal past. The vitriol attack, besides adding an element of sensation and horror to an otherwise rather pedestrian adventure, also forces the baron's criminality into a more palatable form. The untouchable, smiling, laughing villain becomes the blind, grasping monstrous *thing* with "dead-fish eyes" and "burning hands" (ILLU, 957).

The containment of the mastermind in the Gruner case requires something beyond Holmes's normal *modus operandi*, the eradication of the criminal's outward respectability. Likewise, Holmes has to step outside his normal comfort zone when it comes to the act he considers as the pinnacle of his career, the downfall of Professor Moriarty. Though Holmes's contest with Moriarty's criminal organization is described as a great battle of wits, "the most brilliant bit of thrust-and-party work in the history of detection" (FINA, 441), its eventual culmination at the Reichenbach Falls is a very different kind of act altogether. What Holmes calls "the final discussion of those questions which lie between us" (FINA, 449) in his last letter to Watson is a physical conflict that requires the apparent mutual annihilation of Holmes and his greatest adversary. Though "The Empty House" retroactively robs this moment of its finality, Holmes's false demise still carries a resonance.

3.5. The political threat

As already mentioned, another important narrative for foreigners in the Sherlock Holmes stories is the role of subversive political enemies, befitting the rise of continental tensions and a developing taste for what we would call "spy fiction" today. In many stories Holmes is employed to support foreign political interests, such as in the very first short

story, "A Scandal in Bohemia" (1891)²³. More noteworthy, however, are those cases where it is Britain and her interests that are threatened, as occurs in the early tale of "The Engineer's Thumb" (1892), where Holmes comes across a tale of intrigue regarding a gang of counterfeiters led by Lysander Stark, a mysterious German. As before, the criminal is described as deviant in his physical body: "I do not think I have ever seen so thin a man" (ENGI, 257), but what sets the case apart is the methodical nature of the crime itself and the dispassionate ruthlessness of its perpetrator: Colonel Stark is perfectly willing to crush the young engineer to death in his hydraulic press.

Counterfeiting orchestrated by a foreign agent is suggestive of political motivations, especially since the story came out during a time when anti-German feeling was already on the increase (Winder 264). Several cases that followed, "The Naval Treaty" (1893), "The Second Stain" (1904) and "The Bruce-Partington Plans" (1912) engage even more directly with international politics and espionage. All three mysteries focus on the recovery of documents with potentially disastrous political ramifications (and in that, are descendants-in-spirit of Edgar Allan Poe's *The Purloined Letter* from 1844).

Of these, "The Second Stain" is particularly interesting politically, in that the purloined letter in the story is of particularly incendiary character: "There would be such a ferment, sir, that I do not hesitate to say that within a week of the publication of that letter this country would be involved in a great war" (SECO, 619). Such political machinations are beyond Holmes's means to remedy and upon being asked by the Prime Minister to advise a course of action, he can only offer the reply of "Then, sir, prepare for war" (SECO, 619). That England avoids its prophesied doom is not, therefore, due to Holmes's detective actions but rather the work of special providence. As it turns out, the sinister foreign agent in possession of the letter is conveniently murdered by his insanely jealous wife before it

²³ Watson's narration also provides copious amount of hints of Holmes's "unpublished adventures" on behalf of various illustrious clients abroad.

can be put to work against England. The imperial calamity – which Holmes learns has arisen out of a woman’s love for her husband and desire to avoid scandal – is thus thwarted by a domestic crisis brought to a head, in a fine illustration of the volatile intermingling of sensationally domestic themes with imperial politics (Haynsworth 477).

The three stories of stolen documents share not only their basic plot but also a crucial detail: in all three the physical theft is actually performed by an Englishman or woman. In “The Naval Treaty”, the criminal is Percy Phelps’ impoverished brother-in-law Joseph Harrison, in “The Bruce-Partington Plans” the foreign agent Oberstein is working with the likewise destitute Colonel Valentine, and in “The Second Stain” Lady Trelawney Hope is blackmailed to do the deed by Eduardo Lucas. Agents like Oberstein and Lucas are therefore a threat not because of any direct danger they pose, but due to their preying on vulnerable victims. This is underlined by the fact that the identities of these foreign agents are no mystery, and their addresses are known to both Sherlock and Mycroft Holmes (SECO, 620; BRUC, 885).

The summing up of this series of “political” adventures is “His Last Bow” (1917), Sherlock Holmes’s last outing in the defense of his country. There is a key difference between this and earlier stories along a similar vein: since England was at now at war, Germany was overtly identified as an enemy nation, as opposed to the veiled references to European politics in the previous tales. The third-person structure of the tale, too, allows for the author to have his German conspirators, Von Bork and Baron von Herling, to muse on the faults of England and to have a snigger at their enemies’ expense, disparaging Britain, her customs, institutions and sense of honor, before the last pages of the story turning the tables.

In addition of the open war to come, Germany has been busy at work fermenting domestic unrest, too, with “a devil’s brew of Irish civil war, window-breaking furies, and

God knows what" (LAST, 931). Here is Conan Doyle the propagandist at full gallop, allaying the fears of a wartime audience by telling them that the social unrest at the home front (Irish unrest and women's suffrage) was nothing more than an enemy ploy and would resolve itself when the war did. From an Imperial point of view Holmes's choice of disguise for infiltrating the German spy network, in the character of the Irish-American Altamont, can likewise be seen as a kind of an authorial wish fulfillment fantasy for the future of Britain and Ireland (Wynne, *The Colonial Conan Doyle* 183). This is made all the more poignant by the author's choice for Holmes's undercover name: "Altamont" was his father's middle name (Wynne, *The Colonial Conan Doyle* 23).

As spy fiction, the ending of "His Last Bow" falls somewhat flat, but as a culmination of Holmes's career it is unparalleled. To the defeated Von Bork, he is able to enumerate a selection of his triumphs, which produces an immediate effect in his adversary.

Von Bork sat up in amazement.

"There is only one man," he cried.

"Exactly," said Holmes.

(LAST, 938)

The sinister Von Bork, who a scant few pages before had been sneering at England's docility, laughable sense of fair play and outmoded notions of honor, is thus brought to ruin²⁴. Holmes's name, without even having to be mentioned, carries enough weight to convince Von Bork of his downfall, and the detective's patient effort over many years has blunted German plans for England and the rest of Europe. As is the case in "The Second Stain", Holmes cannot alter the course of the nation. In that story England escapes being plunged into war due to a fortuitous coincidence, here the war is set to happen almost by

²⁴ Holmes expects similar results to occur in the end of "The Creeping Man", when he intends to contact Doctor Lowenstein in Prague: "When I have written to this man and told him that I hold him personally responsible for the poisons which he circulates, we will have no more trouble" (CREE, 1039). That he so casually expects his words to be heeded by a man he's never met on the opposite side of Europe underscores the notion of English exceptionalism the character embodies.

divine decree: in the opening lines, Conan Doyle writes how “one might have thought already that God’s curse hung heavy over a degenerate world, for there was an awesome hush and a feeling of vague expectancy in the sultry and stagnant air” (LAST, 929). At the end of the story Sherlock Holmes himself takes up the topic of the war as a divine ordeal to be endured, and a permanent change in the state of the world. His powers do not extend as far as to countermand that:

Good old Watson! You are the one fixed point in a changing age. There's an east wind coming all the same, such a wind as never blew on England yet. It will be cold and bitter, Watson, and a good many of us may wither before its blast. But it's God's own wind none the less, and a cleaner, better, stronger land will lie in the sunshine when the storm has cleared. (LAST, 939)

The message is somewhat mixed: equal parts Attila the Hun and survival of the fittest, together with a prophecy of a better world to come. As befits a propaganda tale intended to soothe a wounded Britain in the clutches of a horrendous world war, the German enemy is recast into the role of an unwitting agent of Providence and in so doing robbed of the threat they posed: Britain’s trials at the hands of Germany were God’s will, and the empire was fated not only to endure despite its efforts, but be better for them²⁵. In capturing Von Bork, Holmes has done his last act of service as an agent of Britain and her interests. After the war, the foreign political criminal would make no more appearances in the Holmes stories, even though they continued to be set in the pre-war years.

4. Conclusions

At the time of writing, Sherlock Holmes is once again enjoying a period of success in popular culture. Hollywood blockbusters and two separate modernized television adaptations in recent years have made sure that Conan Doyle’s creation is not in danger of

²⁵ This is in rather stark contrast to Conan Doyle’s earlier propagandist work, such as the pre-war submarine warfare tale *Danger!*, which had a much more alarmist tone, and indeed was made use of by the German government as counterpropaganda when they did in fact commence a submarine campaign against British shipping (Stashower 301–302).

being forgotten. In writing, too, he is constantly reinvented, with authors trying their skill at creating pastiches of the original work, often based on the oblique hints peppered around the originals, such as the infamous case of the giant rat of Sumatra, a mystery for which, as Holmes assures Watson, “the world is not yet prepared” (SUSS, 991). New stories are a regular occurrence, even in the last few years exploring ideas as varied as portraying the Baker Street duo as gay lovers²⁶, detailing Holmes’s youthful exploits²⁷ or partnering him up with a female detective²⁸. As the appetite of the reading public seems thus undiminished, the understanding of the original creation, therefore, contributes to the enjoyment of a living, prolific genre.

Nor is the detective-story genre resting on Holmes’s shoulders alone. In television series especially, which have to a large extent supplanted serialized short fiction, Holmesian characters and themes are much in evidence. TV shows like *Monk*, *House* and *The Mentalist* carry on the legacy of the exceptional individual using his skills of observation to see what others cannot, while others of more technical bent celebrate the meticulous search for clues, now usually performed by police officers and scientists instead of the amateur detective-at-leisure.

Sherlock, it seems, lives on in many a guise, but the role of foreigners and degeneration has changed immensely in those retellings. In today’s fiction, many of the scenarios of Conan Doyle’s mysteries are no longer effective. The modern equivalent of Godfrey Emsford from “The Blanched Soldier” would no longer be reduced to a life of seclusion because of his disfiguring condition, nor would a contemporary audience be as accepting of a savage stereotype like Tonga. Through this thesis, I have attempted to shed a little light on the circumstances that created such characters in the first place.

²⁶ *A Study in Lavender: Queering Sherlock Holmes* (2011), ed. by Joseph R. G. DeMarco.

²⁷ *Young Sherlock Holmes 1: Death Cloud* (2010), by Andrew Lane.

²⁸ *The Beekeeper’s Apprentice* (2010), by Laurie R. King.

A major reason for the changes in the nature of villainy in Holmesian productions is a change in attitudes of writers and readers. Today the foreign, for most of us, is no longer the sinister invader from outside the gates. The Lombrosoan model of criminals' objectively measurable primitiveness and degeneration has joined phrenology and astrology in the dustbin of history. The notion of England being invaded by savage foreign criminals was hardly true even at the time the stories were written: despite the fervent belief of Londoners at the time, Jack the Ripper was much more likely to have been a local man than a murderous exotic cannibal.

Though Conan Doyle was no stranger to wielding his pen to propagandist purposes, he shied from addressing domestic social and legal issues through the medium of Holmes stories. As such, many criminals in the series reflect external evils that the author could safely criticize or demonize without causing disquiet in his readership. If England is in peril, the subtext seems to be, it is not England's fault, but rather due to evil imported from abroad. The secret ingredient in the recipe for Holmes's success was giving the British a display of an unequivocally villainous Other being defeated time and again by the avatar of Englishness, and his sidekick, the eminently respectable middle-class professional. Today, this kind of narratives are much rarer, with detective stories much more willing to cast a critical eye on the real ills of societies they are set in, without the need to import exotic villainy from abroad. Modern Sherlock Holmeses, their methods still mostly the same, are more likely to do battle with bank robbers, domestic murderers, arsonists, sexual predators, and burglars.

Nevertheless, Victorian conceptions of the criminal foreigner and the degenerate still hold sway in some arenas. Just as the tensions leading up to the First World War created images of subversive German enemies, more modern conflicts have reiterated the trend with the "enemy combatants" of today. Demonization of the immigrant and overemphasis

on nationalist purity are also political hallmarks of far-right thought, and the idea that arrivals from abroad are responsible for a disproportionate amount of particularly heinous criminality has always been seductive for populists trying to sway public opinion.

By contrast to most other Holmesian adversaries, the role of the mastermind is routinely reinvented for each adaptation. Professor Moriarty in particular has proven almost as vigorous as Sherlock himself and almost as necessary as Watson. If, as Wynne argues, Moriarty is intended to be seen as being affiliated with Irish secret societies, he has transcended these origins. Because the author's feelings and attitudes towards Fenianism and Irish separatism were so complex and linked to his personal history and identity, Moriarty and Moran escape the simplistic and dehumanizing treatment given to other foreigners. Because he is free of the baggage of Victorian attitudes and racism, Moriarty can readily assume new shapes, and his many literary lives (and afterlives) would make for a fascinating topic for further study, given how often and prominently he appears in pastiches and adaptations.

Come what may, Sherlock Holmes seems to carry on, and to fully appreciate him for what he is, it pays to take a look of the uses he was put and the opponents he faced in his original outings. The game is afoot, as he is fond of saying, and as readers, it pays for us to know more of the quarry he sets off to chase, the elusive tigers in the fog.

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