

THE UNIVERSITY OF HULL

“I see you have quite gone over to the supernaturalists”:  
The Spiritual and Scientific Arthur Conan Doyle

being a Thesis submitted for the Degree of

PhD

in the University of Hull

by

David Michael Beck, B.A., M.A.

November 2012

## Abstract

This thesis examines the mistaken premise that Arthur Conan Doyle abandoned rational enquiry in order to embrace the supernatural, including spiritualism. It explores how Doyle's diverse fiction and non-fiction define potentially supernatural phenomena as originating in the natural world. Consequently, for Doyle, the supernatural did not exist. This thesis investigates how Doyle advocated that new undetected natural laws could be investigated by science to establish unusual phenomena, including the existence of fairies and spiritualism. Through a reading of Doyle's autobiographical, medical, detective, imperial and science fictions this thesis traces his scientific trajectory from gothicised supernatural to spiritualism. It considers how mental illness and addiction can provide heightened perceptions of potentially supernatural visions. It also examines how Doyle's interpretation of medical realism gothicised sexual transgression that eventually led to him challenging his early creation of a religious schema that incorporated natural selection. At the core of this thesis is a metaphor from 'Lot No. 249' that demonstrates Doyle's belief that the shadows that darken the limits of the natural world could be illuminated by science. This thesis uses Doyle's metaphor to examine Sherlock Holmes's role in *The Hound of the Baskervilles* that provides the detective with a method to investigate unusual phenomena. Doyle's romance of imperial exploration and scientific medical self-experimentation merge with his interest in unusual phenomena. This enables an examination of Watson's experience with a deadly drug in 'The Adventure of the Devil's Foot' that can be read as an encounter with a spirit-entity. This thesis continues by examining Doyle's science fiction stories that include his belief that circumstantial evidence and eye witness testimony should be utilised to sway scientific scepticism. The thesis concludes by noting how the author finally embraced spiritualism through ideas of spiritual salvation amidst a world doomed by their material pleasures, before briefly examining Doyle's belief that science could still explain unusual phenomena by adapting technology.

## Acknowledgements

Writing this thesis was as vital to me as it was challenging, arduous and enlightening. It is also vital for me to acknowledge those whose presence is the difference between success and failure. I had the extraordinary good luck, as an undergraduate, to find a mentor – Dr Catherine Wynne – whose dedication to her students encompasses the person and their intellectual development. Thank you Catherine, for your support, encouragement, good humour and friendship. Many thanks are also due to Dr Elizabeth Boyle who assisted me in the final months before completion and gave me much encouragement prior to my Viva. I would like to thank the English Department at the University of Hull and the Administration team, especially Ruth, Gill and Matt who helped during my time as a tutor. I would also like to thank Dr Sabine Vanacker and Dr Martin Willis for advising me on how to strengthen my thesis.

My undying gratitude is extended to my mother, Kathleen Beck, whose input is so enormous I can never truly appreciate in words alone. To my younger brother, Paul Beck, whose keen critical mind and eye is unmatched, as is his intellect. To my older brother, John Beck, who never doubted throughout it all.

Tracy Rowntree, whose love, patience and constant support have lightened the darker moments. You will always be “The Woman” of my heart. Countless thanks and my constant love and gratitude are due and will never cease to be.

Finally, in Doyle’s life and work there was no true divide between the living and the deceased. In another way, I have always felt the presence of my father Raymond Beck as well as my grandmothers Elsie Park and Elsie Beck, who along with my great-aunt Kaye Dove contributed in their own distinct, brilliant way.

Thank you all.

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## **List of Illustrations**

5

## **Introduction**

6

### **Chapter One:**

Addiction, Madness and the Supernatural in  
Arthur Conan Doyle's Early Fiction.

52

### **Chapter Two:**

The "Facts and Fancies" of Doyle's Medical Fiction

100

### **Chapter Three:**

Investigating the Unknown in *The Hound of the Baskervilles*.

139

### **Chapter Four:**

Exploration and Medical Self-experimentation in 'The Adventure of the Devil's Foot'.

184

### **Chapter Five:**

The Unanswerable Argument and the Spiritualist Revelation

221

## **Conclusion**

266

## **Bibliography**

277

## **List of Illustrations**

*Fig. 1:* Charles Doyle, **Prevention is Better than Cure**

Page 80

*Fig. 2:* Charles Doyle, **The Dreadful Secret**

Page 81

*Fig. 3* Charles Doyle, **Being Taken Up**

Page 81

*Fig. 4:* Charles Doyle, **Truth as Death**

Page 85

*Fig. 5:* Charles Doyle, **Mary, My Ideal Home Ruler**

Page 86

*Fig. 6:* Charles Doyle, **Robbing the Robber**

Page 88

## INTRODUCTION

‘I see that you have quite gone over to the supernaturalists’<sup>1</sup>

*The Hound of the Baskervilles* (1902)

The above quotation, which forms part of the title of this thesis, appeared in Sir Arthur Ignatius Conan Doyle’s (1859-1930) most famous Sherlock Holmes story *The Hound of the Baskervilles*. This accusation, levelled at Dr Mortimer by Holmes, is as pertinent to the fictional doctor as it is to the author. Doyle was a medical man educated by the Jesuits, who renounced Catholicism and embraced a rationalist empiricism, before seemingly moving from his world of science to the supernatural realm of spiritualism.. It is this mistaken premise that Doyle had gone over to the supernaturalists, abandoning rational empiricism in favour of spiritualism, which is at the core of this thesis. Fascination with the apparent contradiction between Doyle’s rational side, epitomised by Sherlock Holmes, and his later advocacy of spiritualism is evident in a wide range of biographies and populist accounts. Daniel Stashower summarises the typical public perception of Doyle as, ‘[w]ell, Sherlock Holmes was brilliant, but Doyle went a bit potty at the end, didn’t he? Fairies, ghosts, and that’.<sup>2</sup> On a more serious note Kelvin I Jones states, ‘[t]he very notion that the creator of the perfect reasoning machine, Sherlock Holmes, should sustain a belief in ‘invisible beings’ seemed utterly incomprehensible to the man in the street’.<sup>3</sup> In a more recent biography examining Doyle’s relationship with the magician and escapologist Harry Houdini, Christopher Sandford asks ‘how a man steeped in empirical reasoning [...] could, within a relatively

---

<sup>1</sup> Arthur Conan Doyle, *The Penguin Complete Sherlock Holmes* (London: Penguin, 1981), p. 681.

<sup>2</sup> Daniel Stashower, *Teller of Tales: The Life of Arthur Conan Doyle* (London: Penguin, 2000), p. XII.

<sup>3</sup> Kelvin I Jones, *Conan Doyle and the Spirits: The Spiritualist Career of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle* (Wellingborough: The Aquarian Press, 1989), p. 9.

few years, come out publicly as a believer in fairies [?]<sup>4</sup> Of course, a simplistic division of Doyle's life between the rational scientist and the irrational spiritualist does not bear close scrutiny, a point made by Diana Barsham. She argues that the apparently 'irreconcilable polarities of his career: his creation of Sherlock Holmes on the one hand, and his support for the séance on the other [...] collapse once the inner history of his writing is read in its entirety'.<sup>5</sup> I examine a wide range of Doyle's fiction and his serious writings on spiritualism to explore his complicated private and literary trajectory. Doyle does indeed utilise the possibility of the supernatural in his early fiction. However, through his personal family traumas, medical experiences and his religious schema this idea of the supernatural is rejected. In its place Doyle argues such unusual phenomena misinterpreted as supernatural could be explained through science and natural laws. This meant that phenomena such as spiritualism did not originate in a supernatural realm but belonged to the natural world and could therefore be explained by science. Despite biographical and critical attention to Doyle, discussed shortly, there is a surprising lack of significant academic study in this area. Consequently, I investigate the diversity of Doyle's interests evident within his writings which include religion, evolutionary theory, medicine, imperialism, science-fiction and spiritualism. Indeed, rather than reading Doyle's work as being disparate or contradictory, I regard his wide range of subjects to be of equal relevance to this thesis. I also treat Doyle's fiction and non-fictional literary output as being located within other discourses contemporaneous to his personal and professional life. When Doyle's apparently disparate forms of writing are read as an ensemble they serve to unify his stance on science and the supernatural. For Doyle, the supernatural did not exist. Instead, phenomena that had been misinterpreted as supernatural were incorrect, or they belonged to hitherto

---

<sup>4</sup> Christopher Sandford, *Houdini and Conan Doyle: The Great Magician and the Inventor of Sherlock Holmes* (London: Duckworth, 2011), p. 35.

<sup>5</sup> Diana Barsham, *Arthur Conan Doyle and the Meaning of Masculinity* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000), p. 6.

unknown laws of nature. He attempted to portray science as being able to explore and explain unusual phenomena, arguing that it was a worthy subject that should be considered by scientists. Doyle's ambition was to encourage scientists to adopt new ways of investigating phenomena such as spiritualism, the existence of fairies as well as the seen and unseen worlds bordering our own. In the 'Law of the Ghost' (1919) Doyle proposed a basic scientific method in which accounts of psychic affairs located in existing 'papers, magazines, reports' could be investigated. Doyle argued that:

They have to be examined, collected into classes, reviewed in the light of our ever-increasing psychic knowledge, and an endeavour made to find underlying principles running through this vague collection of matter, so that at last we may touch solid ground by getting hold of some elementary laws.<sup>6</sup>

Such a method, or what Doyle argues is 'true scientific fashion', contains his fundamental principles of what he hoped would expand the boundaries of scientific orthodoxy.<sup>7</sup> Doyle suggested 'let us see whether here and there we may not find two or three pieces which fit together, and give some idea of a permanent pattern, even though it be a fantastic one', a sentiment that he alluded to as early as *The Narrative of John Smith* (1883).<sup>8</sup> In this novel Doyle wrote 'we stand on a very narrow basis of ascertained fact, with vast untouched sciences looming upon us through the darkness'.<sup>9</sup> I argue that this idea of 'vast untouched sciences', that contained 'fantastic' possibilities, prompted Doyle's advocacy of a need to expand the boundaries of science that could include a reconsideration of the natural world.

---

<sup>6</sup> Doyle, *The Edge of the Unknown* (London: John Murray, 1930; repr. Teddington: The Echo Library, 2006), p.50.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Doyle, *The Narrative of John Smith*, ed. by Jon Lellenberg, Daniel Stashower and Rachel Foss (London: The British Library, 2011), p. 65. This novel is a reprint of Doyle's partial reconstruction of an earlier, finished though unpublished manuscript that was lost in the post.



Without the idea of the supernatural and with Doyle arguing that the complexities of the natural world could be used to explain such unusual phenomena, it was important to consider how this could be demonstrated and expressed through science. As I will demonstrate in this thesis, this was achieved through Doyle's belief in the expansion of natural laws. In his study of psychic science and research published around the time of Doyle's death in 1930, Hereward Carrington defines the meaning of 'supernormal phenomena' as 'unusual or extraordinary, and not necessarily "supernatural"'.<sup>10</sup> Carrington argues that from the perspective of psychical research, 'we no longer believe that the "supernatural" exists'. If any 'phenomena occur, they must necessarily be natural and belong to the order of nature – though perhaps to a more extended order of nature than we have been in the habit of considering'.<sup>11</sup> This description is appropriate when considering Doyle's belief that the supernatural did not exist. For Doyle, unexplained or unusual phenomena originated in the natural world and were therefore due to a misunderstanding of the laws of nature that needed revision to encompass the unknown. In order to apply this idea to the wide range of Doyle's writings, it is necessary to establish a clear definition of 'supernatural' and, indeed, its relationship to what is meant by 'natural' and 'belonging to the order of nature'. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines 'supernatural' as something that is 'above nature; belonging to a higher realm or system than that of nature; transcending the powers or the ordinary course of nature'. A phenomenon attributed to the supernatural would be in violation of a scientific understanding of how the universe works. Such natural laws are fundamental principles of the material universe based upon scientific observation and the formulation of theoretical principles deduced from particular facts. This would result in the creation of a predictable descriptive law capable of explaining the behaviour of a

---

<sup>10</sup> Hereward Carrington, *The Story of Psychic Science: (Psychical Research)* (London: Rider and co., [1930?]), p. 17.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

particular phenomenon. Richard Noakes discusses the difficulties encountered by Victorians. Noakes writes:

While some firmly believed that manifestations were opposed to every known natural law and were by definition supernatural, others upheld the possibility that such manifestations might derive from ‘natural causes’, whether these were well-known mental mechanisms, new forces associated with the body, or intelligences from the spirit world.<sup>12</sup>

It is the latter explanation that ‘such manifestations might derive from “natural causes” that is applicable to Doyle’s interest in the phenomena discussed in this thesis. It is possible to define Doyle’s eventual approach to considering potentially supernatural phenomena, such as spiritualism or the existence of fairies. First, Doyle believed that natural laws consistently governed the physical world, even if they could not always be proved under laboratory conditions. As we shall see throughout this thesis, that although his ideas on the origins of these natural laws were disparate, his belief in this principle was not. Second, a particular phenomenon occurs (a levitation during a séance, for example) that appears to break one of these natural laws (gravity in this instance) and it is corroborated by trustworthy witnesses. Third, the natural law must still apply, so consequently our understanding of this law is incomplete and needs amending. As we shall see in chapter five, this made scientific evidence and the character of a witness contested topics for Doyle who became increasingly disenchanted with intransigent scientists unable to abandon what he felt was scientific orthodoxy. However, from the outset it is possible to observe how Doyle developed this belief in science to expand natural laws to investigate unusual phenomena in the various modes and themes of his fiction and nonfiction writings.

---

<sup>12</sup> Richard Noakes, ‘Spiritualism, Science and the Supernatural in Mid-Victorian Britain’, in *The Victorian Supernatural*, ed. by Nicola Bown and others (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004; repr. 2005), pp. 23-43 (p. 23).

## Science and the Supernatural: the History and Philosophy of Scientific Method and the Nature of Evidence

Before any re-appraisal of Doyle's interest in science and misinterpreted supernatural phenomena can be broached, an understanding of the scientific contexts of the nineteenth century is required. In Doyle's early writings his scientific ideas are rooted in a pre-nineteenth century mode of enquiry based on natural history, philosophy and theology. However, as Jack Meadows notes in his history of Victorian scientists, 'the name [scientist] was only coined in the 1830's (by [William] Whewell) and many scientists were initially opposed to it. They preferred, until the latter years of the century, to be known as "men of science"'.<sup>13</sup> During the nineteenth century a number of eminent scientists occupied similar ground as Doyle. Scientific men, such as George John Romanes and William Crookes appeared to be either one step away from openly supporting the spiritualist cause, or completely endorsing it. What held them back was not just the fear of the loss of their professional reputations (though that was not easily ignored); it was the sense that proof was too elusive. A few promising séances were not enough to risk a life-time's work and academic success. I regard such ideas as important to Doyle's scientific development relating to the investigation of unusual phenomena. In *The Other World: Spiritualism and Psychical Research in England, 1850-1914* (1985), Janet Oppenheim notes the general assumption that during the late nineteenth century, 'men of science *did* have special investigative talents that enabled them to identify fraud in the séance chamber as readily as they might isolate rare gases'.<sup>14</sup> This is a point of view shared by Ruth Brandon in her history of spiritualism when she asks, 'what particular qualification have such persons for pronouncing on such things – more, say,

---

<sup>13</sup> Jack Meadows, *The Victorian Scientist: The Growth of a Profession* (London: The British Library, 2004), p. 2.

<sup>14</sup> Janet Oppenheim, *The Other World: Spiritualism and Psychical Research in England, 1850-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), pp. 342 -3.

than priests, or conjurers, or ordinary intelligent interested observers?’<sup>15</sup> Brandon’s conflation of scientists, priests, conjurers and ‘ordinary, intelligent, interested observers’ is of interest. As we shall see, I examine this nineteenth century cultural uncertainty as to who makes the best candidate for paranormal investigation.

In *The Scientific Revolution* (1996), Steven Shapin notes how natural history represents a ‘program of systematic fact collection [that] could form a register of natural and artificial effects: it could count as natural *history*’ [Shapin’s italics], whereas natural philosophy concerned itself with ‘the quest for secure knowledge of nature’s causes’.<sup>16</sup> Lawrence M Principe argues that, ‘[n]atural philosophy is closely related to what we familiarly call *science* today, but is broader in scope and intent’ [Principe’s italics].<sup>17</sup> It is this broader scope that marks a vital distinction between mid-nineteenth century sciences and natural philosophy. Principe observes how the ‘natural philosopher of the Middle Ages or the Scientific Revolution studied the natural world – as modern scientists do – but did so within a wider vision that included theology and metaphysics’.<sup>18</sup> These are subjects that are not now associated with the practice of modern science. As we shall see in chapters one and two of this thesis, I argue that Doyle’s interest in evolutionary theory and theological questioning is resonant with these earlier traditions of investigating the natural world that did not imply an obvious break between religion and science. In order to understand Doyle’s later ideas on the ability of science to explain unusual phenomena such as spiritualism, it is necessary to appreciate how these earlier modes of thought were a pre-ambule to the trajectory of his beliefs in unexplained natural laws.

---

<sup>15</sup> Ruth Brandon, *The Spiritualists: The Passion for the Occult in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (London: George Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1983), p. 84.

<sup>16</sup> Steven Shapin, *The Scientific Revolution* (London and Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), p. 110.

<sup>17</sup> Lawrence M Principe, *The Scientific Revolution: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 27.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

Doyle may have looked back to an earlier tradition to form his initial ideas, but his later scientific influences can be located in the development of a nineteenth century scientific methodology that includes the definition and interpretation of evidence. In their book *Objectivity* (2010), Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison discuss the development of the notion of objectivity in science that occurred in the nineteenth century. They argue that during this century ‘men of science began to fret openly about a new kind of obstacle to knowledge: themselves’.<sup>19</sup> In their examination of the creation of scientific objectivity Daston and Galison recognise the importance of the anxiety created by an individual’s lapse of selective judgement in the interpretation of evidence. They argue that such anxiety originated in the ‘subjective self’ that was ‘prone to prettify, idealise, and, in the worst case, regularize observations to fit theoretical expectations: to see what it hoped to see’.<sup>20</sup> Daston and Galison note how ‘[o]bjectivity and subjectivity define each other, like left and right or up and down’.<sup>21</sup> This reveals that in order to cultivate objectivity, one must regulate their instinctive subjectivity. They argue that ‘[i]f objectivity was summoned into existence to negate subjectivity, then the emergence of objectivity must tally with the emergence of a certain kind of willful self, one perceived as endangering scientific knowledge’.<sup>22</sup> In order to counter this ‘willful self’, the creation of a certain type of ‘scientific self’ would have to be cultivated, one capable of restraining a natural subjectivity.<sup>23</sup> The scientist would have to cultivate rigorous self-discipline, an ‘asceticism’ of a highly trained sort hardened in the process of:

the keeping of a lab notebook with real-time entries, the discipline of grid-guided drawings, the artificial division

---

<sup>19</sup> Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison, *Objectivity* (New York: Zone Books, 2010), p. 34.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 36-37.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 37.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

of the self into active experimenter and passive observer, the introspective sorting of one's own sensations into objective and subjective by sensory physiologists, the training of voluntary attention.<sup>24</sup>

Daston and Galison's stress on scientific professionalism is relevant to a broader understanding of Doyle's writings. Even though the terms 'willful self' and 'scientific self' do not feature in his literature, they provide a context for Doyle's wider interest in unusual phenomena that have the potential to be misinterpreted as supernatural.

Such discussions of the interpretation of evidence are at the heart of Victorian debates on scientific epistemology. Jonathan Smith notes in *Fact and Feeling: Baconian Science and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (1994) that the construction of a nineteenth century scientific methodology of gathering and interpreting evidence was also facilitated by literary figures such as Doyle. Smith argues that science in the nineteenth century is a cultural discourse as is literature, history science or music. Consequently, science 'shapes and is shaped by the culture of which it is a part'.<sup>25</sup> Smith's argument that such cultural discourses led to the creation of a new nineteenth century scientific methodology is relevant to my examination of Doyle. At the core of this complex development is the 'shift from Baconian induction to something like what we now call the hypothetico-deductive method'.<sup>26</sup> This method involves testing the validity of hypotheses that are formed in anticipation of the results of any particular scientific investigation. As more evidence becomes available the hypothesis is either discarded or modified as circumstance demands. It is a method that grew out of the Victorian interpretation and modification of Sir Francis Bacon's methodology of gathering and interpreting evidence. Smith states:

---

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p. 38.

<sup>25</sup> Jonathan Smith, *Fact and Feeling: Baconian Science and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (London and Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin, 1994), p. 5.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p. 13.

[T]he “common notion” of Baconianism was an emphasis on the collection of facts. Induction begins with particulars, and if the investigator is sufficiently patient and industrious, a pattern will eventually arise from the mass of facts.<sup>27</sup>

At the core of this practice is an attempt to avoid what Principe calls ‘premature theorizing, naval-gazing speculations, and the building of grand explanatory systems’.<sup>28</sup> Smith notes that Bacon’s inductive method did not necessarily involve the indiscriminate collection of data defined as factual evidence. Rather, the aim was to collect relevant facts by ‘employing selection and discrimination’, thus avoiding the problem of ‘[f]lying off to hasty generalizations on the basis of insufficient evidence’.<sup>29</sup> Instead, the development of a new methodology would acknowledge that observation alone was of little use without a hypothesis.

For Smith, Doyle’s interest in the development of gathering and interpreting evidence is deeply rooted in Sherlock Holmes. Smith locates Holmes’s methods within the broader scientific and literary culture, arguing Doyle was shaped by scientific debate encouraged by men such as John Tyndall and Thomas Huxley. In turn, Doyle also assisted in shaping the image of science and detection in a newly literate element of British society eager to expand their intellectual horizons and consume new forms of knowledge. When Holmes begins an investigation he attempts to construct a framework of inferences that are based upon witness accounts, any potential clues that may be on hand and his vast experience of criminal cases. The problem principally lay in where exactly was the line to be drawn in defining relevant facts. Furthermore, how was an observer to know how many of these facts needed to be collected before an emerging theory became apparent. In conjunction with this is the problem, noted above, that the

---

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p. 19.

<sup>28</sup> Principe, p. 120.

<sup>29</sup> Smith, p. 24.

act of observation was not in itself a neutral act prone to modification by an individual's willful self. Smith notes, '[o]bservation, as the expression goes, is theory-laden – though in the nineteenth century the tentative development of this “truism” constituted a radical break from the orthodoxy of naive Baconianism’<sup>30</sup> The cultural shift from ‘naive Baconianism’ towards a more modern hypothetico-deductive method occurred because of a recognition of the importance of imagination in scientific practice.

Smith argues that Holmes is influenced by the Romantic tradition, whereby imagination and inspiration found a role in determining the development of hypothetical theories. However, objectivity was not to be sacrificed to the flights of fancy of a Romantic genius. Rather, to a lesser or greater extent it was impossible to isolate imagination from the act of observation. In fact Smith argues that ‘this new formulation of scientific method consciously sought to portray science as an imaginative, speculative, creative enterprise’ whose role it was to assert ‘more openly’ that scientific ‘truth’ was ‘obtained through, rather than at the expense of, the creative imagination’.<sup>31</sup> Consequently, hypotheses provide the starting point for investigation in both science and detection. They generate an initial understanding of ‘the general laws from which deductions can be made’.<sup>32</sup> The role of deduction occurs in the establishment of a ‘science’s general laws’ as a faculty capable of testing selected evidence making it possible to ‘predict phenomena’ rather than solely relying upon observation.<sup>33</sup>

In *Victorian Detective Fiction and the Nature of Evidence* (2009), Lawrence Frank places Doyle within the wider context of the disciplines that informed the post-Darwinian world. Franks states that ‘[t]hroughout the detective fictions of Poe, Dickens and Doyle [...] there appear terms, figures of speech, and methodological practices

---

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p. 21.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., p. 13.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., pp. 31-32.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.



indebted to nineteenth-century philology, geology and palaeontology, archaeology, and evolutionary biology'.<sup>34</sup> Consequently, Frank casts a wider gaze across scientific discourses than Smith's examination of the Victorian interpretation of naïve Baconianism. These fields of study are important to Frank because they share 'common preoccupations about the nature of evidence and narratological reconstructions of a past unavailable to the observer'.<sup>35</sup> Importantly, Frank reads Doyle's detective fiction as contributing to this new mode of expression, through which 'men and women of the nineteenth century' were 'introduced to a way of imagining themselves in a universe radically altered by the historical disciplines'.<sup>36</sup> For Frank, it is these historical disciplines that inform a view of the world that points to 'the problematic and contradictory nature of a Darwinian perspective that was not then, as it is not now, a single coherent one'.<sup>37</sup> Frank argues that genres between literary and scientific texts are dissolved by a historical examination of discourses influenced by Charles Darwin, Charles Lyell and Pierre Simon Laplace. Consequently, there is an incoherency between such a wide range of literary and scientific texts that rely upon the interpretative methods of scientist, historian and literary writer. An important illustrative example of this occurs in Frank's examination of Darwin's simile of the tree of life in *Origin of Species* (1859). Frank states 'Darwin was to consult a geological record perceived as a fragmentary document'.<sup>38</sup> This is akin to nineteenth century philologists who attempted to recreate the history of the English language by placing it in relationship to other cultures' languages, thus creating 'a language tree of nineteenth-century philology'.<sup>39</sup> The problem facing Darwin, philologists, palaeontologists and historians is that their

---

<sup>34</sup> Lawrence Frank, *Victorian Detective Fiction and the Nature of Evidence: The Scientific Investigations of Poe, Dickens and Doyle* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), p. 4.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., pp. 25-26.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., p. 176.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., p. 15.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

fields of study are incomplete, each missing vital texts that can fill every historical gap. Of interest to Frank is Darwin's statement in *Origin of Species*: 'I look at the natural geological record, as a history of the world imperfectly kept, and written in a changing dialect'.<sup>40</sup> These innumerable texts point to a complex set of associations linked together only by illusory generic boundaries that become more and more porous upon examination.<sup>41</sup> Doyle's literary, scientific and medical practice is located within this complex interaction of interpretative discourses that threaten the possibility of objectivity. Questions of evidence are not contingent upon inductive or deductive processes capable of revealing viable scientific truths as argued by Smith. Instead, interpretation is formed via a competition of materialist perspectives in which we, as twenty-first century readers, are also engaged in as we examine textual histories. Uncertainty as to the nature of evidence is the only outcome and scientists or detectives such as Holmes are only masters of interpretation, not harbingers of an absolute truth or scientific fact.

Running parallel to the development of a new scientific methodology in the nineteenth century was a study of phenomena that could not easily be reconciled with this apparently progressive movement. Scientists sought to marginalize a varied range of subjects such as trance states, mesmerism, apparitions, spiritualism and the existence of non-human creatures such as fairies. As we shall see throughout my thesis Doyle became increasingly frustrated with what he saw as the intransigence of scientists who refused to even consider the possibility of a wider order of nature. Upon first glance Catherine Crowe's *The Night Side of Nature: or Ghosts and Ghost Seers* (1848) appears to be little more than a collection of supernatural stories that included ghosts,

---

<sup>40</sup> Charles Darwin, *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection: or the Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life*, ed. by J W Burrow (New York: Penguin, 1968), p. 316; cited in Frank, *Victorian Detective Fiction*, p. 9.

<sup>41</sup> Frank, *Victorian Detective Fiction*, p. 16.

apparitions, trance like states and doppelgangers. However, there was a serious purpose for this collection gathered meticulously from eyewitness accounts in a manner similar to those collected by the Society for Psychical Research some years later. As Deborah Blum notes Crowe intended to ‘prod scientists into conducting serious investigations of the apparitions she described’.<sup>42</sup> As we shall see, this was an ambition shared by Doyle and there is common ground in their methodology. In a closer examination of *The Night Side of Nature*, Gillian Bennett argues that Crowe’s investigative technique involved gathering ‘a huge number of narratives from respectable people who have actually had psychic experience’ with the hope that ‘the stories will speak for themselves’.<sup>43</sup>

In *The Night Side of Nature* Crowe expressed a belief that her catalogue of unusual and unexplained phenomena would represent a solid body of evidence. She states:

Great as the difficulty is of producing evidence, it will, I think, be pretty generally admitted that, although each individual case, as it stands alone, may be comparatively valueless, the number of recurrent cases forms a body of evidence that, on any other subject, would scarcely be rejected.<sup>44</sup>

Crowe argued that in the physical sciences such as geology, palaeontology, biology and astronomy, her evidence would not be ignored. She also claimed her evidence was not ‘supernatural; on the contrary, I am persuaded that the time will come, when they will be reduced strictly within the bounds of science’.<sup>45</sup> As with Doyle, Crowe expressed dissatisfaction for what they both perceived as the narrow mindedness of the scientific

---

<sup>42</sup> Deborah Blum, *Ghost Hunters: William James and the Search for Scientific Proof of Life After Death* (London: Century, 2007), p. 15.

<sup>43</sup> Catherine Crowe, *The Night Side of Nature: or Ghosts and Ghost Seers*, ed. by Gillian Bennett (London: Wordsworth, 2000), P. 13.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 23.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 22.

community and their refusal to investigate such phenomena as spirit sightings. As an alternative to such scientific subjectivism, Crowe stated:

All I hope or expect is to show that the question [the possibility of spirit contact] is not disposed of yet, either by the rationalists or the physiologists, and that it is still an open one; and all I desire is to arouse inquiry and curiosity, and that thus some mind, better qualified than mine to follow out the investigation, may be incited to undertake it.<sup>46</sup>

Crowe's starting point for an investigation into her subject initially appears to be akin to the type of 'naive Baconianism' discussed above. She argues that it is important to begin with the 'conviction that, knowing nothing, we are not entitled to reject any evidence that may be offered to us, till it has been thoroughly sifted, and proved to be fallacious'.<sup>47</sup> Crowe specifically cites the inductive method of gathering evidence before attempting to theorise. She states 'till a thing has been proved, by induction, logically impossible, we have no right whatever to pronounce that it is so'.<sup>48</sup> Furthermore, she criticises '*á priori* conclusions' as being 'perfectly worthless' [Crowe's italics].<sup>49</sup> *The Night Side of Nature* did not attempt to persuade its readers that the case for a wider order of nature, including the existence of a spirit world, was proven. Rather, Crowe argued that an open mind is necessary to uncover the truth, even if it ultimately proved her false. Crowe emphasises the importance of 'experience, observation, and intuition' as being 'our principal if not our only guides' when investigating unusual phenomena.<sup>50</sup> The inclusion of intuition modifies her initial Baconian stance because it is vital in formulating hypotheses that assist in predicting the type of evidence necessary to prove or exclude various theories. Crowe argued that when considering the case for unusual phenomena the investigator should bear in mind that, '[o]f nature's ordinary laws, we

---

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., p. 133.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., p.17.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., p. 168.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., p. 16.

yet know but little; of their aberrations and perturbations, still less'.<sup>51</sup> On such uncertain ground the type of intuition attributed to Holmes with his ability to formulate hypotheses and interpret evidence would be of undoubted use. This is certainly the case within the context Doyle's wider range of non-Holmesian writings that engage with the premise that the natural world may well be capable of sustaining the types of unusual phenomena Crowe investigated.

As with Doyle and Crowe, Herbert Mayo attempted to draw a direct line between earlier traditions of knowledge to current scientific practices in his book *On the Truths Contained in Popular Superstitions: with an Account of Mesmerism* (1851). Mayo, who like Doyle was a doctor of medicine, stressed the validity of his data due to the weight of 'documentary evidence' supporting his claims.<sup>52</sup> When investigating historical cases of vampirism, Mayo speculated that there must be some truth to it even if it was mistakenly attributed to the supernatural. He argued that 'no doubt can be entertained of its authenticity, or of its *general* fidelity; the less that it does not stand alone, but is supported by a mass of evidence to the same effect' (Mayo's italics).<sup>53</sup> However, like Crowe, Mayo was conscious of the fact that eyewitness accounts from people of good character and with much to lose if exposed to ridicule was not enough to sway a sceptical scientific audience. In Mayo's explanation of his extensive experiments with the divining rod he notes:

[o]bjections have been taken against these experiments, on the ground that their effects are purely subjective; that the results must be received on the testimony of the party employed; and that the best parties for the purpose are persons whose natural sensibility is exalted by disorder of the nerves: a class of persons always suspected of

---

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., p. 30

<sup>52</sup> Herbert Mayo, *On the Truths Contained in Popular Superstitions: with an Account of Mesmerism* Second ed., (London: William Blackwood and Sons, 1851), p. 22.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., p. 29.

exaggeration, and even, and in part with justice, of a tendency to trickery and deception.<sup>54</sup>

Mayo acknowledged that the possibility of the acceptance of the results of his experiments with the divining rod were low. He argued that in order for a new phenomenon to be accepted as a ‘new truth’ in physics it has to undergo ‘three normal stages of opposition’.<sup>55</sup> First, ‘it is denounced as an imposture’.<sup>56</sup> Second, ‘it is cursorily examined, and plausibly explained away’.<sup>57</sup> Finally, ‘when it is fully admitted, it passes only under a protest that it has been perfectly known for ages’.<sup>58</sup> Mayo described this proceeding as intending ‘to make the new truth ashamed of itself and wish it had never been born’.<sup>59</sup> Mayo presented a concise summary of the type of objections familiar to both Doyle and Crowe based on the perceived unreliability of witness testimony. Consequently, he faced the charge of achieving ‘purely subjective’ results in his investigation. The assumption of those opposing Mayo’s investigation would be that he was unable to suspend his ‘willful self’ because his scientific method was rooted in folklore, superstition and the services of unreliable assistants. It is possible to detect a note of frustration in *On the Truths Contained in Popular Superstitions*, something Doyle would have been all too familiar with later in his life.

Investigators such as Doyle, Crowe and Mayo were perceived as being out of touch with the development of a new nineteenth century scientific sensibility. However, their reliance upon witness testimony, superstition and folk-lore are located within an earlier tradition of scientific enquiry that engaged with a sense of wonder and the fantastic. Until the nineteenth century experimentation was generally undertaken by individuals at their own expense. Lorraine Daston and Katharine Park note

---

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., p. 11.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., p. 16.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., p. 17.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

‘[e]xperiments were expensive, laborious, time-consuming, and capricious’, therefore collecting and cataloguing ‘[s]trange facts were more inconvenient to observe’.<sup>60</sup> Rarities such as ‘monstrous births’ or the observation of wondrous creatures ‘were neither practical nor in some cases even possible to repeat’.<sup>61</sup> Consequently, Daston and Park note that ‘trust was (and remains) essential to this form of collective empiricism’ and that there is ‘very little evidence that late-seventeenth-century natural philosophers found their credibility strained’.<sup>62</sup> However, Barbara Maria Stafford argues that the ‘value of “self-evident proof” was not the same as the “reiterated proof of some phenomenon”’.<sup>63</sup> This is indicative of the changes in eighteenth century laboratory practices that called for the ‘subjective vision to be disciplined by logic and corroborated by testimony of the other senses’.<sup>64</sup> It can also be read as criticism of pre-Baconian methodologies that were now regarded as incoherent recordings of inaccurately perceived phenomena. Some of the incoherence is located, as Stafford argues, in the presentation of evidence that involved some form of display existing ambiguously between ‘theater and learning’.<sup>65</sup> This complex interaction between theatre and imagination provides a nineteenth century context for Doyle’s interest in spiritualist exhibitions.

As we shall see in chapter three, theatrical performances of spiritualist séances informed the public perception of the phenomena. This was because, in part, spiritualism frequently shared the stage with magicians albeit far from harmoniously. Martin Willis explores the antagonism between the two professions, although it is the

---

<sup>60</sup> Lorraine Daston and Katharine Park, *Wonders and the Order of Nature 1150 -1750* (New York: Zone Books, 1998), p. 250.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>63</sup> Barbara Maria Stafford, *Artful Science: Enlightenment Entertainment and the Eclipse of Visual Education* (Cambridge MA: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1999), p. 153.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 180.

influence of the notion of spectacle that is of relevance. Willis notes how ‘[t]he spiritualist séance is a rather neglected site for considering scientific spectacle’.<sup>66</sup> The scientific spectacle was a mode of performance aiming to instruct its audience through entertainment. Such exhibitions evoked a sense of wonder in a manner comparable to the stage magician and spiritualist performers. Illusions aimed at presenting stage magic or successful interaction with the spiritual world relied upon successfully making an audience ‘wonder whether they could believe their eyes’.<sup>67</sup> The scientific spectacle aimed to stimulate rational empirical enquiry via a sense of wonder at the possibilities of the natural world. Doyle’s interest in spiritualism and especially the use of mediumistic séances are located within this context, although it is Stafford’s response to the problem of the reliability of evidence that is of most interest to my thesis.<sup>68</sup> Stafford also notes that the development of methodologies capable of responding to the challenge lay in the close examination of data and the verification of results ‘through exacting repetition’.<sup>69</sup> As we have seen, this then brings us to the concerns raised in the nineteenth century about the difficulty in repeating certain phenomena under laboratory conditions. It leaves us at an impasse, which as we shall see in chapter five, reflects Doyle’s argument that phenomena such as spiritualism or proof of the existence of fairies could not be reproducible under laboratory conditions. The root of Daston and Park’s ‘reporting of wonders’, noted above, lies in the experiences encountered at the

---

<sup>66</sup> Martin Willis, ‘On Wonder: Situating the Spectacle in Spiritualism and Performance Magic’, in *Popular Exhibitions, Science and Showmanship, 1840-1910*, ed. by Joe Kember, John Plunkett and Jill A Sullivan, *Science and Culture in the Nineteenth Century*, 16 (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2012), pp. 167-182, (p. 170).

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.* For a more broader discussion of the representation of scientific and cultural exhibitions in the nineteenth century see also Verity Hunt, ‘Narrativizing “The World’s Show”: The Great Exhibition, Panoramic Views and Print Supplements’ in *ibid.*, pp. 115- 132.

<sup>68</sup> For a discussion of scientific observation of spiritualist séances and visual culture see, Martin Willis, *Vision Science and Literature, 1870-1920: Ocular Horizons*, *Science and Culture in the Nineteenth Century*, 15 (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2011).

<sup>69</sup> Stafford, p. 153.



edges of scientific inquiry'.<sup>70</sup> To experience wonder was both a sign of the limits of human knowledge and a spur to learn more of the natural world around us. Before the early modern period, '[w]onders tended to cluster at the margins rather than at the centre of the known world'.<sup>71</sup> As we shall see in chapters four and five, Doyle retained a sense of the material natural world as being surrounded by wondrous new worlds that exist on the margins of our own. Doyle utilised his later fiction to dramatise this possibility while using his non-fiction to encourage the curiosity needed to expand the limits of scientific knowledge. As Daston and Park note in an earlier period, 'wonders had defined the order of nature by marking its limits' in both natural philosophy and theological enquiry into the natural world.<sup>72</sup> However, Doyle was at odds with post enlightenment scientific enquiry. His advocacy of wonder in science was not strictly bound by professional objectivity as the modern age demands. Wonder may well be indicative of the inspiration favoured by a reading of Holmes within a context seeking to investigate the development of nineteenth century scientific methodologies. Within the broader context of wonder and marvels, Doyle is representative of what Daston and Park call '[t]he fantastic imagination' that serves as 'the explanatory resource of last resort for extraordinary but well-attested phenomena that resisted all other attempts at a natural explanation'.<sup>73</sup> Even if Doyle could be regarded as misguided in his attempts to redefine what constituted reliable scientific evidence, he coherently maintained the principle that unusual phenomena, such as spiritualism, currently unexplainable by scientific methods are explicable regardless of their origins.

---

<sup>70</sup> Daston and Park, p. 13.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 14

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 363.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 341.

## Spiritualism and Literature

In the last chapter of his autobiography, *Memories and Adventures* (1924), Doyle reflected upon how his spiritual development and his literary success represented an unconscious preparatory phase for what he termed his ‘Psychic Quest’.<sup>74</sup> Doyle’s conversion to spiritualism is surprisingly difficult to date, with earlier biographers such as John Dickson Carr stating Doyle’s ‘conversion to a belief in communication with the dead may be placed between early September 1915 [...] and late January, 1916’.<sup>75</sup> Carr’s use of the word ‘conversion’ is inaccurate; a point clarified by Brian W Pugh who notes: ‘[Doyle] declares his belief in spiritualism’ in ‘1916’.<sup>76</sup> Pugh’s use of ‘declares’ makes the distinction between Doyle’s private belief in spiritualism and his public declaration of support. However, as we shall see Doyle’s interest in unusual phenomena began over twenty years earlier at the beginning of his professional career.

In August 1881, Doyle graduated from Edinburgh University as a Bachelor of Medicine (B.M.) and Master of Surgery (C.M.). By June 1882 he had arrived at Southsea, a seaside resort located in the city of Portsmouth, determined to establish himself as a general practitioner of medicine. Doyle’s residency in Southsea was important to the development of his religious and literary interests as well as his investigation of unusual phenomena. Stashower argues that Doyle’s interest in spiritualism and other phenomena had been ‘gathering force from his earliest days in Southsea’, until it ‘emerged as the most important thing in his life’.<sup>77</sup> It was during this period that Doyle created his most famous literary achievement Sherlock Holmes, the

---

<sup>74</sup> Arthur Conan Doyle, *Memories and Adventures* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 395.

<sup>75</sup> John Dickson Carr, *The Life of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle* (New York: Carroll and Graff, 1949; repr. 2003), pp. 253-4.

<sup>76</sup> Brian W. Pugh, *A Chronology of the Life of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle May 22nd 1859 to July 7th 1930: A Detailed Account of the life and Times of the Creator of Sherlock Holmes* (London: MX Publishing: 2009), p. 92.

<sup>77</sup> Stashower, *Teller of Tales*, p. 332.

consulting detective, along with other works of literature.<sup>78</sup> At this time, Doyle was also a member of the Hampshire Psychical Society based in Southampton. Doyle's introduction to spiritualism is therefore concurrent with his literary development. The Society's interests included hypnotism and thought transference and they appealed for anyone with relevant experience of such phenomena to notify the Society.<sup>79</sup> In February 1889 Doyle attended a private demonstration of 'The New Hypnotism' presented by 'Professor' Milo de Meyer, a Frenchman who had previously demonstrated his skills in a "music-hall" style performance, making his subjects ballet dance and extinguish imaginary fires. de Meyer's method involved taking hold of his subject's hand and drawing him forward onto one leg, while gazing into the subject's eyes. His subject would then fall to the ground completely unable to move his legs until released by de Meyer blowing onto his face.<sup>80</sup> Doyle was unimpressed by de Meyer's pre-selection of subjects for hypnosis. According to Geoffrey Stavert, Doyle 'got up from the audience and said that he wished to volunteer to be a subject.'<sup>81</sup> The Professor looked at the interrupter, who seemed to be about two feet taller than himself, and quickly decided that this was an offer he couldn't refuse'.<sup>82</sup> However his attempts to hypnotise Doyle failed completely, leaving de Meyer to claim that the process would take too long. If Doyle was less than impressed by this display it did not put him off studying the origins of unusual phenomena. On the contrary, it gathered pace. In 1883, while still resident in Southsea, Doyle also joined the local Portsmouth Literary and Scientific Society. Here

---

<sup>78</sup> Doyle also completed the novels *Micah Clarke* (1889), *The White Company* (1891) and a number of short-stories including 'The Surgeon of Gaster Fell' (1890) and 'A Pastoral Horror' (1890). He had also begun writing his second Sherlock Holmes novel, which was eventually published as *The Sign of Four* (1890) and his fictional, quasi-autobiographical novel *The Stark Munro Letters*.

<sup>79</sup> Doyle was aged 29 when the Hampshire Psychical Society held its opening meeting at the Trinity Schoolrooms in Southampton on the 29<sup>th</sup> September 1888. See Geoffrey Stavert, *A Study in Southsea: The Unrevealed Life of Doctor Arthur Conan Doyle* (Portsmouth, Milestone, 1987), p.130.

<sup>80</sup> Stavert, p. 141.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*

he met Major General Alfred W Drayson, a spiritualist who encouraged Doyle's interest in the subject.<sup>83</sup> Drayson also influenced Doyle's early writings.<sup>84</sup>

Doyle's emergence as a literary figure coincided with the success of his medical career and his growing interest in unusual phenomena, a trend that continued for the next ten years. In 1893 Doyle joined the Society for Psychical Research.<sup>85</sup> During the summer of this year Doyle's first wife, Louise, was diagnosed with tuberculosis. This tragedy was swiftly followed by the death of his father, Charles, in October. On a professional level, by 1894 Doyle had achieved phenomenal success with his serialised publications of his Sherlock Holmes detective stories in *The Strand Magazine*.<sup>86</sup> He had also published *The Stark Munro Letters* (1895), *The Parasite* (1894) and his compilation of medical stories, *Round the Red Lamp: Being Facts and Fancies of Medical Life* (1894). These stories coupled with Doyle's personal tragedies are important because they are influenced by his spiritual questioning, his medical experiences and the traumatic relationship with his father Charles. The interactions between these tensions are a focal point for modern biographies of Doyle. In describing Doyle's progression towards fully endorsing spiritualism later in life, Andrew Lycett is attentive to the consequences of Doyle's father's epilepsy and alcoholism. Lycett notes

---

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 43-45 and Jones, *Conan Doyle and the Spirits*, pp. 60-63.

<sup>84</sup> For example, Drayson's paper on astronomy, 'The Earth and its Movements' includes a description of what he termed 'The Obliquity of the Ecliptic', a term that appeared in the Sherlock Holmes story 'The Adventure of the Greek Interpreter' (1893), Stavert, pp. 47-48. Doyle also dedicated his collection of ten short-stories *The Captain of the Polestar and Other Tales* (1890) to Drayson. Just about every biography on Doyle has some information on Drayson's background. As well as Stavert, I found Stashower, *Teller of Tales*, pp. 95-97 to be useful.

<sup>85</sup> For a history of the Society for Psychical Research and its ambitions, see: Renée Haynes, *The Society for Psychical Research 1882-1982: A History* (London: Macdonald, 1982).

<sup>86</sup> *The Strand Magazine* was a publication of fiction and non-fiction articles aimed at a relatively new, literate audience. Doyle's stories were compiled as *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* (1892) and *The Memoirs of Sherlock Holmes* (1893). The last story in *The Memoirs of Sherlock Holmes*, 'The Adventure of the Final Problem' (1893) details the apparent death of the detective at the Reichenbach Falls in Davos, Switzerland. For a discussion on social, economical and industrial factors of the mass consumption of literature in the nineteenth century, see: Kate Flint, 'The Victorian Novel and its Readers', in *The Cambridge Companion to the Victorian Novel*, ed. by Deirdre David (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 17-36.

that as Doyle ‘wrestled with his concerns about his father’s soul, he had been working towards this end’, namely coming to regard the spiritualist mediums as providing proof of the soul’s survival after bodily death.<sup>87</sup> Similarly, he argues Doyle’s distress and frustration with his wife’s consumption is evident in *The Parasite* at a time when the science of parasitology was developing towards the end of the nineteenth century.<sup>88</sup> These are important issues that have more significance than providing biographical interpretations of Doyle’s psychology. I intend to explore how these tragedies and those which followed World War One assist in Doyle’s formulation of his position on unusual phenomena and a confidence in scientific methods being able to encompass the unknown wonders of the natural world.

### **Spiritualism and Other Worlds**

It is not a coincidence that Doyle’s public advocacy of spiritualism occurred during World War One. July 1<sup>st</sup> 1916 marked the first day of the Battle of the Somme where Doyle’s oldest son Arthur Alleyne Kingsley suffered two shrapnel wounds to his neck resulting in hospitalisation for two months.<sup>89</sup> Kingsley survived the war only to die in 1918 of the Spanish flu, followed months later in 1919 by Doyle’s youngest brother Innes.<sup>90</sup> It has been incorrectly held as a popular belief that this double tragedy, one of millions endured by survivors after the war, was the spur for Doyle’s advocacy of and conversion to spiritualism.<sup>91</sup> The actual date was earlier, on 4<sup>th</sup> November 1916, in an article Doyle contributed to the spiritualist journal, *Light*. This article formed the basis

---

<sup>87</sup> Andrew Lycett, *Conan Doyle: The Man Who Created Sherlock Holmes* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2007), p.130.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, p.202. For a discussion of parasitology and its influence upon literature, see: Anne-Julia Zwierlein, ‘From Parasitology to Parapsychology: Parasites in Nineteenth Century Science and Literature’, in *Unmapped Countries: Biological Visions in Nineteenth Century Literature and Culture*, ed. by Anne-Julia Zwierlein (London: Anthem Press, 2005), pp.155-172.

<sup>89</sup> Russell Miller, *The Adventures of Arthur Conan Doyle* (London: Pimlico, 2009), p. 331.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 344-5.

<sup>91</sup> One example is: ‘shortly after the war, Conan Doyle sank into depression. He found solace supporting spiritualism and its attempts to find proof of existence beyond the grave’ in *Wikipedia* <[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arthur\\_Conan\\_Doyle#cite\\_ref-20](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arthur_Conan_Doyle#cite_ref-20)> [accessed 29/05/11]

for a public speech in October 1917 as well as Doyle's spiritualist book *The New Revelation* (1918), a serious reflection upon his spiritual development.<sup>92</sup> In this text Doyle writes movingly about the effects of the war describing how, 'it brought earnestness into all our souls and made us look more closely at our own beliefs and reassess their values'.<sup>93</sup> This was a response to 'an agonized world, hearing every day of the deaths of the flower of our race in the first promise of their unfulfilled youth'.<sup>94</sup> For Doyle, witnessing 'the wives and mothers who had no clear conception whither their loved ones had gone to' provided meaning to his personal interest in and study of the occult and unusual phenomena.<sup>95</sup> He stated:

I seemed suddenly to see that this subject with which I had so long dallied was not merely a study of a force outside the rules of science, but that it was really something tremendous, a breaking down of the walls between two worlds, a direct undeniable message from beyond, a call of hope and of guidance to the human race at the time of its deepest affliction.<sup>96</sup>

Here, Doyle defines his public endorsement of spiritualism as response to World War One. Communication with the spirits of those who had died during the war represented 'a call of hope and of guidance'. It also offered the possibility of finding some sort of meaning to the slaughter within a broader spiritual context. Doyle describes spiritualism as representing a 'force outside the rules of science' that was also capable of 'breaking down' the 'walls between two worlds'. Doyle's notion that spiritualism was a force from outside the rules of science does not exclude it from originating within the laws of nature. Rather, it indicates the need for an expansion of scientific 'rules' to understand spiritualism. His concept of breaking down the boundaries between two worlds is

---

<sup>92</sup> Doyle, 'A New Revelation. Spiritualism and Religion', *Light*, 36 (1916), 357-8.

<sup>93</sup> Doyle, *The New Revelation* (New York: Cosimo, 2007), p. 26.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 26-7.

intriguing. In this instance the two worlds are the seen and unseen, or the spiritual and material planes of existence. However, they are also indicative of other worlds that co-exist with, or indeed within, our own world yet lie beyond human perception.

Doyle's short-story 'Lot No. 249' (1894) provides one compelling example of the limitations of scientific knowledge. In this story Doyle uses the potential resurrection of an ancient Egyptian mummy to emphasise the perils and the wonders that may exist at the border between the known and unknown laws of the natural world. Doyle writes, '[b]ut the wisdom of men is small, and the ways of nature are strange, and who shall put a bound to the dark things which may be found by those who seek them?'<sup>97</sup> Traditionally, critics position this story within the context of imperialism and the threat of reverse colonization. In *The Colonial Conan Doyle: British Imperialism, Irish Nationalism and the Gothic* (2002), Catherine Wynne notes how 'this story concludes with a somber reflection on the limitations of contemporary science amid the terrible possibilities of nature'.<sup>98</sup> Western science and reason are in opposition to the occultism of the Oriental 'other' apparent in stories such as Doyle's *The Mystery of Cloomber* (1888), Richard Marsh's *The Beetle* (1897) or Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897). Wynne argues, '[t]hus, English scientific reason is reinscribed to the detriment of foreign occultism'.<sup>99</sup> With this in mind, I adopt this premise and argue that Doyle's notion that the 'limitations of contemporary science amid the terrible possibilities of nature' has more than an imperial context within his fictional writings. It is also rooted in his interest in science and its potential to explain phenomena that had hitherto been mistakenly attributed to the supernatural.

---

<sup>97</sup> Doyle, *Conan Doyle's Tales of Medical Humanism and Values: 'Round the Red Lamp: Being Facts and Fancies of Medical Life'*, ed. by Alvin E Rodin and Jack D Key (Malabar FL: Krieger publishing Company, 1992), pp. 219-260, (p.253).

<sup>98</sup> Catherine Wynne, *The Colonial Conan Doyle: British Imperialism, Irish Nationalism and the Gothic* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2002), p. 163.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*

Doyle's public endorsement of spiritualism is also rooted in nineteenth-century cultural and religious concerns. Oppenheim and others examine the motivation for interest and belief in spiritualism in the period from its advent in 1848 with the American Fox sisters to the outbreak of World War One.<sup>100</sup> The motivation for British cultural interest in spiritualism is a complicated topic, elements of which are highly relevant to a study of Doyle's interest in unexplained phenomena. For example, Oppenheim neatly summarises the cultural effects of Darwin's theory of evolution, especially upon religious beliefs:

None however, could blandly accept God's absence from the universe. They [Victorians] had not had time to adjust to an amoral world that neither cared about humanity nor made manifest an ultimate meaning in life.<sup>101</sup>

Consequently, spiritualism appeared to offer an alternative to the apparent nihilism implied by an 'amoral world' devoid of spirituality. Impetus emerged from people who 'searched for some incontrovertible reassurance of fundamental cosmic order and purpose, especially reassurance that life on earth was not the totality of human existence'.<sup>102</sup> Furthermore, opposition to traditional Christian teaching targeted the notion of eternal punishment. Oppenheim goes on to note:

Hell, and consequently predestination, were not the sole Christian doctrines that the progressive spiritualists jettisoned. The vision of man's utter depravity and innate sinfulness similarly vanished, together with its necessary accompaniment, the doctrine of Christ's vicarious atonement.<sup>103</sup>

---

<sup>100</sup> For a brief description of the influence of the Fox sisters on spiritualism see: Deborah Blum, *Ghost Hunters: William James and the Search for Scientific Proof of Life after Death* (London: Century, 2007), pp. 16-19. For other historical accounts of psychical research and the supernatural see: Alan Gauld, *The Founders of Psychical Research* (New York: Schocken Books, 1968) and Brian Inglis, *Natural and Supernatural: A History of the Paranormal from Earliest Times to 1914* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1977).

<sup>101</sup> Oppenheim, p. 4.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 93.



This is particularly pertinent to contextualising Doyle's religious views in his early novel *The Stark Munro Letters* (1895). Doyle's spiritual beliefs are pervasive throughout this novel, foreshadowing his later advocacy of spiritualism and his belief that Christianity needed fundamental revision. Later in life he argued that the main difference between spiritualism and Christianity was that the former possessed proof of an afterlife, whereas the latter was reliant solely upon faith.<sup>104</sup> For Doyle, the experience at the séance table constituted evidence of the soul's survival after bodily death, removing the need for a religion based solely upon faith and highlighting a desire to understand this phenomenon scientifically. In *The Stark Munro Letters*, Doyle presents a system of spirituality that drew upon a complicated merger of evolutionary theory, a non-Christian godhead, racial degeneration and his personal family relationships. Even at this early point in his writing career Doyle stressed his belief that religious reform was not just necessary, but also a measure of human progress.

### **Doyle and Medical Realism**

Concurrent with Doyle's spiritual and creative development are his professional medical experiences. Much critical attention has been paid to Doyle's attempt to portray realism in his medical fiction, while simultaneously sidelining his early interest in the supernatural. However, they do provide a relevant context for my re-evaluation of Doyle's medical realism. I explore how Doyle defined medical realism in a manner that made it possible for it to encompass phenomena mistakenly attributed to the supernatural. In his edition of *Round the Red Lamp*, Robert Darby contextualises Doyle's medical life within the difficulties of establishing a successful practice with

---

<sup>104</sup> Doyle, *The New Revelation*, p. 27.

little capital and no connections.<sup>105</sup> In addition, Darby historicises Doyle's portrayal of medicine within a critical period of change in the nineteenth century. He argues:

it was only at the very end of the nineteenth century that medical advances (as opposed to improvements in urban sanitation and nutrition) began to raise life expectancy and increase the likelihood that a medical consultation would actually do some good.<sup>106</sup>

Darby argues that Doyle's attempt at portraying medical realism to an audience unaccustomed to frank detail of procedures is implicated in the changing status of doctors in the late nineteenth century. Jack D Rodin and Alvin E Key emphasise Doyle's medical humanism and sensitivity to the needs of his patients evident in *Round the Red Lamp*.<sup>107</sup> Both critical texts note the tension between medical professionalism and practice, focussing on Doyle's presentation of a comprehensive range of late nineteenth century medical professions, including surgery, general practice and alienists who specialised in mental illness. Rodin and Key's critical biography of Doyle prioritises his role as a doctor of medicine.<sup>108</sup> They read Doyle's Sherlock Holmes stories within a historical medical context stressing how it shaped his detective fiction. Rodin and Key argue that there are a number of '[m]yths which haunt Conan Doyle's medical reputation [...] endlessly perpetuated, especially by those enthralled with the Sherlock Holmes aspect of his life'.<sup>109</sup> Primarily, they seek to redress a series of imbalances in the public perception of Doyle's legacy. The mythology that surrounds Doyle's literary achievements is composed mainly of:

claims that he was a failure as a physician; that he saw very few patients; that he lived in near poverty all during the years of his practice; that he possessed minimal skills

---

<sup>105</sup> Doyle, *'Round the Red Lamp' and Other Medical Writings*, ed. by Robert Darby (Kansas: Valancourt Books, 2007).

<sup>106</sup> Darby, p. XV.

<sup>107</sup> Rodin and Key, *Conan Doyle's Tales of Medical Humanism*.

<sup>108</sup> Rodin and Key, *Medical Casebook of Doctor Arthur Conan Doyle: From Practitioner to Sherlock Holmes and Beyond* (Malabar FL: Robert E Krieger Publishing Company, 1984).

<sup>109</sup> Rodin and Key, *Medical Casebook*, p. xx.

as a physician; that he was responsible for few medically related publications and these few being so insignificant as to be meaningless; and that he had no real interest in medicine.<sup>110</sup>

Rodin and Key address each of these points in the *Medical Casebook of Doctor Arthur Conan Doyle* (1984). It is not difficult to see why these factual errors needed correction. Roy Porter states, '[w]e owe Sherlock Holmes and Dr Watson to the fact that Dr Arthur Conan Doyle [...] had a slack surgery in his early years, giving him both the time and the need to write'.<sup>111</sup> This is incorrect. Doyle supplemented his income by writing during the early stages of his medical practice from 1882. However, Holmes and Watson were created in Doyle's novella, *A Study in Scarlet* (1888), which was written between March and April 1886.<sup>112</sup> By this time Doyle had established a medical practice that was making around three hundred pounds per year and he was writing in the hours before and after surgery each day.<sup>113</sup> Doyle wrote numerous short-stories that relate to medical practice as well as contributing to both *The Lancet* and the *British Medical Journal*. Rodin and Key argue that these facts, together with his MD thesis and his public campaigns for health reforms, have been unjustly ignored, prompting their own attempt to highlight the importance of his medical experience. Rodin and Key also pay equal critical attention to Doyle's non-Holmesian medical writings, an approach I intend to follow throughout this thesis. However, one key distinction between my reading of Doyle's work and Rodin and Key's is that I register the relevance of the supernatural in Doyle's medical writings.

In chapter two I discuss Doyle's interpretation of medical realism and how he deployed it in his own collection of medical tales. However, before this subject is

---

<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

<sup>111</sup> Roy Porter, *The Greatest Benefit to Mankind: A Medical History of Humanity from Antiquity to the Present* (London: Harper Collins, 1997; repr. 1999), p. 351.

<sup>112</sup> Richard Lancelyn Green and John Michael Gibson, *A Bibliography of A. Conan Doyle* (Boston: Hudson House, 1983; repr. 2000), p. 10.

<sup>113</sup> Stavert, pp. 61-62.

broached it is necessary to understand how medicine can be described as a realistic mode of literary fiction. Lawrence Rothfield argues that nineteenth century authors such as Eliot, Balzac and Flaubert based their literary realism on clinical practice and science. What medical science has to offer is the clinical observation of individual patients while maintaining a professional distance. Rothfield states, ‘medicine enjoys by far the closest and most long-standing association with the issues of mimesis and knowledge so crucial to critical conceptions of realism’.<sup>114</sup> Rothfield argues that literary realists ‘compare themselves to “medical” observers’, asserting that their writing constitutes a medical view of life.<sup>115</sup> When discussing criticism of Flaubert’s *Madame Bovary* (1857), Rothfield is attentive to medical discourse. This is especially so if there is a danger of medical terms, such as hysteria for example, being defined without reference to medical discourse contemporaneous to the cultural practice of Flaubert. Rothfield cautions against being ‘blind to these kind of sociological and institutional determinants of textual situations’.<sup>116</sup> In chapter two of this thesis I examine syphilis within a similar historical, sociological and medical discourse that ran contemporaneously with Doyle’s experience of clinical practice. However, my interest is in how the various elements of Doyle’s writings are readable as a coherent whole. For Doyle the infringement of potentially supernatural phenomena is never far from his medical literary concerns.

Importantly, my reading of Doyle’s collection of medical short stories *Round the Red Lamp*, is in contrast to Rothfield’s interpretation. Rothfield reads this collection as an expression of Doyle’s ‘enormous *ressentiment* as a subordinated professional’

---

<sup>114</sup> Lawrence Rothfield, *Vital Signs: Medical Realism in Nineteenth-Century Fiction* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), p. 12

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 84-85

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 23.

(Rothfield's italics).<sup>117</sup> According to this reading *Round the Red Lamp* is limited to Doyle's psychologically suppressed 'attacks on his superiors', displaced into the 'nightmarish quality' of his 'medical tales'.<sup>118</sup> I find it difficult to read *Round the Red Lamp*, as Rothfield does, as an expression of Doyle's frustrated inferiority and aggression at his professional fraternity. Certainly, the weight of critical analysis deployed in this thesis weighs against such a reading. Doyle has little influence in Rothfield's discussion of how medical realism engaged with the professionalization of clinical and scientific classes during the nineteenth century. Rothfield states 'I would only point out here that Conan Doyle was a subordinate and marginal, respectable yet poverty-stricken clinical practitioner'.<sup>119</sup> Rothfield continues to argue that Doyle's role in literary realism can be reduced to merely documenting 'the dreary condition of the general practitioner in Victorian England'.<sup>120</sup> He suggests that the 'professions had established themselves – by roughly 1860' and that central to the rise of medical professionalization was the epistemological 'validation' which occurred gradually throughout the century.<sup>121</sup> Crucially, much of this validation occurred 'in the form of university and medical school educational requirements' by which a doctor became qualified and licensed to practice medicine.<sup>122</sup> Rothfield reads this process as being formative to the development of an 'imagined self that could be in the cruel world of competitive capitalism but not of it'.<sup>123</sup> Consequently, the process of writing literary realism is incorporated within this process of developing such an imagined self with its dependent yet aloof involvement in modern capitalist society. While not ascribing to the

---

<sup>117</sup> Ibid., p. 142.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid., pp. 79 and 74.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid., p. 74.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid., p. 79.

aesthetics of a “high” literary mode, Doyle can be easily located within a context that engages with medical professionalization nonetheless.

In *Literature and Medicine in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (2004), Janis McLarren Caldwell examines how ‘clinical medicine emerged from the same culture that nourished Romantic Literature’.<sup>124</sup> Consequently, leading medical doctors and writers cultivated a form of double vision that she interprets as constituting a “‘Romantic materialism’”.<sup>125</sup> They were ‘Romantic because they were concerned with consciousness and self-expression, and materialist because they placed a particularly high value on what natural philosophy was telling them about the material world’.<sup>126</sup> Caldwell’s dichotomy between the highly intuitive romantic genius and the meticulous observer of the natural world is akin to the scientific methodology discussed above, thus providing a medical context for Doyle’s detective fiction that is of interest to critics of medical realism.

The dualism inherent in Caldwell’s Romantic materialism enables the investigation of the natural world without entirely marginalising potentially supernatural phenomena. In my second chapter I investigate Doyle’s interest in unusual phenomena that occurs beyond the limit of scientific understanding. Caldwell examines Thomas Carlyle’s *Sartor Resartus* (1833-1834) noting the blurring between ‘boundaries established between natural and supernatural realms’.<sup>127</sup> She argues that Carlyle hypothesises that, ‘the supernatural can be attributed to the natural once its laws are discovered, and that the supernatural is also law-abiding, even if humans are not

---

<sup>124</sup> Janis McLarren Caldwell, *Literature and Medicine in Nineteenth-Century Britain: From Mary Shelley to George Eliot*, (Cambridge: Cambridge university Press), p. 1.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid., p. 56.

acquainted with this “deeper law”<sup>128</sup>. Consequently, ‘[n]ature and the supernatural become one continuous fabric, divided only by the shifting cusp of human knowledge’, a position that could be attributable to Doyle’s own arguments about the limits of our understanding of natural law evident in his medical realism.<sup>129</sup>

As with Rothfield, Jason Daniel Tougaw’s *Strange Cases: The Medical Case History and the British Novel* (2006) focuses upon the interaction between literary realism and medicine. However, Tougaw’s emphasis is on the importance of clinical case histories. He examines ‘the mutual influence of the medical case history and the British novel during the nineteenth century, when that influence was most dynamic’.<sup>130</sup> Noting the rise of the case history during the Enlightenment and its establishment in nineteenth century medical practice, Tougaw argues that its use stems from its ability to ‘provide a public forum for the discussion of medical phenomena that could not be explained or cured with the tools or knowledge of the period’s medical science’.<sup>131</sup> Uncertainties about the outcome of medical diagnostics are at the heart of Doyle’s medical realism and Tougaw’s analysis of clinical case histories. For Tougaw, it is the process of “telling tales” that is the corollary between literary realism and medicine. He states, ‘[i]n novels, the doctor-patient relationship becomes an implicit model for the relationship between a reader and a novel’ because ‘the novel offers writers of case histories a set of conventions that enable them to tell the stories of suffering patients’.<sup>132</sup> According to Tougaw literature and medicine interact by the establishment of a set of literary conventions that provide a model for the presentation of medical case histories. Tougaw argues that when dealing with incurable conditions, the ‘physicians who write

---

<sup>128</sup> Ibid.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid.

<sup>130</sup> Jason Daniel Tougaw, *Strange Cases: The Medical Case History and the British Novel* (London: Routledge, 2006), p. 1.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid., p.2.

case histories seem to turn as if by instinct to literary techniques to provide the missing closure' moderating the tensions between patient and doctor.<sup>133</sup>

In particular, it is the 'representation of living, breathing human beings' that becomes a 'burden to the writers of case histories'.<sup>134</sup> This is because case histories call attention to 'two troubling realities: that illness is intrinsic to life and often eludes the power of medical science'.<sup>135</sup> What medicine and nineteenth century literary realism have in common is a mutually accessible genre capable of 'closing without offering anything like epistemological certainty'.<sup>136</sup> I argue that, for Doyle, such epistemological uncertainty is located with his personal literary and scientific trajectory. This trajectory begins with medical uncertainty and moves through the gothic before contemplating the possibilities of a wider order of nature. Doyle's depiction of unusual, yet natural occurrences experienced by doctors are infused by gothic modes. Tougaw argues that '[o]n the surface, realist fiction focuses on ordinary life'.<sup>137</sup> However, the 'sheer attention novels pay to the details of their characters' *ordinary* lives exposes their more *extraordinary* aspects' (Tougaw's italics).<sup>138</sup> Tougaw argues that '[r]ealism allowed novelists to represent fictional experiences that vacillate between the ordinary and the extraordinary, eliciting ambivalent identification from readers'.<sup>139</sup> It is this ambivalence where Doyle's medical writing shares some common ground with the wider context of literary realism rooted in medical discourse.

The interplay between ordinary and extraordinary experiences also finds expression in medical experimentation and theories of human consciousness that

---

<sup>133</sup> Ibid., p. 36.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid., p. 15.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid., p. 10.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid., p. 4.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid.



emerged toward the end of the nineteenth century. For Doyle, altered states of consciousness brought on by self-experimentation with drugs or under mesmeric influence are located within his movement towards advocating spiritualism and his attempt to explain such unusual phenomena within the boundaries of science. Tougaw examines texts that emerged in the latter half of the nineteenth century, such as *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886), *In a Glass Darkly* (1872) and *The Moonstone* (1868). Central to these texts is the ‘type of case history [...] that documents a scientific experiment’.<sup>140</sup> Closely related to this is Meegan Kennedy’s identification of a literary tradition ‘that could be called “Gothic medicine”’.<sup>141</sup> Its relevance towards Doyle’s medical realism also lies in her addition of ‘the monstrous in medicine, the curious in the clinic [and] the romance in realism’.<sup>142</sup>

Kennedy argues that ‘few acknowledge how often the “clinical” case history of the nineteenth century also shares the romantic discourse of the Gothic’.<sup>143</sup> The area of romance and the gothic is also a feature of Doyle’s medical writings. What is of interest to Kennedy is the manner in which the clinical case history sought to suppress the type of unusual phenomena stressed by Doyle’s medical realism. While Kennedy is interested in how literary realism and the gothic threatened the objectivity of the medical case history, Doyle was concerned with interpreting potentially supernatural phenomena that he presented in a manner akin to those described in ‘The Ghost in the Clinic’ (2004). However, Gothic medicine’s ‘interest in the supernatural and the unexplainable and its narrative aim of arousing suspense, horror, and astonishment in the reader’ is a relevant context for Doyle’s medical realism. In particular the

---

<sup>140</sup> Ibid., pp. 140-141.

<sup>141</sup> Meegan Kennedy, ‘The Ghost in the Clinic: Gothic Medicine and Curious Fiction in Samuel Warren’s *Diary of a Late Physician*’, *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 32. 2 (2004), 327-351 (p. 345).

<sup>142</sup> Ibid.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid., p. 327.

unexplainable provides an adequate locus for much of the anxiety caused by unfavourable medical diagnoses that are presented in the gothic mode, a feature of *Round the Red Lamp* and Kennedy's Gothic medicine. Tougaw argues that these stories, as well as *Dracula* and *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, 'fuse the conventions of sensation and gothic fiction', while drawing upon 'medical experiment in order to dramatize what amounted to emerging theories of the unconscious mind'.<sup>144</sup> Doyle also engaged with what Tougaw describes as 'lively representations of new and controversial medical technologies'.<sup>145</sup> They were both conscious of how '[e]xperiments with altered [psychological] states suggested that the consciousness is labile, that a mind or even a self can be transformed under the influence of a drug or even the pointed gaze of another human being'.<sup>146</sup> As with other writers of gothic literature Doyle understood the dramatic potential of such possibilities as well as the scientific ramifications of mid to late nineteenth century experimentation with anaesthetics, mesmerism and hypnosis.

Importantly, there is a danger when side-lining Doyle's interest in potentially supernatural phenomena. This is evident in Martin Booth's *The Doctor and the Detective* (1997) when he states:

Understandably, some of Conan Doyle's literary work from the start of his Southsea days reflected his growing fascination with the paranormal, the supernatural and his grand religion, although it is unfair, as some critics have done, to say that these factors were central to his muse. Conan Doyle merely used his interest to spin a good tale, to refine his innate ability to disturb his readers, especially in his horror stories.<sup>147</sup>

Defining Doyle's interest in the supernatural as nothing more than inspiration for a 'good tale' is reductive. In Doyle's trajectory, his early use of the supernatural

---

<sup>144</sup> Tougaw, p. 141.

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 142.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 141.

<sup>147</sup> Martin Booth, *The Doctor and the Detective: A Biography of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle* (New York: Thomas Dunne Books, 1997; repr. 2000), p. 124.

incorporates the idea that the day-to-day practice of medicine incorporates unusual, yet natural, occurrences. Doyle portrays these occurrences as supernatural phenomena that articulate the unease generated by taboo subjects such as venereal disease and religious tensions, which are expressed through gothic modes. This becomes a motivation of Doyle's abandonment of his early religious beliefs as he turned more fully towards his developing scientific ideas.

### **Exploring the Gothic and Imperialism**

In Doyle's fiction, his use of gothic modes assist in formulating the notion that phenomena such as spiritualism and the existence of fairies belonged to the natural world.<sup>148</sup> For example, Roger Luckhurst notes how Doyle's 'John Barrington Cowles' (1884) and *The Parasite* illustrate how the 'Victorian gothic' in the late nineteenth century began to exploit the 'scientific and occult frameworks'.<sup>149</sup> Noting the interaction between medical knowledge and the occult in this short-story, Luckhurst continues, 'the sureties of medical science, in other words, slip between the esoteric and the folkloric, leaving official knowledges impotent without extending their boundaries'.<sup>150</sup> While recognising the gothic influences upon Doyle's fictional writings, my focus in this thesis is this notion of whether 'official knowledges' (medical or otherwise), were capable of extending their boundaries within the context of Doyle's fiction and nonfiction writings.

---

<sup>148</sup> Attention has also been paid to the gothic influence on Doyle's detective fiction. For instance, David Punter notes Doyle's contribution to 'the development of the detective thriller' is rooted in Edgar Allan Poe's 'The Murders in the Rue Morgue' (1841) and 'The Gold Bug' (1843). In a broader contextualisation one could also include Poe's 'The Imp of the Perverse' (1845) as an influence upon his Sherlock Holmes story 'The Adventure of the Devil's Foot' (1910). This latter short-story merges gothic horror with the occult and the Victorian practice of medical self-experimentation. See David Punter, *The Literature of Terror: A History of Gothic Fictions from 1765 to the Present Day, The Gothic Tradition*, 2 vols (Harlow: Longman, 1996), I, p. 176.

<sup>149</sup> Roger Luckhurst, 'Trance-Gothic, 1882-97', in *Victorian Gothic: Literary and Cultural Manifestations in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. by Ruth Robbins and Julian Wolfreys (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave, 2000), pp. 148-67 (p. 156).

<sup>150</sup> Luckhurst, 'Trance-Gothic, 1882-97', p. 156.

Other gothic interpretations are applicable to Doyle's fiction. In *The Hound of the Baskervilles* there is an opposition of Baker Street rationalism versus rural superstition. *The Hound* has been critically recognised as the most gothic of Holmes's stories.<sup>151</sup> In his critical history *Gothic* (1996), Fred Botting defines the 'stock features' of gothic fiction that 'provide the principal embodiments and evocations of cultural anxieties'.<sup>152</sup> These features include, '[t]orturous, fragmented narratives relating mysterious incidents, horrible images and life-threatening pursuits [...] Gothic landscapes as suggestive figures of imagined and realistic threats'.<sup>153</sup> Patrick Brantlinger reads Doyle's later writings within the context of his spiritualist beliefs, late nineteenth century imperial fiction, and the gothic. Brantlinger's concept of 'imperial Gothic' conflates the 'seemingly scientific, progressive, often Darwinian ideology of imperialism with an antithetical interest in the occult'.<sup>154</sup> This mode of fiction reveals 'three principal themes of imperial Gothic'.<sup>155</sup> They are, 'individual regression or going native; an invasion of civilization by the forces of barbarism or demonism; and the diminution of opportunities for adventure and heroism in the modern world'.<sup>156</sup> Brantlinger lists *The Lost World* (1912), *The Poison Belt* (1913) and *The Land of Mist* (1926) as fitting these criteria, revealing 'anxieties characteristic of late Victorian and Edwardian imperialism' with, for instance apocalyptic visions betraying the feeling of

---

<sup>151</sup> For critical discussions on gothic and supernatural themes of this novel, see: Doyle, *The Hound of the Baskervilles with 'The Adventure of the Speckled Band'*, ed. by Francis O'Gorman (Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview Press, 2006); Doyle, *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, ed. by Christopher Frayling (London: Penguin Classics, 2001; repr. 2003); Nils Clausson, 'Degeneration, *Fin-de-Siecle* Gothic, and the Science of Detection: Arthur Conan Doyle's *The Hound of the Baskervilles* and the Emergence of the Modern detective Story', *Journal of National Theory*, 35.1 (Winter 2005), 60-87 and Jesse Oak Taylor-Ide, 'Ritual and the Liminality of Sherlock Holmes in *The Sign of Four* and *The Hound of the Baskervilles*', *English Literature in Transition, 1880-1920*, 48.1 (2005), 55-70. For a comprehensive discussion on Doyle's development of the legend of the hound, see: Philip Weller, '*The Hound of the Baskervilles*': *Hunting the Dartmoor Legend* (Dartmoor: Devon Books, [2001?]).

<sup>152</sup> Fred Botting, *Gothic* (London: Routledge, 1996; 2002), p.2.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>154</sup> Patrick Brantlinger, *Rule of Darkness: British Literature and Imperialism, 1830-1914* (London: Cornell University Press, 1988), p 227.

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 230.

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*

imperial and social decay, interacting with atavistic nightmares of human degeneration.<sup>157</sup> Brantlinger concludes his chapter on imperial Gothic by arguing:

the ultimate victory of spiritualism was prefigured for Doyle in the demise of the empires of this world, the precondition for the invasion and reconquest of reality by the realm of spirit, or perhaps of our transubstantiation - a kind of psychic emigration and colonization - into the world beyond reality, an invisible, even more glorious empire rising ghostlike out of the corpse of the old.<sup>158</sup>

Brantlinger argues that Doyle's creation of a realm of spirit was a reaction to the fear of the 'demise of the empire of this world'. Reading Doyle's later fiction solely in relation to empire leads Brantlinger to conclude, '[m]aterial adventure in the material Empire might be on the wane, but over the ruins was dawning the light of the great spiritualist adventure'.<sup>159</sup> However, the argument that spiritualism had for Doyle become 'a substitute for all other causes-for imperialism itself' places undue significance upon his imperialism while ignoring his lifelong interest in unexplained phenomena and the occult. I do not read the imperial, gothic and spiritualist themes in Doyle's later fiction as solely a prop for him to replace a decaying British Empire. Rather, I acknowledge the importance of the gothic and imperialism within Doyle's writings while attempting to register a wider range of his interests and their influence upon how he hoped scientific methods could be utilised to expand and explore the boundaries of human knowledge.

### **Objectives of this Thesis**

In this thesis I examine how Doyle portrayed science as being able to explore and explain unusual phenomena that had previously been misinterpreted as supernatural. For Doyle, the supernatural did not exist but belonged to a wider order of nature that had been marginalised or ignored by the scientific community for much of

---

<sup>157</sup> Ibid., p. 236.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid., p. 253.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid., p. 252.

the nineteenth century. With close textual analysis of contemporary Victorian documents including newspapers, medical journals, private correspondence, artwork, biography and autobiography I will demonstrate how they can be read alongside Doyle's fiction and essays to unify and investigate his views on the existence of unusual phenomena. Each of the five chapters in this thesis addresses an aspect of Doyle's stance on unusual phenomena and its relationship to his writings. They are arranged chronologically with Doyle's biography, but examine a clear trajectory beginning with his early novel, *The Stark Munro Letters* in chapter one. The second and third chapters cover the middle period of his life, engaging with his medical fiction and the return of Sherlock Holmes in *The Hound of the Baskervilles* respectively. The final two chapters engage with his later years covering his science fiction and serious spiritualist writings.

Before the central themes of Doyle's engagement with science and potentially supernatural phenomena are discussed, it is necessary to establish how this was influenced by his early writings. Consequently, in chapter one, I examine how *The Stark Munro Letters*, Doyle's quasi-autobiographical account of a young doctor, represents an early attempt to unify his thoughts on religion, addiction, madness and the supernatural. In Doyle's religious schema evolution and diseases such as addiction serve as tools for the divine creator to weed out those unfit to survive. I consider how Doyle's religious views considered addiction as immoral and regressive and how these early ideas were influenced by his father Charles's alcoholism and mental illness. Addiction and mental illness are examined in *The Parasite* and several short-stories, 'The Japanned Box', (1899) 'The Silver Mirror' (1908) and 'A Pastoral Horror' (1890). The first two novels reveal elements of Doyle's medical experience and spiritual beliefs and the last two stories are analysed with reference to madness, addiction and the supernatural. With reference to Charles's artwork, I examine how alcoholism and mental illness in such

stories as ‘The Jappaned Box’ and ‘A Pastoral Horror’ offer the prospect of heightening an individual’s perception of phenomena that contains supernatural potential. I then argue that it is this gothicised portrayal of heightened perceptions that allows Doyle to refigure his father from an immoral alcoholic to a potential visionary capable of observing potentially supernatural phenomena. This is a key point in Doyle’s early writings, where he establishes and begins on his trajectory of the supernatural towards the necessity of investigating the limits of the laws of nature. Within Doyle’s fictional milieu phenomena believed to be supernatural in origin are discovered to originate in the natural world. I illustrate this point with a reading of *The Parasite*. I argue that a sceptical Professor Gilroy stumbles upon a new discipline of scientific enquiry through the discovery of the natural origins of Miss Penelosa’s mesmeric powers. Significantly, at this early part of Doyle’s writings and ideas, Gilroy’s knowledge is not adequate to the task of confronting the wonders and the horrors of the natural world.

Having established the importance of Doyle’s early writings, I then turn to his medical experiences as a student and as a doctor, examining their wider influence upon his interest in science and unusual phenomena. In chapter two, I argue that phenomena that appear to be supernatural in origin may in fact belong to unknown laws of nature. I examine Doyle’s collection of medical stories compiled in *Round the Red Lamp*. I explore how the gothic, the occult and the supernatural support his interest in expanding the boundaries of science. Doyle’s notion of medical realism engages with issues of sexuality and madness, but sexuality is often articulated through the deployment of gothic modes. I consider how in ‘The Third Generation’ (1894), Dr Selby fancies he can see an apparition that is concordant with both the narrator of ‘The Silver Mirror’ and Colmore in ‘The Jappaned Box’. Consequently, I argue that this reveals the subtlety of Doyle’s writing, whereby characters such as Selby are potentially visionaries of natural

wonders that exist at the boundaries of human knowledge in a manner similar to Charles Doyle. I examine the importance of Doyle's use of medical realism and how *Round the Red Lamp* reveals the unease created by the inability of medical science to ameliorate a patient's suffering, evident within 'A Medical Document' and especially 'The Third Generation'. I explore how Doyle's medical realism incorporates unusual phenomena that are, at times of crisis, expressed in a gothic mode. I look at how it is the inability to diagnose and to treat medical ailments that opens the potential for the supernatural. In addition, I argue that the unjust contagions and hereditary taints included in Doyle's medical realism prompted him to revise his earlier stance on degeneration. I consider how for Doyle, the idea of natural selection as an element of the creator's plan became redundant. Instead, his early ideas of natural selection and racial regression are rejected in favour of a consideration of potentially supernatural phenomena as originating in hitherto unexplained laws of nature. Importantly, I then introduce the significance of 'Lot No. 249' as being at the core of Doyle's emerging views on natural law. I argue that it becomes possible to read 'Lot No. 249' as an important extended metaphor that Doyle uses to show how unexplained phenomena with the potential to be interpreted as supernatural, may belong to the natural world once the scientific boundaries are expanded through appropriate investigation.

In chapter three I argue that Doyle utilised *The Hound of the Baskervilles* to demonstrate how such phenomena could be investigated. I begin by noting the importance of Doyle's spiritualist essay 'A New Light on Old Crimes' (1920), in which he contends that the 'new light' of spiritualism could help in solving unexplained criminal cases. Doyle argued that there were no divisions between investigating crime and spiritualism because they both existed in the natural world. I argue that Doyle's position is articulated through Holmes's stance on the supernatural and his investigation



of the Baskerville hound. Doyle and Holmes both reject the supernatural by arguing that there are ordinary and extra-ordinary laws of nature subject to an empirical investigation. In *The Hound* I read Dr Mortimer as a man of science whom Doyle portrays as a cautionary figure who is too swift in embracing the popular superstition of a spectral devil-hound instead of rational scientific enquiry. I also demonstrate how Stapleton's murderous deception in recreating the legend of the Baskerville hound locates him within the practices of fraudulent mediums through his use of phosphorous. I argue that Stapleton can be examined within the context of nineteenth century discourse upon the validity and means of investigating spiritualist mediums and the occult. Importantly, I read Holmes as a specialist in crime whose scientific methods are able to mediate between varying interpretations of contested phenomena. While Holmes's concept of extra-ordinary laws of nature are not validated by the exposure of the hound of the Baskervilles, I argue that his investigative role demonstrates how Doyle felt such unusual phenomenon should be explored.

In chapter four, I return to study Doyle's medical writings, in particular his interest in medical self-experimentation that influences his position on the exploration and investigation of unexplained phenomena. I argue that for Doyle, the romance of imperial fiction and exploration was incorporated within his advocacy of the need to investigate the boundaries of the natural world. In this chapter I contextualise Doyle's interest in foreign explorers, such as Charles Waterton, who return to England with a variety of deadly poisons from the boundaries of the known world. They are important because they provide Doyle with the fictional theme of a hallucinogenic toxin capable of expanding perceptions to incorporate the unknown. Importantly, I argue that 'The Adventure of the Devil's Foot' (1910) combines Doyle's interest in exotic drugs with his familiarity with self-experimentation during his time at university. I examine how in

‘The Devil’s Foot’ Watson and Holmes’ exposure to a drug brought back to England is then contextualised through the notion of medical self-experimentation. With reference to the influence of doctors such as Sir Robert Christison and his self-experimentation with the Calabar bean, I provide a context for the risks taken by those willing to explore the boundaries of science. I argue that, during their experiment with the drug, Watson provides a remarkable description of its effects that raise the possibility of an encounter with a nameless horror dwelling upon the threshold of the known and unknown worlds.

In Doyle’s science fiction and spiritualist writings covered in chapter five, there is a noticeable shift towards the religious aspects of his spiritualist beliefs. I examine the latter part of Doyle’s scientific trajectory to explore his revision of what constituted viable evidence of spiritualism and the existence of fairies. I read *The Lost World* as demonstrating Doyle’s argument that circumstantial evidence is more valid than physical proof. I argue that although Doyle still remained hopeful that science was capable of expanding the boundaries of human knowledge to encompass phenomena that had mistakenly been attributed to the supernatural, he was increasingly despairing of the scientists’ interest in doing so. From this intransigency I demonstrate how Doyle used his science fiction writings to move from science to spiritual salvation before eventually embracing spiritualism fully. In ‘Dwellers on the Border’ Doyle expands his earlier metaphor from ‘Lot No. 249’ to now speculate that a strict adherence to a narrow scientific definition of the natural laws would leave the world devoid of spirituality. Similarly, I argue that in stories such as *The Poison Belt* and *The Maracot Deep* (1929), his use of an apocalyptic narrative forewarn of the dire consequences of abandoning spirituality in favour of a materialistic lifestyle. In *The Maracot Deep*, Doyle explores how Maracot, an ardent materialist, is awakened to spiritualism without sacrificing his faith in science. Doyle describes the destruction of Atlantis, merging his interest in

exploration with an encounter with a demonic spirit Bal-seepa who is intent on slaying the Atlantean descendents trapped on the Atlantic sea bed. The function of Maracot's confrontation with Bal-seepa is to introduce Doyle's notion of a celestial hierarchy concordant with his personal belief in a spiritual realm from which guidance could be sought. I conclude the chapter by arguing that in *The Land of Mist* Lord John Roxton, like many of Doyle's other fictional characters, possesses the potential to broaden the definition of explorer while on his trajectory from imperial adventurer to psychic investigator.

In order to investigate the premise that Doyle's psychic quest culminated with him as a supernaturalist, this thesis engages with the notion that, in his seemingly disparate strands of fiction and nonfiction, much of what is deemed as supernatural was in fact misunderstood by the superstitious or ignored by the champions of scientific orthodoxy. Rather than regard Doyle's literary output as revealing tension between a rational Sherlock Holmes and his irrational creator, I argue that this is a concept that unifies Doyle's fiction and nonfiction writings. When read together it indicates a trajectory that can unify Doyle's position on the supernatural, his formal adoption of spiritualism later in life, his belief in and attempts to prove the existence of fairies are consistent with his medical experiences, his scientific beliefs and his creation of the rationalist, Sherlock Holmes. Importantly, this thesis demonstrates Doyle's concept that phenomena which appear to be supernatural may be explained by natural laws that are not fully understood. His concept also speculates upon how such unusual phenomena should be investigated. In order to examine Doyle's concept it would be appropriate to start with one of his early novels, *The Stark Munro Letters*, written near the beginning of his professional medical career.

## CHAPTER ONE

### **Addiction, Madness and the Supernatural in Arthur Conan Doyle's Early Fiction**

Doyle's early and critically neglected work *The Stark Munro Letters* (1895) was begun around the time he arrived in Switzerland in 1893 to rejoin his first wife Louise who was suffering the early stages of tuberculosis. It was originally titled *The Threshold*, before being restructured to include Doyle's ideas on "religion and science" as well as "the reasons which brought me to a broad Theism".<sup>1</sup> The proximity between autobiography and Doyle's interest in religious questions is revealed in *The Stark Munro Letters* through the development of a young doctor who struggles with professional and personal problems. In *The Stark Munro Letters* Doyle attempts to incorporate Darwinian evolutionary theory into his early religious ideas. In doing so, he also reveals the influence of his father's alcoholism on this novel as well as his other early fiction through themes of madness and the supernatural. These themes of addiction and certain types of mental illness appear throughout his fiction, including his Sherlock Holmes stories. This chapter examines *The Stark Munro Letters* and the novella *The Parasite* (1894), as well as a number of Doyle's early short-stories, 'The Japanned Box' (1899), and 'A Pastoral Horror' (1890). Furthermore, I also include a later short-story 'The Silver Mirror' (1908) as an assimilation of Doyle's earlier ideas which evidence his relationship with his father. In addition, I also read these fictional works alongside elements of Doyle's Sherlock Holmes short-story, 'The Man with the Twisted Lip' (1891). These stories are important because they show Doyle's early religious and scientific position which he adapted as he grew older. In chapter two I examine and develop Doyle's preoccupation with the possibility of defining potentially

---

<sup>1</sup> Richard Lancelyn Green and John Michael Gibson, *A Bibliography of A. Conan Doyle* (Boston: Hudson House, 1983; repr. 2000), p. 89.

supernatural phenomena as actually originating in the natural world. Before this can be accomplished I discuss Doyle's merger of religion and evolutionary theories. Although Doyle would later reject the merger of these theories, no clear understanding of his later ideas on science being able to explain potentially supernatural phenomena can be achieved until this complex idea has been grasped. Consequently, this chapter introduces and examines Doyle's ideas on religion and evolutionary theory which I regard as a preparatory phase that precedes the central premise of this thesis developed through the subsequent chapters. Importantly, I examine how the merger of religion and evolutionary theories incorporates Doyle's portrayal of addiction and madness, which initially appears indicative of degeneration. However, as we shall see towards the end of this chapter, this portrayal of addiction and madness can also provide a means to heighten human perception to register potentially supernatural phenomena.

Importantly, *The Stark Munro Letters* also prefigure elements of Doyle's later spiritualist writings, *The New Revelation* (1918), *The Vital Message* (1919) and *Pheneas Speaks* (1927), which challenge and seek to reform the dominance of Christianity in European culture. By this latter point in Doyle's literary career spiritualism had become the primary focus of his ambition to explain the relevance of a wide range of phenomena in scientifically respectable terms. In achieving this Doyle hoped that spiritualism would fundamentally reform or replace Christianity. Doyle's spiritualist message of these texts is absent from Munro's spiritual struggle in *The Stark Munro Letters*. However, at this early point in Doyle's writing Christianity is replaced by a godhead that instigated evolutionary law driven by natural selection in a scheme that shaped the destiny of mankind. *The Stark Munro Letters* reveals Doyle's initial attempt to unify religion and science as an explanation for the origins of the natural world and its laws. As we shall see, fears of racial degeneration caused by mental and physical

illness are also apparent in Doyle's religious ideas in *The Stark Munro Letters*. This creates tension with his notion that such conditions may also heighten human perception of unusual phenomena. In order to counter this anxiety Doyle drew upon his own medical experience, a process evident in his stories of medical realism and discussed in my next chapter. For now it is enough to note that Doyle's medical experiences are a fundamental aspect of his formulation of a position capable of unifying the apparently disparate subjects of his writings, which range from detective fiction to the occult, science-fiction and spiritualism. Doyle depicts various forms of addiction in the stories covered in this chapter, whether it is Doyle's father's alcoholism or the fictional character Isa Whitney's opium habit in the Sherlock Holmes short-story 'The Man with the Twisted Lip'. I argue that addiction is also a key component of Doyle's religious, medical and supernatural concerns. Along with madness and physical illness, addiction constitutes a process of natural selection that checks the propagation of degenerative racial characteristics.

Each of the sixteen letters comprising *The Stark Munro Letters* can be broadly divided into two parts: an ongoing account of Munro's life and a debate on religious matters with his correspondent Herbert Swanborough, a fictional character created by Doyle whose responses are not recorded. Modern attention to *The Stark Munro Letters* focuses on its autobiographical content, which typically follows an enquiry into the futility of Christian worship, a secondary topic of lesser interest to the general reader of his work.<sup>2</sup> Doyle also disguised a number of relatives, friends and colleagues in his novel, the most colourful being Cullingworth, a man closely based on Doyle's friend

---

<sup>2</sup> For example: '[i]t is, however, for its semi-autobiographical description of the author's relationship with Dr Budd that the book is of most interest', in Green, Richard Lancelyn and John Michael Gibson, *A Bibliography of A. Conan Doyle* (Boston: Hudson House, 1983; repr. 2000), p..89.

and fellow doctor George Budd.<sup>3</sup> In an interview with Bram Stoker in 1907 Doyle stated ‘all my mental and spiritual aspirations, are written down in *The Stark Munro Letters*, a book which, with the exception of one chapter, is a very close autobiography’.<sup>4</sup> Doyle’s early ambivalence towards his father is evident in *The Stark Munro Letters*. Unlike Charles Doyle, Munro’s father, a medical doctor, is present in the domestic scene. His medical practice is not extensive enough to provide his son with a sustainable career opening. Munro learns his father is suffering from a terminal illness and is urged to fulfil his duty by finding a job good enough to support the family. Munro states how ‘I had enough to make a man serious before, when I had to face the world without money or interest’.<sup>5</sup> The extra responsibility for his mother and his siblings is described as a ‘nightmare’.<sup>6</sup> Doyle expressed a similar concern in his autobiography. He recalled how his three sisters worked away from home as governesses and sent money back. Doyle contributed to the family finances by working throughout his medical studies. Doyle recalled telling his mother as a small child, “[w]hen you are old, Mammie, you shall have a velvet dress and gold glasses and sit in comfort by the fire”.<sup>7</sup> As a much older man, Doyle stated: ‘[t]hank God, it so came to pass. My father, I fear, was of little help to her’.<sup>8</sup> The distance between father, son and family is expressed in *The Stark Munro Letters*. Munro endures a difficult relationship

---

<sup>3</sup> Doyle’s friendship with Budd ended after the latter secretly read private letters from Mary Doyle to her son. He then attempted to ruin Doyle by offering him a loan to help manage the cost of starting a medical practice in Portsmouth. This is covered in Andrew Lycett, *Conan Doyle: The Man Who Created Sherlock Holmes* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2007), Daniel Stashower, *Teller of Tales: The Life of Arthur Conan Doyle* (London: Penguin, 2000), and other biographies of Doyle.

<sup>4</sup> Bram Stoker, ‘Sir Arthur Conan Doyle Tells of his Career and Work, his Sentiments Towards America, and his Approaching Marriage’, *New York World* (28 July 1907), 1 (repr. in Catherine Wynne, *The Parasite & The Watter’s Mou’* (Kansas MO: Valencourt, 2009), pp.153-65, p. 159).

<sup>5</sup> Doyle, *The Stark Munro Letters: Being A Series of Twelve Letters Wriiten by J. Stark Munro, M.B., to his Friend and Former Fellow Student, Herbert Swanborough, of Lowell, Massachusetts, During the Years 1881-1884* (Fairfield IA: 1st World Library, 2004), p. 75.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Arthur Conan Doyle, *Memories and Adventures* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 11.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

with his father in that ‘there is little intellectual sympathy between us’.<sup>9</sup> Crucially, this difficulty is orientated away from their immediate domestic crisis. He explains his father’s belief that:

opinions of mine upon religion and politics which come hot from my inmost soul have been assumed either out of indifference or bravado. So I have ceased to talk on vital subjects with him.<sup>10</sup>

Munro is embittered enough to state: ‘[i]f the Esquire were to be snipped once and forever from the tail of my name I should be the lighter for it’.<sup>11</sup> Although Doyle was willing to closely associate Stark Munro’s experiences and religious anxieties to his own early development, the dangers of exposing such family secrets created tension, due to public embarrassment and the private fear of degeneration. In his autobiography, Doyle included an intriguing disclaimer targeting future biographers:

should any reader reconstruct me or my career from that book [*The Stark Munro Letters*], that there are some few incidents there which are imaginary, and that, especially, the whole incident of the case of a lunatic and of Lord Saltire in Chapter IV occurred to a friend and not to myself.<sup>12</sup>

In this extract, Doyle is referring to chapter four of *The Stark Munro Letters*, in which Munro is engaged to take care of Lord Saltire’s deranged son, James Derwent, a potentially lucrative and prestigious appointment. Munro’s employment is short-lived after political and religious disagreements with Lady Saltire at the dinner table lead to his dismissal and a return to the family household. Lycett attributes Doyle’s desire to distance himself from the fictional Derwent’s insanity to an obsession about Charles’s mental state and alcoholism.<sup>13</sup> While there are no accounts Doyle ever undertook the

---

<sup>9</sup> Doyle, *The Stark Munro Letters*, p. 47.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 48.

<sup>12</sup> Doyle, *Memories and Adventures*, p. 58.

<sup>13</sup> Lycett, p. 199.



responsibility for managing such a person during his medical practice, the subject of insanity in his novel was too close to his own father's condition for comfort. With his father as a catalyst, in this chapter I investigate how Doyle's views on religion and illness allow him to portray madness and addiction as potentially instigating phenomena, such as visions of the dead, which are potentially supernatural in origin.

### **Charles Doyle: Mental Instability and Addiction**

When Sherlock Holmes informs Dr Watson in 'The Adventure of the Greek Interpreter' (1893) that "[a]rt in the blood is liable to take the strangest forms", he could easily have been referring to Doyle's family.<sup>14</sup> Charles Altamont Doyle was the youngest of five sons, each possessing what Holmes regarded as 'hereditary aptitudes' or artistic traits.<sup>15</sup> Charles Doyle was an alcoholic who was diagnosed as suffering from epilepsy, both conditions resulting in his eventual confinement in a lunatic asylum.<sup>16</sup> As Daniel Stashower notes, epilepsy was little-understood and stigmatised during the Victorian period and Charles's instability was one of the reasons Doyle was sent away to Stonyhurst School in Lancashire at the age of nine. In *Memories and Adventures* (1924) Doyle described his father's life as 'full of the tragedy of unfulfilled powers and of undeveloped gifts', skirting over Charles's alcoholism by commenting upon his 'weaknesses', which 'all of us have'.<sup>17</sup> Charles is described by Doyle as having 'thoughts [that] were always in the clouds and he had no appreciation for the realities of life'.<sup>18</sup> In addition, the hardship endured by his mother in keeping the household together during Charles's frequent physical and mental lapses is treated sympathetically.

---

<sup>14</sup> Arthur Conan Doyle, *The Penguin Complete Sherlock Holmes* (London: Penguin, 1981), p. 435.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> Stashower, *Teller of Tales*, p. 24.

<sup>17</sup> Doyle, *Memories and Adventures*, p. 30.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11. Wynne contextualises Charles Doyle's 'obsession with otherworldliness' with his Catholicism and interest in Irish separatism, influencing his son's disposition for a colonial influence to his occult and gothic writings: Catherine Wynne, *The Colonial Conan Doyle: British Imperialism, Irish Nationalism and the Gothic* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2002), p. 156.

Importantly, Doyle described his father as being ‘unworldly and unpractical and his family suffered for it’.<sup>19</sup> The word ‘unworldly’ hints at a transcendental quality to Charles Doyle’s work that exceeded everyday experiences of the world. Doyle was conscious of an unusual and ‘unworldly’ quality to his father’s artwork, noting his ‘brush was concerned not only with fairies and delicate themes of the kind, but with wild and fearsome subjects, so that his work had a very peculiar style of its own’.<sup>20</sup> Doyle’s desire to prove the existence of fairies later in life was, in part, an attempt to rehabilitate his father’s character as a visionary with the ability to communicate with spiritual beings.<sup>21</sup> As we shall see later in this chapter, the peculiarity of Charles’s ‘wild and fearsome subjects’ is comparable to the themes of Doyle’s supernatural writings, illustrating how they were both occupied with similar subjects. Doyle displayed some of his father’s artwork in his drawing-room. Bram Stoker in his interview with Doyle, described the artwork as displaying ‘delicate fancies and weird flights of imagination’, a description equally attributable to Doyle’s fiction.<sup>22</sup> Michael Baker notes a ‘dramatic power of almost Gothic dimensions’ to Charles’s biography, worthy of a story ‘Doyle himself would not have been ashamed to have written’.<sup>23</sup> Here, the unintentional irony is that the gothic elements of Charles’s life, his periods of madness and incarceration, were a subject Doyle was unable to repeat publicly. Instead, his early fiction is immersed in themes of addiction and degeneration. Doyle’s troubled relationship with his father is influential upon the formulation of his merger of evolutionary theory with religion and the degenerative effects of hereditary tendencies of addiction and mental illness.

---

<sup>19</sup> Doyle, *Memories and Adventures*, p. 30.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11. For a description of fairies in the ‘literary and folkloric Irish landscape’, see Wynne, *The Colonial Conan Doyle*, p. 166.

<sup>21</sup> Lycett, p. 384.

<sup>22</sup> Wynne, *The Parasite & The Watter’s Mou’*, p. 155.

<sup>23</sup> Michael Baker, *The Doyle Diary: The Last Great Conan Doyle Mystery* (New York: Paddington press, 1978), p. XXIX.

### Doyle's Fictional Addict: Sherlock Holmes

Doyle created one of the most famous fictional addicts in popular culture, Sherlock Holmes the consulting detective. Holmes, invigorated and intoxicated by crime, resorted to cocaine in several adventures to alleviate his boredom between cases. Watson records his anxiety about drug addiction and Holmes's health, which is weakened to the point of nervous exhaustion on several occasions by a combination of overwork and the effects of drug abuse. Interestingly, when Charles Doyle illustrated the first Holmes story, he modelled Sherlock Holmes on himself. Contrary to his son's description and subsequent illustrations of Holmes, Charles depicted Holmes sporting a bushy beard perhaps, as Stashower suggests, seeing something of himself in the great detective's character.<sup>24</sup> Holmes's addiction to narcotics waned over the years, partly due to the attention of Watson and a succession of demanding cases. This is apparent in 'The Adventure of the Missing Three-quarter' (1904) a story in which Holmes searches for a star rugby player believed to have been kidnapped. Watson notes how he dreaded periods of inaction because, 'I knew by experience that my companion's brain was so abnormally active that it was dangerous to leave it without material upon which to work'.<sup>25</sup> The danger is what Watson describes as 'drug mania which had threatened once to check his remarkable career'.<sup>26</sup> As Jack D Rodin and Alvin E Key explain, Doyle was well aware of the benefits and pitfalls of cocaine use.<sup>27</sup> In *The Sign of Four* (1890) Watson admonishes Holmes for his cocaine habit, warning him of the resulting black moods and potential physiological cost, stating, "it is a pathological and morbid process which involves increased tissue-change and may at least leave a permanent

---

<sup>24</sup> Stashower, *Teller of Tales*, p. 82.

<sup>25</sup> *The Penguin Complete Sherlock Holmes*, p. 622.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> Rodin and Key, *Medical Casebook of Doctor Arthur Conan Doyle: From Practitioner to Sherlock Holmes and Beyond* (Malabar FL: Robert E Krieger Publishing Company, 1984), pp. 249-99.

weakness”<sup>28</sup>. It is likely Doyle intended Holmes’s addiction to narcotics to gradually ease through his career, indicated by Watson’s remark in ‘The Missing Three-quarter’ that “[f]or years I had gradually weaned him from that drug-mania”<sup>29</sup>. However, the pathological and morbid processes referred to by Watson are mainly located in Holmes’s personal life. In other cases the morality of addiction is brought into stark focus, especially when it revolves around the wider sphere of the family home.

Such is the case in the Holmes story ‘The Man with the Twisted Lip’, when Watson is called upon by his wife’s friend Kate Whitney to find and return her husband, Isa, who has been missing for several days. However, there is no mystery as to Isa’s location as Watson’s first line in the story indicates: ‘Isa Whitney, brother of the late Elias Whitney, D. D., Principal of the Theological College of St. George’s, was much addicted to opium’<sup>30</sup>. Isa frequented an opium den in the East End of London, a familiar location within Victorian popular culture. Watson is despatched to the opium den where he encounters a disguised Sherlock Holmes conducting a separate investigation.<sup>31</sup> Considering Holmes’s history with narcotics Watson’s suspicions are aroused, which is acknowledged by his friend: “you imagine that I have added opium-smoking to cocaine injections, and all the other little weaknesses on which you have favoured me with your medical views”<sup>32</sup>. Watson does not deny Holmes’s statement, indicating the underlying tension between the two men on this subject. Isa Whitney is one of several cases of substance addiction portrayed in the Sherlock Holmes stories, revealing Doyle’s interest in, and knowledge of, the subject which extended beyond his detective fiction.<sup>33</sup>

---

<sup>28</sup> *The Penguin Complete Sherlock Holmes*, p. 89.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 622.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 229.

<sup>31</sup> For a wide-ranging discussion of drugs in the Victorian period see; Mike Jay, *Emperors of Dreams: Drugs in the Nineteenth Century* (Sawtry: Dedalus, 2000; repr. 2011). The beginning of ‘The Man with the Twisted Lip’ is evocative of the opening to Charles Dickens’s *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* (1870).

<sup>32</sup> *The Penguin Complete Sherlock Holmes*, p.232.

<sup>33</sup> For a list of cases of addiction in the Sherlock Holmes stories, including five instances of alcohol addiction, see: Rodin and Key, *Medical Casebook*, p. 379.

In Doyle's early fictions, addiction, particularly alcoholism, is the consequence of an immoral lifestyle. Doyle's early religious ideology indicates that those who have chosen such a path are in danger of being naturally selected for extinction within several generations. As we shall see, in such instances selection occurs by the will of a non-Christian godhead that utilises natural law to weed out those unfit to progress the human species. Such immorality is apparent within 'The Man with the Twisted Lip' when Watson recalls that as a youth Isa had frequently drenched 'his tobacco with laudanum in an attempt to produce the same effects' as 'De Quincey's description of his dreams and sensations' in *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater* (1822).<sup>34</sup> This is indicative of Doyle's and his readers' familiarity with the concept of the opium dens of the East End. Watson recalls how Isa was 'a slave to the drug, an object of mingled horror and pity', whose 'yellow, pasty face, drooping lids, and pin-point pupils' marked him as a 'wreck and ruin of a noble man'.<sup>35</sup> The opening sentence of 'The Man with the Twisted Lip', quoted above, presents an unusual reference to Isa's brother Elias, the Doctor of Divinity and Principal at the fictional Theological College of St. George. The story highlights the dangers of being led onto a ruinous path that can turn someone into a 'slave' and a 'wreck and ruin'. Elias's success contrasts with Isa's failure as a man and husband who evokes pity and horror in equal measure. What makes Elias unusual is that he is a religious scholar holding an administrative and academic position at a college of theology. The contrast between the two brothers introduces the binary opposition of personal success and failure. Yet, by making Elias a figure of religious belief, Doyle returns to his concerns with notions of morality. Doyle's choice of career and the ethical poles occupied by the brothers are, as we shall see, indicative of the dichotomy between

---

<sup>34</sup> *The Penguin Complete Sherlock Holmes*, p.229.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

morality and immorality of alcoholism established *The Stark Munro Letters*.<sup>36</sup> They also constitute part of Doyle's ideas on Darwin's theory of evolution.

### **Evolution, Morality and Evil in *The Stark Munro Letters***

Doyle constantly moved through spiritual, supernatural and scientific subjects in his writings, which were often infused with ideas of evolution and degeneration. Towards the end of his life, Doyle argued in *The New Revelation* and *Pheneas Speaks* that fundamental evolution would occur in both religious practices, as well as in the nature of reality itself. In his autobiography, *Memories and Adventures*, Doyle argues, '[t]here are no worse enemies of true religion than those who clamour against all revision or modification' to the sacred texts of various religions.<sup>37</sup> In his psychoanalytical biography Charles Higham notes that as a young man Doyle 'did not accept the usual concept of God, but believed in an intelligent force in Nature'<sup>38</sup>. When reflecting upon this early period of his career in his autobiography, Doyle recognised that 'a new phase had begun, part medical, part literary and part philosophical'.<sup>39</sup> In their critical biography of Doyle, Rodin and Key recognise how these strands are intertwined, arguing his 'medical background [...] permeated his religious and philosophic thoughts', which were influenced by an earlier tradition of natural philosophy.<sup>40</sup> Just as Doyle saw society's relationship with religion adapting as the human species evolved, his personal attitude to religion was an ongoing process. This point is acknowledged by Rodin and Key who state Doyle's 'orientation to Darwin's theory of evolution of the species was similar to his own religion – both were still

---

<sup>36</sup> Whitney's condition as a slave to a narcotic, associated with orientalism during the late nineteenth century, has also been read within an imperial context. See: Susan Cannon Harris, 'Pathological Possibilities: Contagion and Empire in Doyle's Sherlock Holmes Stories', *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 31.2 (2003), pp. 447- 466.

<sup>37</sup> Doyle, *Memories and Adventures*, p. 32.

<sup>38</sup> Charles Higham, *The Adventures of Conan Doyle: The Life of the Creator of Sherlock Holmes* (New York: Norton, 1976), p. 61.

<sup>39</sup> Doyle, *Memories and Adventures*, p. 32.

<sup>40</sup> Rodin and Key, *Medical Casebook*, p. 157.

developing'.<sup>41</sup> In explaining his abandonment of Catholicism at a young age, Doyle contextualised his change of faith within evolutionary discourse:

It is to be remembered that these were the years when Huxley, Tyndall, Darwin, Herbert Spencer and John Stuart Mill were our chief philosophers, and that even the man in the street felt the strong sweeping current of their thought, while to the young student, eager and impressionable, it was overwhelming.<sup>42</sup>

Doyle included his personal early medical experiences within the general public's response to the economical, social and political discourses that engaged with evolutionary theories.<sup>43</sup> Lawrence Frank reads this quotation as a 'new foundation' for Doyle based on 'various proponents and defenders of Darwinian evolution', locating him in the discourses formulating a nineteenth century post-Darwinian worldview.<sup>44</sup> A young Doyle, 'eager and impressionable', was undoubtedly stimulated by his medical study and was swift to draw on these as a source for *The Stark Munro Letters*.

In *The Stark Munro Letters* Doyle reveals his eagerness to apply his own views on evolutionary theory to his religious ideas:

The last reformation simplified Catholicism. The coming one will simplify Protestantism. And when the world is ripe for it another will come and simplify that. The ever improving brain will give us an ever broadening creed.<sup>45</sup>

Doyle's later spiritualist writings, such as *The New Revelation*, argued religious reform was a natural consequence of human social and spiritual evolution.<sup>46</sup> The quotation

---

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Doyle *Memories and Adventures*, p. 31.

<sup>43</sup> For an examination of the relationship between several Sherlock Holmes stories and evolutionary theory, see: Hilary A. Goldsmith, 'Darwin and the Detective: Aspects of the Darwinian Worldview and the Sherlock Holmes stories of Arthur Conan Doyle', *Clues: A Journal of Detection*, 28.2, 2010, 19-28. For a discussion of Darwin's influence on fiction see: Gillian Beer, *Darwin's Plots: Evolutionary Narrative in Darwin, George Eliot and Nineteenth Century Fiction*, 2nd edn (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2000).

<sup>44</sup> Lawrence Frank, *Victorian Detective Fiction and the Nature of Evidence: the Scientific Investigations of Poe, Dickens and Doyle* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2009), p.134.

<sup>45</sup> Doyle, *The Stark Munro Letters*, p. 44.

<sup>46</sup> Doyle argued, 'Christianity must change or must perish. That is the law of life—that things must adapt themselves or perish', Doyle, *The New Revelation* (New York: Cosimo, 2007), p. 36.

above associates future religious reformation with the ‘ever improving brain’, locating this movement within humanity’s evolutionary destiny. Munro establishes this point in the same paragraph of the quotation: ‘[i]s it not glorious to think that evolution is still living and acting – that if we have an anthropoid ape as an ancestor, we may have archangels for posterity?’<sup>47</sup> Throughout *The Stark Munro Letters* Munro broadly advocates a form of natural religion or deism, in that his understanding of a supreme being is not dependent upon Christian revelation or any other religious doctrine. Munro argues the divine ‘Creator[’s]’ attributes ‘in no way depend upon Jewish poets, nor upon human paper or printing ink’, dislocating God from a religious doctrine.<sup>48</sup> Munro then explains how a closer relationship with the ‘Creator’ can be developed by studying ‘Him in His works, which cannot be counterfeited or manipulated’ unlike contested accounts of miracles.<sup>49</sup> Finally, Munro states, ‘Nature is the true revelation of the Deity to man. The nearest green field is the inspired page from which you may read all that is needful for you to know’.<sup>50</sup> Here, Munro replaces Christian revelation with a metaphorical book of nature. Munro is in concordance with deism in that human reason, in conjunction with studying the world’s natural laws, may reveal the existence of a supreme creator who does not directly intervene in the events of the universe. His ideas were also influenced by pre-nineteenth century traditions of examining the natural world including natural history and philosophy.<sup>51</sup> For Munro the majesty and complexity of these natural laws are enough to presuppose the existence of a creator. By seeing the ‘serene dignity’ in the planets as they orbit the sun, or the ‘definite purposeful function’ of an insect’s ‘minute proboscis’, Munro constructs a teleological

---

<sup>47</sup> Doyle, *The Stark Munro Letters*, p. 44.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 42.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>51</sup> See Steven Shapin, *The Scientific Revolution* (London and Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996); Lawrence M Principe, *The Scientific Revolution: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011) and John Hedley Brooke, *Science and Religion: Some Historical Perspectives*: (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 226-274.



argument for the existence of God in that such complicated systems could not have developed naturally without some sort of deliberate design.<sup>52</sup> He argues by analogy that the ‘existence [...] of a table guarantees the pre-existence of the carpenter’, in a similar manner as the watchmaker argument states design implies a designer.<sup>53</sup> This is an important concept in *The Stark Munro Letters* and it forms the bedrock of much of Munro’s philosophical musings to his friend, incorporating morality and evolution.

In *The Stark Munro Letters* Munro argues that as well as proving the existence of a creator, the study of the intricacies of the natural world demonstrates the influence of evolution and natural selection. He argues, ‘[w]hat matter whether these came by special creation or by evolution? We know as a matter of fact they came by evolution, but that only defines the law. It does not explain it’.<sup>54</sup> Munro attempts to integrate evolutionary theory with deism by defining natural selection as a system established by the creator to shape the destinies of humanity and the natural world. Munro argues that nature works on two ‘lines of evolution’, strengthening the human race in two ways.<sup>55</sup> First, nature improves those who are ‘morally strong’ via education and, significantly, by ‘broadening religious views’.<sup>56</sup> The second line of evolution works by ‘killing off’ and ensuring the ‘extinction’ of those who are ‘morally weak’.<sup>57</sup> There is some similarity to what Herbert Spencer termed “the survival of the fittest” and its later application to economic and social policies advocating a laissez-faire approach to

---

<sup>52</sup> Doyle, *The Stark Munro Letters*, p. 43.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid. Although Doyle does not specifically reference William Paley’s (1743-1805) watchmaker analogy, he is drawing upon an established convention of explaining the existence of God. However in Doyle’s *The Narrative of John Smith*, a book that was an important influence upon *The Stark Munro Letters*, he makes reference to Paley indicating he was familiar with this concept, Doyle, *The Narrative of John Smith*, ed. by Jon Lellenberg, Daniel Stashower and Rachel Foss (London: The British Library, 2011), p. 108.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., p. 84.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

economic and social reform.<sup>58</sup> However, Doyle regards his system as applying to the processes of natural law as determined by the creator. Munro pictures his two points, religious reform through education and the extinction of the morally weak, as ‘two great invisible hands hovering over the garden of life and plucking up the weeds’, a metaphor that allows Doyle to unify his belief in a divine order and evolution.<sup>59</sup>

For Doyle, if the benevolent creator designed a series of natural laws that incorporate evolutionary theory there remained the unresolved question of how evil could exist in such a scheme.<sup>60</sup> In *The Stark Munro Letters* Munro expresses ‘doubts if there is such a thing as the existence of evil’, and he attempts to orientate it away from notions of original sin and the influence of Satan.<sup>61</sup> Rodin and Key argue that Doyle’s ‘concept of evil was that it only appears to be evil’.<sup>62</sup> For Doyle, unpleasant circumstances in life, such as disease or horrifying accidents, were only attributed to the work of evil because of a misperception of the mechanics of natural law. In *The Stark Munro Letters*, Doyle’s concept of evil is influenced by his medical experiences. Munro argues that those witnessing the effects of illness and disease mistakenly, although understandably, attribute it to the work of evil. This is a result of our narrow personal perspective. He argues, ‘very much [of what] seems to be saddest in life might be very different if we could focus it properly’, particularly so with the benefit of medical training.<sup>63</sup> Munro argues that ‘as students of medicine’ know, there is little actual pain associated with the act of dying, re-orientating a perception of suffering away from the

---

<sup>58</sup> Spencer coined this term in Volume 1 of his *Principles of Biology* (1864). The ambiguity of meaning to the word “fittest” to justify eugenic programmes or the use of violence differ from its original context that referred to ‘best suited’ to the prevalent environmental conditions. The context to this phrase is neatly summarised in: Mark Pallen, *The Rough Guide to Evolution* (London: Rough Guides, 2009), pp. 67 and 264 – 275.

<sup>59</sup> Doyle, *The Stark Munro Letters*, p. 84.

<sup>60</sup> For a summary of this, see: Michael Tooley, ‘The Problem of Evil’, *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2010) <<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2010/entries/evil/>> [accessed: 25July 2011].

<sup>61</sup> Doyle, *The Stark Munro Letters*, p. 83.

<sup>62</sup> Rodin and Key, *Medical Casebook*, p. 157.

<sup>63</sup> Doyle, *The Stark Munro Letters*, p. 129.

concept of evil and towards the natural world.<sup>64</sup> Munro states: '[a]ll the physical evils of life seem to culminate in death; and yet death, as I have seen it, has not been a painful or terrible process'.<sup>65</sup> Following this is a remarkable example of his point:

When a man is overtaken by an express [train] and shivered into fragments, or when he drops from a fourth-floor window and is smashed into a bag of splinters, the unfortunate spectators are convulsed with horror, and find a text for pessimistic views about the Providence which allows such things to be. And yet, it is very doubtful whether the deceased, could his tongue be loosened, would remember anything at all about the matter.<sup>66</sup>

Munro is not just arguing that the onlooker's perception of evil is incorrect. The absence of pain during physical trauma is further evidence of benevolence in the creator's design of the natural world. Munro gives another example when he witnessed a patient suffering from spinal disease having a cautery administered without anaesthetic.<sup>67</sup> Munro 'felt faint and ill' with the 'sight and the nauseating smell of burned flesh', yet the patient's facial expression never changed throughout the procedure. The patient 'assured me that the proceeding was absolutely painless, a remark which was corroborated by the surgeon'.<sup>68</sup> The reason for this was that the nerves were destroyed so quickly that they did not have time to relay the sensation to the brain.

For Munro then, there is evidence of the creator in the absence of suffering experienced in the act of dying. Munro and Doyle's medical experiences argue for the necessity of re-orientating our perception of evil to developing an understanding of the natural world. That a cauterized nerve is unable to relay pain to the patient's brain, for example, evidences that 'Providence is not only not cruel itself, but will not allow man

---

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> A cautery is the direct application of a heated instrument to destroy diseased tissue. *Oxford Concise Colour Medical Dictionary*, 4th edn. (Oxford: Osford university Press, 2007), pp. 119-20.

<sup>68</sup> Doyle, *The Stark Munro Letters*, p. 130.

to be cruel either'.<sup>69</sup> This statement concurs with Munro's earlier hope that such 'inexplicable' acts may tend 'in the long run to the good of mankind' in a manner and scope beyond our comprehension.<sup>70</sup> He is reliant upon a vague assertion that such inexplicable acts may turn towards the good of mankind in the long run, suggesting his theories were still in their early stages. Munro's religious beliefs incorporate Doyle's medical experience, his understanding of evolutionary theory and the regressive nature of addiction and degeneration. In *The Stark Munro Letters* there is a greater emphasis upon the significance of what is morally right and wrong. Again, this is defined within Doyle's medical experience: 'the study of life by the physician vindicates the moral principles of right and wrong'.<sup>71</sup> Munro's concept of right and wrong is a part of the creator's work that is apparent in the laws of nature. He states, 'right and wrong are both tools which are being wielded by those great hands that are shaping the destinies of the universe'.<sup>72</sup> Munro is again describing a metaphorical garden of life in which the creator's will is evident in the evolutionary works of nature that utilise right and wrong as tools to weed out the unfit. What is striking in this scheme is not just Doyle's combination of religion and evolution; it is how it reflects upon his perception of his father's alcoholism.

In *The Stark Munro Letters*, Munro specifically targets alcoholism as an assisting factor for human racial progression:

Nature has her devices, and drink is among them. When there are no more drunkards and reprobates, it means the race is so advanced that it no longer needs such rough treatment. Then the all-wise Engineer will speed us along in some other fashion.<sup>73</sup>

---

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., p. 83.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., p. 85.

Doyle defines alcoholism as a condition that is implicated within the divinely ordained process of natural selection that drives human evolution. Doyle also argued that this process gradually improved the human species spiritually and physically over the generations by weeding out the unfit. Munro argues that after several generations ‘the line of the drunkard and the debauchee, physically as well as morally weakened, is either extinct or on the way towards it’.<sup>74</sup> Natural laws of evolution reduce the wide-ranging effects of alcoholism as the race is improved. Munro describes this process as a ‘law which acts with startling swiftness, that a majority of drunkards never perpetuate their species at all, and that when the curse is hereditary, the second generation generally sees the end of it’.<sup>75</sup> Eventually this will remove reprobates and drunkards from the human race in preparation for a new evolutionary stage of development. If Munro’s theory of a natural law weeding out the unfit can be applied to alcoholism and is couched in Doyle’s experiences with his father, then such a natural law is problematic when it is faced with other personal tragedies such as his wife Louise’s tuberculosis.

### **Degenerative Bodies and the Supernatural in *The Parasite***

In *The Stark Munro Letters* Doyle included a poem of thirteen short stanzas titled ‘With Either Hand’, which describes how the human race is tested and improved over generations by the creator:

6.

He strews the microbes in the lung,  
The blood-clot in the brain:  
With test and test He picks the best,  
Then tests them once again.

---

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., p. 84.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

7.

He tests the body and the mind,  
 He rings them o'er and o'er;  
 And if they crack, He throws them back  
 And fashions them once more.<sup>76</sup>

[...] 12.

So read I this – and as I try  
 To write it clear again,  
 I feel a second finger lie  
 Above mine on the pen.<sup>77</sup>

In the twelfth stanza, the 'second finger' above the narrator's 'pen' indicates Munro's hand is guided by a higher authority, suggesting that the act of writing this poem is implicated within the natural order of a divine scheme. It is also suggestive of the notion of a writer's hand being guided by potentially supernatural forces which is a feature of the spiritualist practice of automatic writing whereby a medium is guided to relay a controlling spirit's messages while emerged in a trance.<sup>78</sup>

Doyle's reference to 'microbes in the lung' in the above quotation from 'With Either Hand' is an allusion to tuberculosis, a disease which his wife Louise was diagnosed with about a year before *The Stark Munro Letters* was published. In 1890 Doyle visited Berlin to attend a lecture given by Robert Koch who presented his findings upon several substances he claimed destroyed the tubercle bacillus.<sup>79</sup> Doyle was correct in his scepticism of Koch's results having examined several of the doctor's patients before dutifully reporting his doubts in the press.<sup>80</sup> In *The Stark Munro Letters*

---

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., p. 86.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., p. 87.

<sup>78</sup> 'With Either Hand' is suggestive of Doyle's later interest in spiritualism, especially spirit-writing, a talent his second wife, Jean, eventually discovered.

<sup>79</sup> Rodin and key, *Medical Casebook*, pp. 105-8. See also Douglas Kerr, 'Arthur Conan Doyle and the Consumption Cure', *Literature and History*, 19.2 (2010), 36-51.

<sup>80</sup> Doyle, 'The Consumption Cure', *Daily Telegraph*, 20 November 1890, p. 3; and 'Dr. Koch and His Cure', *Review of Reviews*, 2 (December 1890), 552-556.

Doyle defines tuberculosis as having a degenerative effect upon humanity. This is in accord with contemporaneous interpretations of the disease. In their survey of various forms of addiction and medical notions of hereditary conditions, Stephen Snelders, Frans J Meijman and Toine Pieter note that together with ‘tuberculosis and syphilis, alcoholism was regarded as a major cause of degeneration and as such defined as a public threat that should be curbed by public health measures’ encouraging the state endorsed practice of eugenics.<sup>81</sup> *The Stark Munro Letters* falls short of advocating such a measure because nature working along evolutionary lines makes it unnecessary. Munro argues, ‘struma, tubercle, nervous disease, have all lent a hand towards the pruning off of that rotten branch’ of humanity’s evolutionary tree.<sup>82</sup> The influence of Louise’s tuberculosis is apparent in Doyle’s work. In ‘The Adventure of the Final Problem’ (1893) Watson is lured away from Holmes by an emergency involving an ill English woman suffering with consumption. This scene occurs in Switzerland, where Louise, suffering from this disease, was waiting for her husband at the time he was writing *The Stark Munro Letters*. Doyle attempted to place such concerns within a spiritual ideology capable of turning dire conditions into an element of a greater scheme that denies the presence of evil by turning all ends into a greater good. If Louise’s condition was tragic, there was some consolation that nature forbids suffering by ameliorating the final effects of tuberculosis. Despite a witness’s undeniable anguish, such conditions serve the greater good by pruning a defective branch from humanity’s family tree.

At about the time Doyle was putting the finishing touches to *The Stark Munro Letters* he had began work on *The Parasite*, which engages with the malign influence of

---

<sup>81</sup> Stephen Snelders, Frans J Meijman and Toine Pieters, ‘Hereditary and Alcoholism in the Medical Sphere: The Netherlands, 1850 - 1900’, *Medical History*, 51 (2007), 219–236, (p. 219).

<sup>82</sup> Doyle, *The Stark Munro Letters*, p. 84.

mesmerism. In *The Parasite* Professor Gilroy undertakes a series of experiments with Miss Penelosa, a West Indian woman with mesmeric powers. To Gilroy's horror he becomes enslaved to her will after refusing her romantic advances. The twelfth stanza of Munro's poem, 'With Either Hand', is also evocative of Miss Penelosa's control as Gilroy's hand is guided by the influence of her mind. The climax of the novel occurs when Gilroy, acting against his will, is prevented from seriously harming his fiancé by the unexpected natural death of Miss Penelosa. This novella, influenced by the huge success of George Du Maurier's *Tilby* (1894), also reflects Doyle's preoccupation with Louise's illness. *The Parasite's* undercurrent of illicit sexual tension is indicative of what Lycett calls a subconscious reference to the 'bacillus which had invaded his wife's body' to sexual tension brought on by Doyle's sexual abstinence.<sup>83</sup> Medical advice about tuberculosis at the time was likely to have prohibited conjugal relations between Doyle and his wife.<sup>84</sup> As we shall see, the psychological implications of parasitism, Louise's illness and Charles's alcoholism merge with Doyle's supernatural and scientific concerns in this novella. It is here that Doyle's early belief in a religious doctrine that advocates the necessity of weeding out the degenerative elements in society begins to shift. In *The Parasite* Doyle refigures the tubercle parasite as a potentially supernatural phenomenon that conflates mesmerism with his anxieties about addiction.

Miss Penelosa's actions are driven by her sexual infatuation with Gilroy as she derives no physical or psychical benefit or sustenance from her attachment to him. Unsurprisingly for a physiologist perhaps, Gilroy seeks a biological analogy to describe the horror of his position: '[s]he creeps into my frame as the hermit crab does into the

---

<sup>83</sup> Lycett, p. 202.

<sup>84</sup> Wynne, *The Parasite & The Watter's Mou*, p. XXIII, and Lycett, p. 232.



whelk's shell. I am powerless!'<sup>85</sup> It is the consequences of psychic invasion that terrifies him the most, '[s]he can project herself into my body and take command of it. She has a parasitic soul - yes, she is a parasite, a monstrous parasite'.<sup>86</sup> Gilroy discovers he has no memory of his actions while under the mesmeric influence of Miss Penelosa. Her plan is to intimidate Gilroy into accepting her advances. She intends to ruin his academic career by making him behave foolishly during his lectures. Events take a sinister turn when she forces him to rob the local bank and assault Sadler, a colleague at his university. It is revealing how Gilroy attributes the early influence of Miss Penelosa's mind control to addiction. After deciding to reduce his contact with Miss Penelosa, he finds himself visiting her at his customary hour. Rather than suspecting her occult influence he contemplates the possibility of a 'mesmeric craze as there is an opium craze, and I am a victim to it'.<sup>87</sup> Gilroy notes the symptoms of this possible addiction, 'I became more and more uneasy. I fidgeted. I worried. I could not concentrate my mind upon the papers in front of me'.<sup>88</sup> Certainly, Gilroy behaves as if he is addicted to the presence of Miss Penelosa. When she summons him, he makes extraordinary efforts to come to her despite having locked himself in his room and throwing away the key. The price of Gilroy's resistance becomes apparent in his 'deplorable' physical state, as he develops a 'perpetual hiccough and ptosis of the left eyelid'.<sup>89</sup> These symptoms, along with the tension of losing his personal honour are remarkably similar to the daily battle fought by John Bollamore against alcoholism in 'The Japanned Box'. Colmore, the story's narrator, notes the 'deep lines upon [Bollamore's] careworn face' before describing their cause:

---

<sup>85</sup> Wynne, *The Parasite & The Watter's Mou*, p. 25.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 22.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 41.

He was a man who was fighting a ceaseless battle, holding at arm's length, from morning till night a horrible adversary, who was forever trying to close with him – an adversary which would destroy him body and soul could it but fix his claws once more upon him.<sup>90</sup>

Doyle's depiction of alcoholism as an 'adversary' threatening its victim's 'body and soul' is analogous to Gilroy's struggle against mesmerism in *The Parasite*. In the novella Gilroy uses 'fiend' and 'hell-fiend' to describe Miss Penelosa associating her mesmeric influence with addiction.<sup>91</sup> As we shall see, addiction in 'The Japanned Box' is also referred to as a supernatural 'fiend'. Importantly, alcoholism in 'The Japanned Box' develops a movement by Doyle from religious theories of degeneration into the supernatural potential of Charles Doyle's illness and experiences.

### **Alcoholism in 'The Japanned Box'**

In 'The Japanned Box' the protagonist, Frank Colmore, recalls his service as a tutor to the family of Sir John "Devil Bollamore".<sup>92</sup> In the narrative it is important to recognise how Bollamore's alcoholism resembles Doyle's father's condition. Bollamore, unlike the unfortunates in *The Stark Munro Letters*, where the drunkard's fate is extinction, enjoys the possibility of redemption. This represents a softening in Doyle's tone, further discussed in my next chapter which was partly brought on by the death of his father in 1893.<sup>93</sup> It is indicative of Doyle casting aside his interpretation of natural selection and evolution as a process specifically targeting people suffering from addiction, illness or psychological torment. In 'The Japanned Box' Bollamore is described as "the greatest rip and debauchee in England" as well as "the leader of the fastest set, bruiser, driver, gambler, drunkard - a survival of the old type, and as bad as

---

<sup>90</sup> *The Conan Doyle Stories* (London: John Murray, 1929; repr. 1960), p. 614

<sup>91</sup> Wynne, *The Parasite & The Watter's Mou*, p. 41 and p. 44.

<sup>92</sup> *The Conan Doyle Stories*, p. 613.

<sup>93</sup> In his biography of Doyle, Russell Miller argues Bollamore 'could have been Conan Doyle's father', noting Colmore's silent empathy with his employer's addiction, Russell Miller, *The Adventures of Arthur Conan Doyle* (London: Pimlico, 2009), pp. 155-6.

the worst of them”<sup>94</sup> Isa Whitney in ‘The Man with the Twisted Lip’ shares some of these vices, although it is Sir Hugo Baskerville - the originator of the family curse in *The Hound of the Baskervilles* (1902) that most closely resembles Bollamore’s early career. Both men suffer from a family curse, although there is no mention of hereditary tendencies in Bollamore’s addiction. However, Doyle’s conflation of physical and supernatural curses is at work in ‘The Japanned Box’. Colmore describes his employer’s addiction as ‘this most loathsome and dangerous of all the fiends crouching closely in his very shadow, like a half-cowed beast which slinks beside its keeper, ready at any moment to spring at his throat’.<sup>95</sup> Bollamore, like the descendents of Sir Hugo Baskerville, is haunted by a beast-like fiend that is only half-cowed. It is due to Colmore’s ‘fancy’, a quality similar to the weird flights of imagination shared by Doyle and his father noted by Stoker above, that casts addiction in the form of a supernatural fiend.<sup>96</sup> Several years later Doyle described Holmes’s addiction to narcotics in a similar manner. In ‘The Missing Three-quarter’ Holmes, like Bollamore, faces a continual struggle with addiction. Watson notes:

Now I knew that under ordinary conditions he no longer craved for this artificial stimulus, but I was well aware that the fiend was not dead but sleeping, and I have known that the sleep was a light one.<sup>97</sup>

Doyle’s use of ‘fiend’ to describe at least two forms of addiction illustrate his concern with the issue extending from novels as early as *The Stark Munro Letters* to his later Sherlock Holmes stories published in the twentieth century. Colmore states he could almost fancy seeing a fiend, a physical materialization of addiction, take shape at his employer’s side. This presentiment of supernatural evil is illustrative of Doyle’s engagement with his metaphor in ‘The Japanned Box’. Doyle’s short-story is an

---

<sup>94</sup> *The Conan Doyle Stories*, p. 613.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 614-5.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 614

<sup>97</sup> *The Penguin Complete Sherlock Holmes*, p. 622.

example of his subtlety in evoking gothic themes and hinting at the possibility of the supernatural without overtly endorsing such an interpretation. Colmore uncovers a mystery surrounding his employer's nocturnal visits to a private study where a female voice is heard, despite there being evidence of no-one else visiting the household. Her voice is distraught enough to turn Colmore against his employer, suspecting him of leading a 'double and dubious life' and illicitly meeting and mistreating a woman from the village.<sup>98</sup> Colmore recalls how that 'room has been kept such a mystery [...] that an almost superstitious feeling has arisen about it in the household'.<sup>99</sup> Doyle builds the supernatural suspense with gothic imagery, evident in Colmore's statement, 'suddenly I remembered how ancient this building was, and how probable that some medieval passage existed in it'.<sup>100</sup> The story concludes with Bollamore's admission that he suffers from alcoholism and battles his addiction daily. This dispels the possibility of the supernatural because the woman's voice was a phonograph recording of Bollamore's dead wife, Beryl Clare, imploring him to keep his pledge to remain sober.

Beryl's strength of character is in keeping with Doyle's idealisation of the maternal woman evident in his description of his own mother Mary in his autobiography, as well as Munro's in *The Stark Munro Letters*. However, in 'The Japanned Box' Beryl, unlike Doyle's mother, is successful in combating her husband's alcoholism, albeit at a terrible personal cost. Bollamore describes his wife as a "ministering angel from above", sent at his "blackest degradation", who "spent her life in making a man once more of that which had degraded itself to the level of the beasts".<sup>101</sup> Her devotion is also described by Richards, the estate manager, as bringing

---

<sup>98</sup> *The Conan Doyle Stories*, p. 616.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 612.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 616.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 622.

Bollamore back to “manhood and decency”.<sup>102</sup> It is significant that Bollamore’s salvation is at the hands of an angelic woman is evocative of the qualities Doyle attributed to his mother Mary. ‘The Japanned Box’ indicates that salvation is achieved by individual effort supported by the possibility of spiritual guidance from beyond the grave. This is a message Doyle endorsed in his spiritualist non-fiction later in life that countered religious fears of original sin and humanity’s irredeemable fall from grace.

As well as embodying themes evident in *The Stark Munro Letters*, ‘The Japanned Box’ foreshadows Doyle’s spiritualist writings such as *The New Revelation* as well as his spiritualist fictions including *The Land of Mist* (1926) and ‘Playing with Fire’ (1900). Beryl’s only presence in this story, apart from a memory, is her disembodied voice in the form of a phonograph recording. Bollamore keeps this, along with the phonograph player, in a japanned box secure for his daily use.<sup>103</sup> Her message is both poignant and simple in its delivery:

‘I am not really gone, John’ said the thin, gasping voice. ‘I am here at your very elbow, and shall be until we meet once more. I die happy to think that morning and night you will hear my voice. Oh, John, be strong, be strong, until we meet again’.<sup>104</sup>

It is this message, replayed daily by Bollamore, which gives him the strength to continue his struggle against his addiction and find salvation. This notion is in marked contrast to Doyle’s earlier religious musings but they only found full expression in his later spiritualist writings. It is interesting that the recordings have a similarity to the messages delivered by mediums to their spiritualist audiences. The comfort in knowing that a deceased loved-one is in fact still close to hand with the promise of reuniting after death is the promise shared by Beryl’s disembodied voice and the spiritualist message

---

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., p. 613.

<sup>103</sup> Japanning is a form of lacquering. For a description of this process, see: <http://www.localhistory.scit.wlv.ac.uk/Museum/metalware/japtech.htm> [14 March 2011].

<sup>104</sup> *The Conan Doyle Stories*, pp. 620-1.

championed by Doyle later in life. However, what is of greater significance in ‘The Japanned Box’ is how Doyle had begun to reconsider addiction in relation to his father and how this influenced his subsequent fiction.

### **Charles Doyle: Addiction as Heightened Perception of Potentially Supernatural Phenomena**

By 1907 Doyle had softened his stance toward his father, willing now to cast him as a “great unrecognised genius” and later expressing a desire to publicly exhibit Charles’s artwork.<sup>105</sup> Doyle drew upon his father’s artwork with its darker flights of imagination, in a manner that should not be solely regarded as a form of psychological displacement of Charles’s faults. In effect, Doyle gothicised the romantic aspect to his father’s character. As we have seen in *The Parasite* and ‘The Japanned Box’, Doyle alluded to his father’s condition as a source for his earlier fiction but it found a fuller expression in his later writings such as ‘The Silver Mirror’. Michael Baker published a sketchbook containing Charles’s illustrations that was originally produced by Doyle in 1889. It contains a wide range of material relating to fairies, the supernatural and references to alcoholism. Baker notes the ‘emotive passion which Conan Doyle had brought to his study of the supernatural’, associating it with ‘an unconscious effort to prove that Charles and his preoccupation with the nether world had not simply been the outpourings of a senile failure’.<sup>106</sup> Charles Doyle was preoccupied with the judgement of his mental state of mind, indicated by his statement on the frontispiece of his diary:

keep steadily in view that this Book is ascribed wholly to the produce of a MADMAN. Whereabouts would you say was the deficiency of intellect? or [sic] depraved taste? If in the whole Book you can find a single Evidence of either, mark it and record it against me.<sup>107</sup>

---

<sup>105</sup> Wynne, *The Parasite & The Watter’s Mou*, p. 155.

<sup>106</sup> Baker, p. XIX.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 78.

A sense of injustice is evident in the tone of this plea, although Charles does provide some indication of his alcoholism in three of his pictures, 'Prevention is Better than Cure' (Fig. 1.), 'The Dreadful Secret' (Fig. 2.) and 'Being Taken Up' (Fig. 3.).<sup>108</sup> The first picture portrays a young man on his knees imploring a woman standing with her back to him, with her head looking back over one shoulder. The title is suggestive of avoiding the need to beg for forgiveness by modifying the offending behaviour. The second picture depicts a man clinging on to a bucking horse surrounded by five spirit-like figures. The only face fully visible bears an anguished expression. Behind the rider is a male figure whispering theatrically with one hand close to his lips. The third picture shows a man closely resembling Charles Doyle being taken up into the heavens by an angelic figure dressed as a policeman. These three pictures alone are representative of the supernatural and the 'weird flights of fancy' noted by Stoker, above, as well as images of guilt, persecution and suffering. These pictures are important because they portray guilt, anguish and indeed psychological torment via an invocation of the supernatural. They also portray Charles as interacting with spirits. Here, it is possible to note an early influence on Doyle's eventual notion of an individual's perception being heightened by strained nerves or mental instability such as in 'The Japanned Box', *The Parasite* and 'The Silver Mirror'.

The proximity between Doyle's supernatural writings and his father's darker flights of imagination is apparent in 'The Silver Mirror', a story that portrays mental instability as being able to awaken the mind to potentially supernatural phenomena. The dangers of mental strain due to over-exertion are featured in the Sherlock Holmes stories as well as in a number of Doyle's writings that deal with unusual phenomena.<sup>109</sup>

---

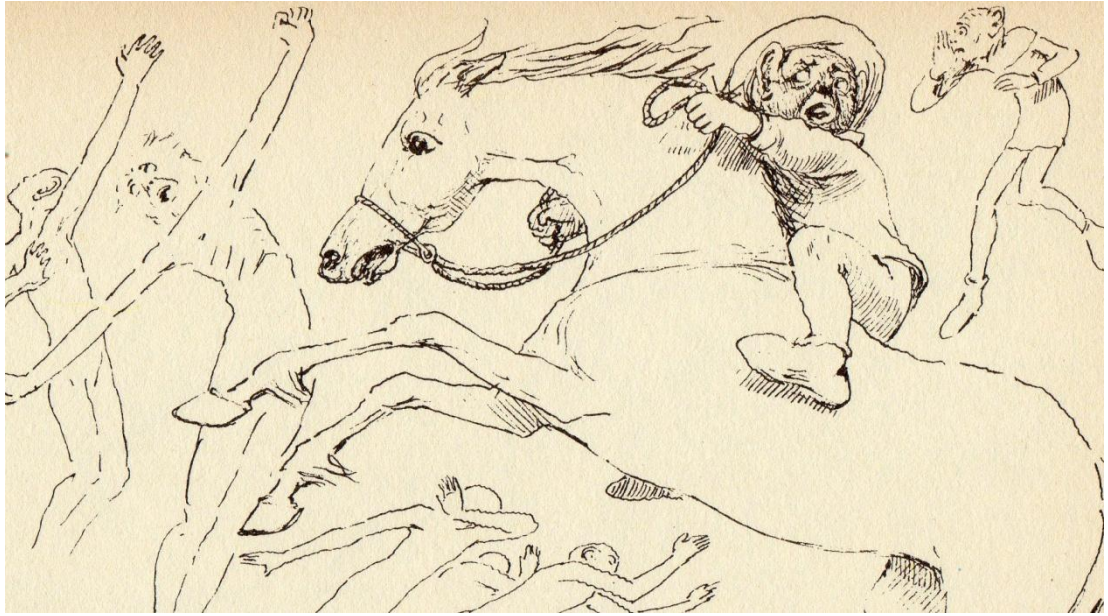
<sup>108</sup> Ibid, pp. 23; 37 and 60.

<sup>109</sup> 'The Adventure of the Devil's Foot' (1910), 'The Terror Blue John Gap' (1910) and 'A Pastoral Horror' (1890) to name a few.



**Fig. 1. Prevention is Better than Cure**





**Fig. 2. The Dreadful Secret**



**Fig. 3. Being Taken Up**

According to Higham ‘The Silver Mirror’ reflects Doyle’s ‘overstrained mental state, brought on by excessive hours of work’.<sup>110</sup> This story is presented as the diary account of a young junior partner of an accountancy firm who is tasked to gather evidence of fraud in preparation for a criminal trial. During the long hours of work in the evening, the narrator begins to see visions in an antique mirror that gradually form into human shapes in his room. Eventually, with the assistance of his medical doctor, the narrator discovers the mirror belonged to Mary Queen of Scots (1542-87) and was present at Holyrood House at the time of the assassination of her Italian secretary David Rizzio. Mary, mother of James I of England (the VI of Scotland), was executed at the order of Elizabeth I of England after being implicated in a plot to assassinate the English monarch and being associated with other Catholic conspiracies.<sup>111</sup> Prior to this in 1556 David Rizzio was murdered in full view of Queen Mary by her husband, Lord Darnley, jealous of the Italian’s influence.<sup>112</sup>

Like Charles Doyle and on occasion Sherlock Holmes, the narrator of ‘The Silver Mirror’ is heading towards a psychological breakdown brought on by overworking. On several occasions in ‘The Silver Mirror’ the narrator describes the deterioration of his mental condition. He notes, ‘I get nervous and highly strung when I sit alone at my work at night’.<sup>113</sup> Later he states that he is, ““straining [his] nerves, risking a complete breakdown, even endangering my sanity””.<sup>114</sup> It is at this point, when the narrator is close to a total mental and physical collapse, that the proximity between a potentially supernatural phenomenon and insanity is revealed. The reader is presented

---

<sup>110</sup> Higham, p. 217.

<sup>111</sup> For a brief biography of Mary, see: *The History Today: Who’s Who in British History*, ed. by Juliet Gardiner (London: Collins and Brown, 2000), p. 555.

<sup>112</sup> This episode is also the subject of a modern Sherlock Holmes pastiche written by Caleb Carr, a writer of detective fiction and contributor to the Baker Street Irregulars. His novel involves Holmes in an investigation of an apparent haunting of Holyrood House before a royal visit by Queen Victoria, Carr, Caleb, *The Italian Secretary* (London: Little, Brown, 2005).

<sup>113</sup> *The Conan Doyle Stories*, p. 1170.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, p 1171.

with the possibility of the narrator's experiences representing either a symptom of madness, or that his mind is more receptive due to the sustained psychological pressure he is under. The first apparition of Queen Mary and Rizzio forms inside the silver mirror then outside it in his own apartment. Initially, the narrator attempts to rationalise his visions, 'it was a subjective impression – a chimera of the nerves – begotten by worry and insomnia'.<sup>115</sup> As his condition deteriorates he realises the 'visions depend entirely upon my own nervous state'.<sup>116</sup> The story concludes with the narrator experiencing a 'tenseness within my brain, a sense of intolerable strain, which warns me that something must give'.<sup>117</sup> His fears become fully founded when he awakes in 'Dr Sinclair's private hospital some three weeks after the last entry in [his] diary'.<sup>118</sup> The conclusion of 'The Silver Mirror', particularly the narrator's eventual respite in a private hospital, parallels Charles Doyle's dysfunction and eventual physical collapse.<sup>119</sup> The images of Rizzio's horrific murder are evocative of the preternatural quality of Charles Doyle's artwork in that they share a common theme of evoking experiences that are outside the normal course of nature. Charles is the inspiration for 'The Silver Mirror', being a supposedly insane artist that Doyle attempted to define later as a visionary with a heightened sense of phenomena that belonged to unknown laws of nature. Several examples of Charles's art, such as 'Truth as Death' (Fig. 4.) possess a morbid quality with the figure of death grasping Charles with one hand while simultaneously placing his other upon the shoulder in a manner that could be read as controlling or in consolation.<sup>120</sup> Apparently unseen by Charles is an angelic figure attempting to lead him away from the figure of death with the words 'this way'

---

<sup>115</sup> Ibid., p. 1173.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid., p. 1175.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid., p. 1177.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid.

<sup>119</sup> Higham argues 'The Silver Mirror' is suggestive of 'the delirium which Charles Doyle experienced as an epileptic and alcoholic', p. 218.

<sup>120</sup> Michael Baker, *The Doyle Diary*, p. 7.

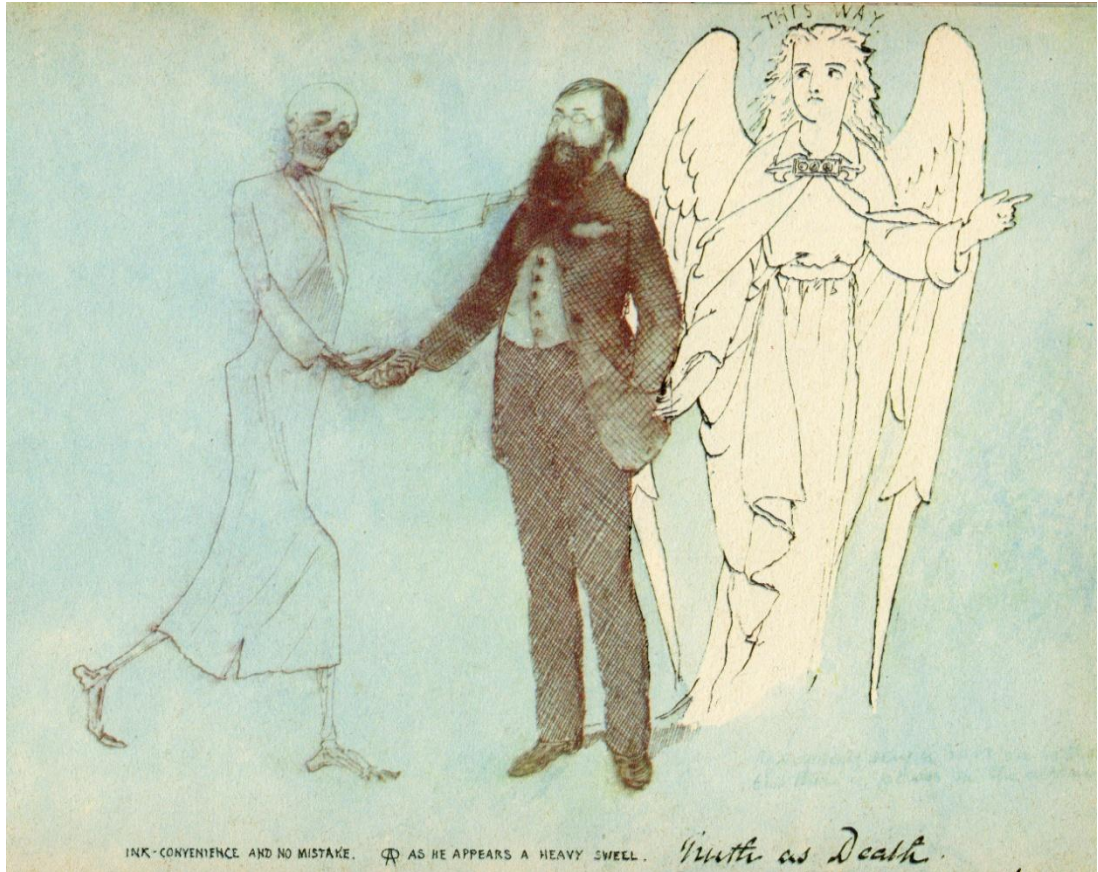
inscribed above its head. Charles's preoccupation with figures from beyond the grave is something he shares with the narrator of 'The Silver Mirror', who is also under severe mental duress. Furthermore, the image of Rizzio crouching at the side of Queen Mary moments prior to his murder resembles Charles's illustration, 'Mary my Ideal Home Ruler' (Fig. 5.), which shows him sitting at his wife's side gazing at her with adoration.<sup>121</sup> Finally, Charles had been employed in the Office of Works at Holyrood Palace, the original location of the silver mirror in Doyle's story. 'The Silver Mirror' reveals how an individual's strained nerves create the right conditions for a potentially supernatural phenomenon. At the end of the story the narrator asks Dr Sinclair how he was able to see the visions. Sinclair informs him it was "[b]ecause you were in the fit mental state to receive the impression. Because you chanced to own the mirror which gave the impression".<sup>122</sup> The second sentence in this quotation indicates that the story is influenced by psychometry, in which an object's history is revealed to one sensitive enough to read it, a practice also featured in Doyle's story 'The Leather Funnel' (1903). However, in the above quotation, Sinclair states that the 'fit mental state' necessary to receive such impressions is caused by mental exhaustion and psychological collapse. Sinclair attributes the powers Doyle believed were possessed by psychics and others who are sensitive to spirit phenomena, to people suffering from mental collapse. Although 'The Silver Mirror' is a later expression of Charles's gothic legacy, it is rooted in Doyle's early familial experiences. Charles, like the narrator of 'The Silver Mirror', was being treated in a private hospital having suffered mental collapse. Both are men who potentially possess a heightened perception of unusual phenomena. Charles Doyle drew pictures of fairy-like creatures evident in 'Robbing the Robber'

---

<sup>121</sup> Ibid., p. 27.

<sup>122</sup> Doyle, *The Conan Doyle Stories*, p. 1180.





**Fig. 4. Truth as Death**



**Fig. 5. Mary, My Ideal Home Ruler**

(Fig. 6.), where nine tiny figures attempt to steal a fox's prey from its jaws.<sup>123</sup> There are also a number of pictures of small females closely entwined in branches and leaves. One untitled piece illustrates a tiny female remonstrating with a blackbird while sheltering a butterfly behind her back.<sup>124</sup> Doyle's investigation into the existence of fairies in *The Coming of the Fairies* (1922) was, in part, an attempt to vindicate his father as a visionary similar to the narrator of 'The Silver Mirror', as opposed to being a madman. Lycett argues this was a motivation for Doyle stating that if the existence of fairies were proved it would show that, 'far from being mad, Charles Doyle had the evolved sensibility to communicate with higher spiritual beings'.<sup>125</sup> In 'The Silver Mirror', Dr Sinclair is important because he is a man of science arguing that the narrator's condition is attributable to the natural world. Sinclair is one of many characters created by Doyle who investigates the limits of natural law, a subject discussed throughout my thesis. Doyle utilises characters such as Sinclair to indicate that the experiences of the narrator of 'The Silver Mirror' are subjects worthy of scientific investigation and that they are explainable by hitherto unrecognised laws of nature.<sup>126</sup> In addition, Dr Sinclair is a medical expert familiar with working with unusual cases, a subject I discuss in my next chapter. However, Sinclair touches upon other important issues for Doyle such as medicine and the investigation of potentially supernatural phenomena.

The narrator of 'The Silver Mirror' visits a doctor hoping for a medical prescription. He states, 'I thought perhaps some bromide, or chloral, or something of the kind might do me some good'.<sup>127</sup> Doyle's medical knowledge of sedatives is apparent

---

<sup>123</sup> Michael Baker, *The Doyle Diary*, p. 3.

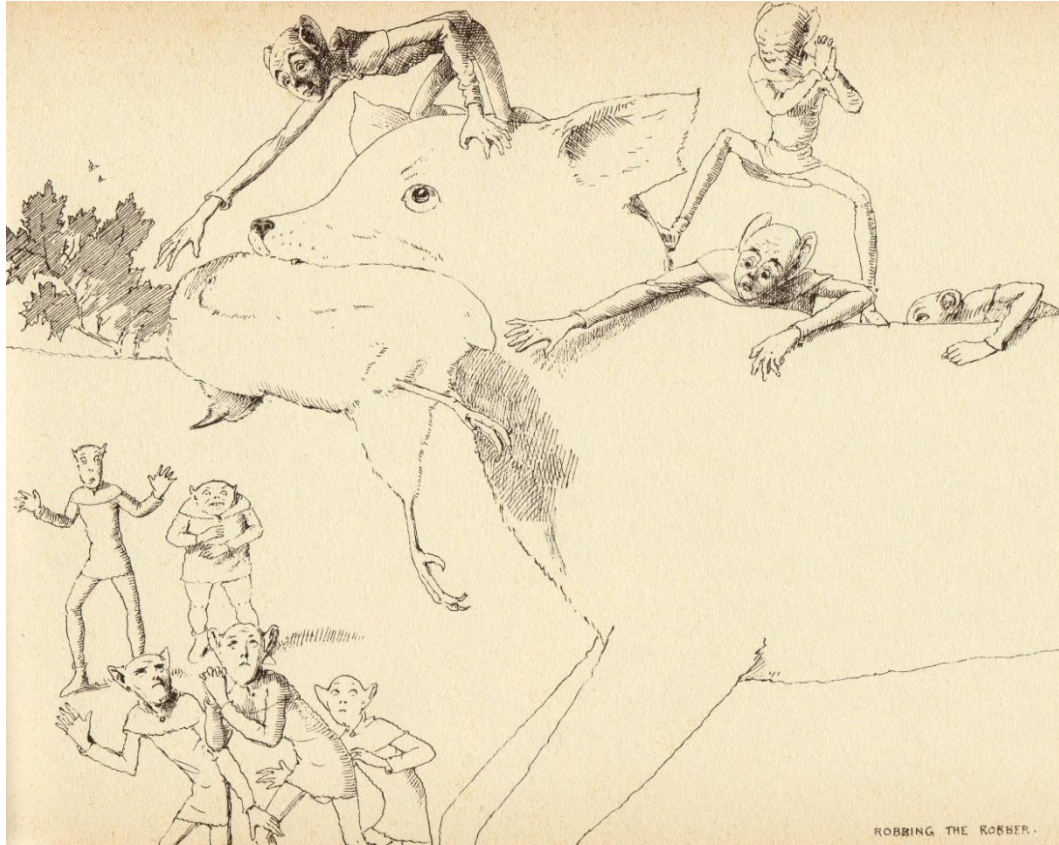
<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 17.

<sup>125</sup> Lycett, p. 384.

<sup>126</sup> As discussed in my introduction, this is a point shared by other nineteenth century investigators such as Catherine Crowe, *The Night Side of Nature: or Ghosts and Ghost Seers*, ed. by Gillian Bennett (London: Wordsworth, 2000) and Herbert Mayo, *On the Truths Contained in Popular Superstitions: with an Account of Mesmerism* Second ed. (London: William Blackwood and Sons, 1851).

<sup>127</sup> *The Conan Doyle Stories*, p. 1170.





**Fig. 6. Robbing the Robber**



here, a skill he utilised in his medical, supernatural and detective stories. Dr Sinclair bridges the divide between science and the supernatural. His initial diagnosis is nervous exhaustion brought on by overwork. However, Sinclair is also described as ““a bit of a psychologist”” who regards the narrator’s visions as a ““curious psycho-physiological study””.<sup>128</sup> This description is misleading. Rather than study the physiological effects of nervous strain, Sinclair attempts to define the narrator’s account of the silver mirror as something beyond the normal experience of medical science yet still located within the natural world. It is Sinclair who recognises both the scene as Rizzio’s murder and the origins of the silver mirror. Despite reacting with an understandable scepticism, he swiftly accepts the narrator’s assurance that he did not consciously recognise the protagonists in his visions and does not suspect the memory may have been partially submerged in his unconscious. From a scientific perspective, Sinclair could be criticised for suspending medical enquiry in favour of an irrational, supernatural reason for the narrator’s experiences. However, within the broader context of Doyle’s writings, it highlights his interest in such issues in his medical fiction. It is significant that Doyle utilised ‘The Silver Mirror’ to combine an investigation into scientifically uncharted territory with a medical professional who regarded the subject as a worthy use of his time, a position Doyle himself maintained was necessary to begin understanding such phenomena. The type of phenomena witnessed, whether it is Charles’s fairy figures or psychometric visions of traumatic historic events recorded in ‘The Silver Mirror’, belong to unexplained laws of the natural world and not the supernatural. In chapter four of my thesis, I examine how certain drugs in Doyle’s fiction may also be used to heighten an individual’s perception to register phenomena including creatures and

---

<sup>128</sup> Ibid., pp 1173 and 1171.

spirits that are invisible to the naked eye under normal conditions. Charles's addiction is an inspiration to such notions, whether it is Sherlock Holmes's drug use or Dr Watson's encounter with a spirit entity while under the influence of the deadly hallucinogen called the Devil's-foot root. Doyle's relationship with his father's addiction and its implications in moral and spiritual terms permeate his fictions and in 'The Silver Mirror' demonstrates his movement to a position highlighting science as a means to explain the natural world.

### **The Natural World: A New Field of Scientific Enquiry in *The Parasite***

*The Parasite*, 'The Japanned Box', and 'The Silver Mirror' are indicative of Doyle's interest in the expansion of scientific fields of enquiry and the development of new investigative methods. In *The Stark Munro Letters*, Munro attacks what he perceives as a scientific fundamentalism. He states, 'I know nothing more unbearable than the complacent type of scientist' confident in his knowledge of 'all that he does know', yet lacking 'imagination enough to understand what a speck his little accumulation of doubtful erudition is when compared with the immensity of our ignorance'.<sup>129</sup> The combination of 'imagination' and an open mind to the unknown possibilities of the natural world is a key component of Doyle's supernatural and spiritualist writings. However, as Jonathan Smith argues in *Fact and Feeling: Baconian Science and the Nineteenth Century Literary Imagination* (1994), imagination was also merged with speculation as an important element of the development of a broader nineteenth century scientific methodology.<sup>130</sup> Importantly, although Smith is examining the broader idea of imagination and science, in *The Parasite* Doyle is expressing his early and tentative ideas about reinterpreting the supernatural. This is because Miss Penelosa's mesmeric powers are not representative of the supernatural. Gilroy gradually

<sup>129</sup> Doyle, *The Stark Munro Letters*, p. 224.

<sup>130</sup> Jonathan Smith *Fact and Feeling: Baconian Science and the Nineteenth Century Literary Imagination* (London and Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin, 1994), p. 13.

discovers that ‘this dreadful thing [mesmerism] which has sprung out at me is neither supernatural nor even preternatural’, rather it is a ‘natural force which this woman can use and society is ignorant of’.<sup>131</sup> Importantly, although Gilroy initially represents Munro’s idea of a ‘complacent scientist’ he does indeed have the ‘imagination’ to consider the limits of the natural world.

The word ‘parasite’ originates in ancient Greek referring to one who lives at another’s expense in exchange for flattery. As Anne-Julia Zwierlein notes, the development of the biological terminology associated with the word parasite occurred during the late eighteenth to mid nineteenth centuries, with the scientific and medical study of parasitology developing in the late Victorian period.<sup>132</sup> By this period the figure of the parasite incorporated a literary element that amalgamated anxiety relating to reverse-colonization. The biological aspect to this is particularly evident in H G Wells’s *The War of the Worlds* (1898) in which the morally and physically degenerate, though technologically superior Martians, attempt to revive their race by the injection of human blood. An explicit case of vampirism in Stoker’s *Dracula* (1897) reveals the twin threat of reverse-colonization and parasitism in the figure of the degenerate Count Dracula. However, it is what Zwierlein notes as the transference of the literary figure of the parasite onto a ‘parapsychological’ plane that is of interest here because in *The Parasite* the protagonist Gilroy engages in a study of the extra-ordinary functioning of the human brain.<sup>133</sup> Once Gilroy receives incontrovertible proof as to the validity of Miss Penelosa’s mesmeric ability it forces him to abandon his scepticism stating, ‘I am immensely impressed. My horizon of scientific possibilities has suddenly been

---

<sup>131</sup> Wynne, *The Parasite & The Watter’s Mou*, p28.

<sup>132</sup> Anne-Julia Zwierlein, ‘From Parasitology to Parapsychology: Parasites in Nineteenth Century Science and Literature’, in *Unmapped Countries: Biological Visions in Nineteenth Century Literature and Culture*, ed. by Anne-Julia Zwierlein (London: Anthem Press, 2005), p. 158.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 169.

enormously extended'.<sup>134</sup> Gilroy states, 'I had always looked upon spirit as the product of matter. The Brain, I thought, secreted the mind, as the liver does the bile'.<sup>135</sup> Gilroy's former belief in the brain as the seat for the human soul is disrupted by proof of one mind's direct influence upon another by the power of thought. His witnessing of Miss Penelosa's mind working from a distance, and 'playing upon matter as a musician might upon a violin', is enough to convince him that the 'body does not give rise to the soul then, but is rather the rough instrument by which the spirit manifests itself'.<sup>136</sup> This is made apparent to Gilroy when his fiancée, Agatha, volunteers for Penelosa's mesmeric trance. When Agatha is non-responsive, Gilroy reflects upon the nature of what has afflicted her: '[b]ut her soul It had slipped from beyond our ken! Whither had it gone? What power had dispossessed it? I was puzzled and disconcerted'.<sup>137</sup> If the human body merely channelled the soul as opposed to giving rise to it, then it raises the possibility that the soul may continue to exist after death. Gilroy's new field of study is evocative of Doyle's interest in The Society for Psychical Research's investigation into extra sensory perception and telepathy at a time when 'Doyle was receptive to the potentialities of mesmeric phenomena'.<sup>138</sup> Similarly, it reflects Doyle's enthusiasm for Frederic Myers's *Human Personality and its Survival of Bodily Death* (1903). Myers's two-volume study proposed a hypothetical division of the human mind, by which the waking self exists alongside other streams of consciousness of which it may only be dimly aware. Parts of these streams of consciousness, sometimes called subliminal, may retain a dormant capacity for telepathic control, contact with the dead or a form of survival after death. The proximity of such ideas to early theories of human psychology

---

<sup>134</sup> Wynne, *The Parasite & The Watter's Mou*, p. 14.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 15.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.* 10.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*, p. XVII. See also, Renée Haynes, *The Society for Psychical Research 1882-1982: A History* (London: Macdonald, 1982).

is evident here.<sup>139</sup> Zweirlein notes the confluence of psychology and parapsychology in *The Parasite* and Wynne notes the novella's expression of the 'double fear' of 'the unexplored depths of the unconscious and the colonization of the mind through mesmerism'.<sup>140</sup> In *The Parasite*, Gilroy states, '[h]ow sweet and gentle and soothing is Nature! Who would think that there lurked in her also such vile forces, such odious possibilities!'<sup>141</sup> The possibility of spiritual survival, never far from the surface of Doyle's writings, merge with unusual phenomena in *The Parasite* while expressing anxiety as to the immutability of the human soul when it is subject to paranormal, physical or psychological duress. A key aspect to this novella is the materialist approach to studying mesmerism as a subject worthy of scientific attention. Gilroy is represented as a hard-headed materialist invested in the process of maintaining the scientific orthodoxy of ignoring new fields of scientific study that are criticised by Doyle. The extent of the physical and psychological impact of illness, addiction and madness is questioned with the additional anxiety of its affect upon the immutability and destiny of the human soul.

The possible mutability of the human soul is a concern Doyle expresses in both *The Stark Munro Letters* and *The Parasite*. Munro enquires 'where is the man, the very, very inmost essence of the man? See how much you may subtract from him without touching it'.<sup>142</sup> Munro continues by explaining how the soul, the 'inmost essence of man' cannot be analysed or identified by physiology. Bones, flesh and even the brain itself are considered before being cast aside by Munro, leaving him with the nervous

---

<sup>139</sup> Tougaw notes how the emergence of theories of human psychology are evident in a number of gothic and sensation stories in the mid to late nineteenth century, Jason Daniel Tougaw, *Strange Cases: The Medical Case History and the British Novel* (London: Routledge, 2006), pp.140-142.

<sup>140</sup> Zweirlein, p. 169; Wynne, *The Parasite & The Watter's Mou*, p. xiv. Also, Lycett, notes Doyle's 'the ideas which were teeming' in Doyle's head include 'how the new science of psychology was developing in parallel with the study of the paranormal', p.201.

<sup>141</sup> Wynne, *The Parasite & The Watter's Mou*, p. 28.

<sup>142</sup> Doyle, *The Stark Munro Letters*, p.55.

system. Somewhere within this ‘little blob of matter, a handful of nervous dough, a few ounces of tissue’ is the ‘physical seat of what we call the soul – the spiritual part of the man’.<sup>143</sup> However, identifying the location of the human soul offers no insight to the nature of its properties, whether it is immune to the ravages of illness, degeneration or addiction. Munro provides some indication of an answer to this when he states, ‘[d]oes not lunacy strike you [...] as being a very eerie thing? It is a disease of the soul’.<sup>144</sup> His use of ‘eerie’ is suggestive of the supernatural and as we shall see, the possibility of this along with lunacy and superstition are important themes of Doyle’s short-story, ‘A Pastoral Horror’. The mutable nature of the human soul, subject to spiritual malaise, is analogous to physical disease affecting the living body. According to Munro they both originate with a ‘gross physical cause’, suggesting that even if the soul is freed by bodily death, its existence in an afterlife may well be impaired.<sup>145</sup> These stories register an anxiety about how, if survival after death is possible, can science prove it. They also register a concern that even if the existence of a human soul could be proved by extending the field of scientific enquiry it would not shed any light upon the fate of people, like his father, whose soul may have been wrecked by alcoholism, illness and madness. In *The Parasite* Doyle aligns the symptoms of addiction with mesmerism, a phenomenon that operates according to hitherto unknown natural laws. The novella also highlights how scientists, such as Professor Gilroy, are unaccustomed to studying this new field of enquiry.

### **Madness, the Supernatural and ‘A Pastoral Horror’**

Finally, ‘A Pastoral Horror’ demonstrates how the division between the natural world and the potential for supernatural phenomena is a slender one. This story, along with the others discussed in this chapter, engages with Doyle’s emerging stance on the

---

<sup>143</sup> Ibid, p. 56.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid., p. 54.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid., p.55.

relationship between science and the supernatural. In the narrative, the scientific field of enquiry is administered by John Hudson, an educated man who aids the local authorities in their investigation of the murders in the hamlet of Laden in the Austrian Alps. Hudson also possesses medical knowledge having spent ‘two years at Guy’s’ hospital in London.<sup>146</sup> As we have already seen, there are a large number of Doyle’s fictional characters with a range of medical experience, the most famous being Dr Watson. Hudson, the narrator of ‘A Pastoral Horror’, describes the fear caused by a series of random, opportunistic murders carried out by the deranged local Catholic priest Father Verhagen. Laden’s proximity to ‘Feldkirch’, a small town remarkable only for its beauty and the presence of ‘a large and well conducted Jesuit school’, associates this story with Doyle’s early years. He spent the autumn of 1875 to the spring of 1876 finishing his early education at Stella Matutina the Jesuit school in Feldkirch. Father Verhagen in ‘A Pastoral Horror’ has no connection to the Jesuits at Feldkirch, although his ‘somewhat cold and reserved’ nature is reflective of Doyle’s perception of the Jesuits at Stonyhurst.<sup>147</sup>

Doyle’s decision to make Verhagen a Catholic priest and a deranged murderer is not necessarily at odds with the dichotomy of morality and alcoholism established in *The Stark Munro Letters* and developed in the characters of Isa and Elias Whitney in ‘The Man with the Twisted Lip’. Structurally, Verhagen’s vocation as a respected priest initially removes him as a suspect while also providing him with legitimate access to all areas of the small community. Instead, his ‘homicidal mania’ is diagnosed as a ‘disease’ originating in what Munro would call a ‘gross physical cause’.<sup>148</sup> Munro’s example of

---

<sup>146</sup> *The Collected Supernatural & Weird Fiction of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle*, 3 vols ([n.p.]: Leonaur, 2009), I, p. 381. Guy’s is named after Sir Thomas Guy who leased land to ‘build one of the world’s first institutions for the care of the “incurably ill and hopelessly insane” in 1725.

<<http://www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk/about/organisation/history.aspx>> [accessed 27/03/11].

<sup>147</sup> *The Collected Supernatural & Weird Fiction of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle*, p. 377.

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 55.

this in *The Stark Munro Letters* is ‘the fall of a spicule of bone from the inner table of [a] skull on to the surface of the membrane which covers [the] brain’.<sup>149</sup> Munro’s point is that the human mind is subject to physical ailments and diseases. He states, ‘a man of noble mind, full of every lofty aspiration’ may be turned into an ‘obscene creature full of every beastly attribute’, with ‘two contradictory personalities’.<sup>150</sup> Other physical causes for mental disturbance include sunstroke, a hereditary disposition or the stresses of overwork, as is the case in Doyle’s ‘The Silver Mirror’. Father Verhagen’s insanity is caused by similar stresses, as discovered by Hudson at the end of ‘A Pastoral Horror’. He notes the ‘homicidal mania’ had ‘undoubtedly proceeded from overwork and brain worry’.<sup>151</sup> Unlike ‘The Silver Mirror’, stresses caused by overwork and a naturally sensitive disposition do not result in potentially supernatural phenomena in ‘A Pastoral Horror’. Despite murdering two villagers and assaulting several more, Hudson describes Verhagen as the ‘man most to be pitied’.<sup>152</sup> Hudson argues that Verhagen’s illness would have been diagnosed in a larger town where ‘good medical advice’ was available.<sup>153</sup> Verhagen’s moral integrity is preserved because he is the victim of a disease, albeit one that might also endanger his soul.

Addiction and insanity in *The Parasite*, ‘The Silver Mirror’, ‘The Japanned Box’ and ‘A Pastoral Horror’ also raise the prospect of the supernatural before eventually establishing scientific order. *The Parasite* and ‘The Silver Mirror’ directly engage with the supernatural, whereas in the latter stories the connection is more subtle. In ‘A

---

<sup>149</sup> Doyle, *The Stark Munro letters*, p. 55.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid. Such ideas were far from being unique to Doyle. Robert Louis Stevenson’s *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886), published while Doyle was working on *The Stark Munro Letters*, is deeply rooted in the gothic tradition and scientific notions of split-personality. See, Robert Mighall, ‘Diagnosing Jekyll: the Scientific Context to Dr Jekyll’s Experiment and Mr Hyde’s Embodiment’, in *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde and Other Tales of Terror* (London: Penguin, 2002; repr. 2003), pp. 143-161.

<sup>151</sup> *The Collected Supernatural & Weird Fiction of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle*, p. 391.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid.



Pastoral Horror’ it is the lack of an obvious motive that encourages superstitious fears that incorporate the supernatural. Once revenge has been dismissed as a reason for the death of a villager named, appropriately enough, Maul, Hudson’s unease is transferred into gothic speculation. He states, ‘there seems to be something almost supernatural in the malignity of this unknown fiend’, while also describing him as an ‘awful demon who haunts us’, words similar to those used by Doyle to describe Miss Penelosa in *The Parasite* and Bollamore’s addiction in ‘The Japanned Box’.<sup>154</sup> Hudson’s opinion in ‘A Pastoral Horror’ changes once it becomes apparent their adversary is human and the supernatural explanation recedes. Hudson’s alternative explanation is that ‘[h]e is either some murderous misanthrope who has declared a vendetta against the whole human race, or else he is an escaped maniac’.<sup>155</sup>

In contemplating the impunity of the murderer’s attacks, Hudson theorises that their assailant is an opportunist because of the ‘badly lit state of the place – or rather the entire absence of light – and also in the fact that thick woods stretch right down to the houses on every side’.<sup>156</sup> The physical darkness of Laden is metaphorically akin to the darkness of not just the unknown, but also the very ignorance within the village itself that tends towards superstition. Having failed to correctly diagnose Verhagen’s symptoms after an informal consultation, Hudson states, ‘[h]ow could I diagnose with my smattering of science the existence of such a terrible and insidious form of insanity’.<sup>157</sup> In ‘A Pastoral Horror’, this raises the prospect of having the lamps of medical knowledge lighting the metaphorical darkness. What initially appears to be supernatural is due to a misunderstanding or the narrow-mindedness of scientists of the type criticised in *The Stark Munro Letters*. Hudson’s ‘smattering of science’ is not

---

<sup>154</sup> Ibid., p. 386 and 385.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid., p. 389.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid., p. 387.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid., p. 392.

adequate to master the task at hand, suggesting a range of experienced scientists or even the pioneers of new fields of enquiry must be assembled to chart the wonders and the horrors of the natural world.

Dr Sinclair in 'The Silver Mirror' and Professor Gilroy in *The Parasite* are pioneers of a new frontier in scientific enquiry. They embody the imagination Munro praises in *The Stark Munro Letters* when he despairs of the investigative conservatism of scientists. This highlights the importance of *The Stark Munro Letters*, a text that originated in Doyle's early years as a general practitioner of medicine in Portsmouth. Despite being rooted in these experiences and in Doyle's early ambivalent relationship with his father, the significance of this novel is far greater than the author's psychology or biography. The narrative of *The Stark Munro Letters* wrestles with religion in a manner that foreshadows Doyle's advocacy of spiritualism later in life. It reveals how Doyle's darker flights of imagination engaged with addiction, madness and his interest in redefining the supernatural as misunderstood laws of nature. Addiction and madness play a role in providing a gateway to a new extra-ordinary nature in which visionaries are capable of experiencing phenomena beyond the range of everyday knowledge. It is important to consider that the tension created by the dual role of addiction and madness in Doyle's early fictions is a result of his ambivalence towards his father. It is indicative of Doyle gothicising the process of resolving these issues, something that occurred in different forms throughout his lifetime. It occurs again in his medical fiction as Doyle wrestled with notions of justice within his early religious ideas, a subject discussed in my next chapter. The significance of 'A Pastoral Horror' does not lie in the fact that the supernatural is dismissed by rational enquiry. Rather, its importance is rooted in the fact that the story's characters are superstitious and ready to assume that the horrific and the unknown may well be a genuine case of vampirism or diabolic

activity. The mystery of the disembodied voice in ‘The Japanned Box’ is solved by Colmore’s discovery of his employer’s alcoholism. However, by combining addiction and the trope of hereditary gothic curses, Doyle creates the potential for a supernatural explanation when Colmore could almost fancy seeing Bollamore’s alcoholism materialise as a fiend. It is such an imagination which narrows the gap between visionary and lunatic. It also creates the possibility that Colmore may possess latent gifts that narrow the divide between his ‘fancy’ and reality. This sentiment is apparent in ‘The Silver Mirror’ and it is implicated in the process of redefining Doyle’s father as a misunderstood visionary. As well as revealing the potential of widening scientific enquiry, these stories also reveal anxiety as to the limits of knowledge. In *The Parasite*, Gilroy’s revelation that Miss Penelosa’s abilities do, in fact, stem from the natural world underlies his helplessness. The presence of Doyle’s medical knowledge is also apparent in these stories. Hudson’s failure to correctly diagnose Verhagen’s mental instability is excusable for his incomplete medical training. It also raises the question of medicine’s ability to map new fields of enquiry. What emerges here is the possibility, however slightly, of supernatural phenomena only to have it rationalised and explained as a previously unknown factor of the natural world. My next chapter examines how an occult story appears within Doyle’s collection dedicated to exploring medical realism. The inability to diagnose physical and psychological illness further reveals Doyle’s religious anxieties, his use of medical realism and its movement into the gothic. How this then engages with Doyle’s interest in science is the subject of my next chapter.

## CHAPTER TWO

### The “Facts and Fancies” of Doyle’s Medical Fiction

In chapter one I examined how Doyle’s early traumatic relationship with his father formed his ideas on addiction, illness and madness and their potential to enable an individual to perceive potentially supernatural phenomena. Doyle’s early religious ideas suggested that someone suffering from addiction and madness was marked for extinction through the process of natural selection. As we have seen, it is evident in *The Parasite* (1894) and ‘The Silver Mirror’ (1908) that Doyle began a process of re-evaluating such evolutionary theories in response to his relationship with his wife Louise and his father Charles. In response Doyle began to consider addiction and illness as evidence of an individual’s heightened perceptions. In addition, Doyle argued that science was capable of defining such phenomena, not as supernatural, but originating in the natural world. In chapter two I examine how Doyle continued to expand this position through his writings. Key to this is Doyle’s medical fiction; in particular *Round the Red Lamp: Being Facts and Fancies of Medical Life* (1894). This collection of fifteen medical short-stories was published in the same year as *The Parasite* and months after the apparent death of Sherlock Holmes in ‘The Adventure of the Final Problem’ (1893). In this chapter I focus primarily upon three stories from *Round the Red Lamp*: ‘The Third Generation’ (1894), ‘A Medical Document’ (1894) and ‘Lot No. 249’ (1892). They are supported by another example of Doyle’s medical fiction ‘The Surgeon of Gaster Fell’ (1890) which is not included in *Round the Red Lamp*. A close reading of these stories, supported by the context of nineteenth century medical history, reveals Doyle’s changing ideas as he moves along the trajectory of medical realism and its incorporation of unusual, yet natural, events through the gothic to the possibility of supernatural phenomena. Furthermore, by early 1894 Doyle was also nearing the

completion of *The Stark Munro Letters* (1895) and I read *Round the Red Lamp* as engaging with the religious and scientific concerns Doyle expressed in the former text. In particular *Round the Red Lamp* challenges Doyle's notion that human suffering, caused by addiction, illness and insanity, was essential to racial progress within the context of his merger of religion and evolutionary theory evident in *The Stark Munro Letters*. I argue that *Round the Red Lamp* is representative of a transitional phase in Doyle's development in these areas, as religion gave way gradually to his scientific ideas before he progressed to publicly endorsing spiritualism later in life. As with *The Stark Munro Letters*, *Round the Red Lamp* begins with an extract from Doyle's correspondence with a friend in America. However, in this case it is a letter from a real correspondent that Doyle uses to preface *Round the Red Lamp*. In this preface he notes the potentially detrimental effect that stories attempting medical realism might have on certain readers. In particular he responds to the criticism that 'an invalid, or a woman in weak health, would get no good from stories which attempt to treat some features of medical life with a certain amount of realism'.<sup>1</sup> In *Round the Red Lamp* he defines realism as describing medical cases explicitly, a course of action that proved to be unpopular with his audience.<sup>2</sup> Doyle's definition of medical realism is important. This is because some of these conditions, typically incurable diseases related to sex or female sexuality, are displaced by invocation of gothic modes in his fiction. For Doyle untreatable medical conditions such as Sir Francis Norton's syphilis in 'The Third Generation' have a much wider significance. Such incurable diseases also occur in the formulation of literary realism. For Jason Daniel Tougaw, anxieties caused by uncertain

---

<sup>1</sup> Doyle, *Conan Doyle's Tales of Medical Humanism and Values: 'Round the Red Lamp: Being Facts and Fancies of Medical Life'*, ed. by Alvin E Rodin and Jack D Key (Malabar FL: Krieger publishing Company, 1992), p.XI.

<sup>2</sup> For example, when Doyle read a story from this compilation, 'The Curse of Eve' (1894) to the members of the Authors' Club. This story, which details the death of a young mother at childbirth, received a negative response forcing Doyle to change the ending to a happier conclusion, see: Richard Lancelyn Green and John Michael Gibson, *A Bibliography of A. Conan Doyle* (Boston: Hudson House, 1983; repr. 2000), pp 82-83.

diagnoses are displaced into a set of literary conventions that enable doctors to tell the stories of suffering patients providing ‘the missing closure’ between the two.<sup>3</sup> The anxiety created by this leads to ambivalence between ordinary and extraordinary experiences mediated by literary realism influenced by medical practice. Doyle’s medical realism is located within this broader critical context. However, for Doyle medical realism is positioned more firmly within his trajectory that begins with medical uncertainty and moves through the gothic before contemplating the possibilities of a wider order of nature. Importantly, the anxiety exhibited by being unable to ameliorate such conditions challenges the religious schema Doyle established in *The Stark Munro Letters*, illustrating how his religious ideas were unsettled at this point in his life. In this chapter I examine Doyle’s medical stories focussing upon the occasions when his fictional medical realism is punctured by the gothic or the potential for supernatural phenomena. In *Round the Red Lamp* the gothic is not just used to displace medical anxiety, it also occurs at times of Doyle’s uncertainty at religious and scientific progress.

In *Round the Red Lamp* Doyle’s medical realism is broadly concordant with literary realism. They are both a ‘mode of writing that gives the impression of recording or ‘reflecting’ faithfully an actual way of life’, in this instance within the context of medical experience.<sup>4</sup> Doyle argues that if authors are to make their ‘doctors something more than marionettes, it is quite essential that you should paint the darker side, since it is that which is principally presented to the Surgeon or the Physician’.<sup>5</sup> Doyle argues that in certain fictional situations a sense of realism conveys medical authenticity. This

---

<sup>3</sup> Jason Daniel Tougaw, *Strange Cases: The Medical Case History and the British Novel* (London: Routledge, 2006), p.36.

<sup>4</sup> Chris Baldick, ‘realism’, in *The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* (Oxford University Press, 2008), in *Oxford Reference Online*. Oxford University Press  
<<http://www.oxfordreference.com/views/ENTRY.html?subview=Main&entry=t56.e954>> [accessed: 28 July 2011].

<sup>5</sup> Rodin and Key, *Conan Doyle’s Tales of Medical Humanism*, p. XI.

locates Doyle within the cultural interaction of science, medicine and literature. Critics such as Lawrence Rothfield note that literary writers of the nineteenth century based their realist novels on medical practice, especially clinical observation and the cultivation of a professional distance from the subject.<sup>6</sup> The creation of what Rothfield describes as a mimetic medical view of life engages with the formulation of a literary world view that informed, and was informed by, the public's perception of medical science and clinical practice. Doyle also argues that it is the 'province of fiction to treat painful things as well as cheerful ones'.<sup>7</sup> Doyle speculates that such fiction may 'startle the reader out of his usual grooves of thought', therefore shocking them into 'seriousness'.<sup>8</sup> Consequently, Doyle's medical realism possesses an inherent didacticism. Literary realism may also possess 'a more general attitude that rejects idealization, escapism, and other extravagant qualities of romance in favour of recognizing soberly the actual problems of life'.<sup>9</sup> Doyle warns against adopting too light a touch to writing medical realism in his preface stating, '[o]ne cannot write of medical life and be merry over it'.<sup>10</sup> In Doyle's fictional writings, romance - whether it is in his tales of imperial adventure or his historical novels, had more in common with notions of chivalry than in purely escapist fantasy. In *Round the Red Lamp*, such qualities were not necessarily oppositional to his depiction of medical realism. When discussing the medical experiences of doctors, Doyle notes, '[h]e sees many beautiful things, it is true; fortitude and heroism, self-sacrifice and love, but they are called forth (as our nobler qualities are always called forth) by bitter sorrow and trial'.<sup>11</sup> For Doyle, his medical

---

<sup>6</sup> Lawrence Rothfield, *Vital Signs: Medical Realism in Nineteenth-Century Fiction* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), p. 12.

<sup>7</sup> Rodin and Key, *Conan Doyle's Tales of Medical Humanism*, p. XI.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> Baldick, 'realism'.

<sup>10</sup> Rodin and Key, *Conan Doyle's Tales of Medical Humanism*, p. XI.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

fiction could incorporate elements of romance adventure, such as chivalry and fortitude, without sacrificing some of the unpleasant facts of realism.

In 1910, approximately twenty years after leaving medical practice, Doyle delivered a speech to students at St Mary's Hospital Medical School in London. This address was later published as 'The Romance of Medicine'.<sup>12</sup> In this address Doyle explains how he incorporated his medical experience into his fiction. 'In every literature or dramatic romance' Doyle notes in 'The Romance of Medicine', 'you will observe that from the time that the villain is unmasked he is innocuous. It is the undiscovered villain who is formidable. So it has been in this wonderful romance of medicine'.<sup>13</sup> Here, Doyle conflates medical science with literature or dramatic romance.<sup>14</sup> Illness and disease are cast as villains regardless of whether they are 'micrococcus or microbe' in origin.<sup>15</sup> Doyle argues that, 'how one by one their machinations were traced, is, I think, one of the most wonderful, and certainly one of the most eventful in Science'.<sup>16</sup> This statement illustrates how Doyle could imbue medical practice with a quality that appeals to the imagination, locating it within his favourite mode of literature that was evocative of adventure, heroism and chivalry. However, to limit *Round the Red Lamp* to such a narrow criterion would be inaccurate and Doyle's range of stories within this compilation varies in tone and subject matter. Alvin E Rodin and Jack D Key note that 'The Romance of Medicine' provided 'a much greater breadth of orientation to medical

---

<sup>12</sup> Doyle, 'The Romance of Medicine', *St Mary's Hospital Gazette*, 16 (1910) 100-6 (repr. in Darby pp. 306-320).

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 315.

<sup>14</sup> It is well documented in biographies of Doyle, how he based elements of his own fictional detective, Sherlock Holmes upon a similar precept. Holmes entitles his detective method as the science of deduction and Doyle's teacher, Dr Joseph Bell, is commonly regarded as the inspiration for the great detective. Other academic influences upon Doyle are discussed in chapter five of this thesis.

<sup>15</sup> Doyle, '*Round the Red Lamp*' and *Other Medical Writings*, ed. by Robert Darby (Kansas: Valancourt Books, 2007), p. 315.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*



matters than is evident in his other talks or writings'.<sup>17</sup> It is this breadth of orientation, his interest in the supernatural, the limits of scientific knowledge and the boundaries of the laws of nature that are of interest to this chapter. Janice McLarren Caldwell focuses upon the influence of Romantic literature upon the broader genre of literary realism.<sup>18</sup> This is significant because, as we shall see in this chapter, various forms of romance were influential to Doyle's concept of medical realism. Caldwell's reading of medical realism investigates the possibility that nature and supernature is representative of a deeper natural law that challenges supernatural interpretations of unusual phenomena. This is a point Doyle addresses through his medical realism, evident in his investigation of extraordinary phenomena articulated through *Round the Red Lamp*.

#### **'A Medical Document', Literature, Medical Realism and Sexuality**

Doyle utilises his short-story 'A Medical Document' to debate the issues surrounding realism and its appropriate use in medical fiction. In this story three doctors, including a general practitioner, an alienist and a surgeon, discuss their experiences with a young medical layman.<sup>19</sup> As Rodin and Key suggest this person is 'most likely a writer', evidenced by his note-taking and interest in the nine medical cases discussed by the three doctors.<sup>20</sup> 'A Medical Document' is aptly named as its metafictional structure, a story about the process of writing fiction, documents the difficulties of creating medical realism, as well as revealing its proximity to literary realism.<sup>21</sup> Tougaw argues that 'the influence of the case history on the novel is precisely the ability to give readers the experience of mixing categories of thought and feeling',

---

<sup>17</sup> Rodin and Key, *Medical Casebook of Doctor Arthur Conan Doyle: From Practitioner to Sherlock Holmes and Beyond* (Malabar FL: Robert E Krieger Publishing Company, 1984), p. 112.

<sup>18</sup> Janis McLarren Caldwell, *Literature and Medicine in Nineteenth-Century Britain: From Mary Shelley to George Eliot*, (Cambridge: Cambridge university Press), p. 1.

<sup>19</sup> In the nineteenth century an alienist was a specialist in treating mental illnesses.

<sup>20</sup> Rodin and Key, *Conan Doyle's Tales of Medical Humanism*, p. 212.

<sup>21</sup> This is similar to what Tougaw calls the 'diagnostic tendencies' inherent in fiction such as Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890), albeit being expressed in a more blunter mode, Tougaw, pp. 4-6.

something Doyle was seeking to express in his own medical fiction.<sup>22</sup> One of the medical professionals, Charley Manson, an alienist, argues, ““there is a side of life which is too medical for the general public and too romantic for the professional journals””.<sup>23</sup> Manson neatly summarises the difficulties of balancing medicine and romance in medical realism. In the story, Theodore Foster, a general practitioner of medicine, argues that in general fiction the reader is left with an unrealistic picture of medical practice. He observes how “[t]he small complaints”” such as mumps, quinsy or shingles ““simply don’t exist””.<sup>24</sup> Another condition Foster describes is that of brain fever, a ““mysterious malady”” that always ““attacks the heroine after a crisis, but which is unknown under that name to the text books””.<sup>25</sup> Instead, the kind of literature best suited to the notes the young layman is taking in ‘A Medical Document’, would be a ““curious paper [that] might be read at some of these meetings about the uses of medicine in popular fiction””.<sup>26</sup> However, the layman’s fresh perspective, combined with his literary skill is of importance to creating medically realistic fiction. This is because the layman does not take for granted the wide range of unusual experiences of the medical professional. The experienced doctor is liable to assume that there is ‘little that is remarkable, or break away into the technical’ language of the specialist.<sup>27</sup> Instead, the layman is able to avoid Foster’s jaundiced opinion that “[t]here is no need for fiction in medicine”” because ““the facts will always beat anything you can fancy””.<sup>28</sup> Doyle as a professional writer and a doctor attempted to assimilate the

---

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p.2.

<sup>23</sup> Rodin and Key, *Conan Doyle’s Tales of Medical Humanism*, p. 210.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p. 209.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid. This is a point shared by Tougaw, who notes, ‘[i]n romance, heroes and heroines exist in foreign, enchanted places where bowel movements were unnecessary and copulation could be represented with an amorous trope’. He regards the representation of taboo subjects as a major problem ‘faced by the realist novel’ of the nineteenth century, Tougaw, p. 83.

<sup>26</sup> Rodin and Key, *Conan Doyle’s Tales of Medical Humanism*, p. 209.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p. 201.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 209.

extraordinary experiences of medical life into a mode of fiction that did not compromise his expressed desire to portray realism in *Round the Red Lamp*.

In ‘A Medical Document’, the assembled doctors discuss various medical cases which the surgeon, Hargrave, describes as ““out of the ordinary””.<sup>29</sup> A review in *The Spectator*, published in 1895, highlighted Doyle’s ‘preternatural imagination of a specially gruesome kind’.<sup>30</sup> Owen Dudley Edwards notes how Doyle shared a ‘fascination with the preternatural’ with his father Charles and his uncle Richard.<sup>31</sup> The preternatural, that which lies outside the ordinary course of nature, is a quality of Doyle’s writings already discussed in chapter one and is evident in ‘A Medical Document’. In the narrative sexuality and an uncertain prognosis of a medical condition creates unease that merges religious imagery and gothic suspense. Hargrave was consulted by a ““famous beauty in London society”” admired for her ““very low dresses”” that revealed ““the whitest of skins, and the most beautiful of shoulders””.<sup>32</sup> The sexual nature of this observation, indicated by his euphemistic admiration of her beautiful shoulders, was supported by his remark that ““it was no wonder”” she should wish to exhibit her body, something considered ““remarkable”” by observers.<sup>33</sup> The reason for her visit to the surgeon was due to a change in her behaviour in fashionable society. Hargrave noted how her mode of dress had changed over several months, ““gradually the frilling at her neck lapped upwards and upwards”” until she finally ““astonished everyone by wearing quite a high collar at a time when it was completely out of fashion””.<sup>34</sup> This sudden change in fashion was perceived as a mystery. Her condition was related to a change in her health and not a change of taste in fashion.

---

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 210.

<sup>30</sup> Review of Doyle’s *Round the Red Lamp*, *The Spectator*, 16 February 1895, pp.238-9. Also See: Darby p. vii.

<sup>31</sup> Owen Dudley Edwards, *The Quest for Sherlock Holmes* (London: Penguin, 1984), p. 42.

<sup>32</sup> Rodin and Key, *Conan Doyle’s Tales of Medical Humanism*, p. 210.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

During her consultation with Hargrave she “suddenly tore off the upper part of her dress”, exclaiming: “[f]or God’s sake do something for me!”<sup>35</sup> Her exposed body revealed what Hargrave diagnoses as a “rodent ulcer”, which was “eating its way upwards, coiling on in its serpiginous fashion until the end of it was flush with her collar”.<sup>36</sup> The horror for Hargrave’s patient was intensified by the ulcer’s steady growth. The surgeon noted that the “red streak of its tail was lost below the line of her bust”.<sup>37</sup> Today, the term ‘rodent ulcer’ is also defined as a ‘basal cell carcinoma’, a form of skin cancer that spreads gradually over the affected area.<sup>38</sup> It occurs more frequently in people with fair skin, such as Hargrave’s patient and if left untreated it can lead to tissue damage in the area. The term ‘rodent ulcer’ technically refers to this latter stage of the cancer’s progress, although it is sometimes used to refer to basal cell carcinoma generally. It is likely that Doyle used the term in this sense as Hargrave noted how, “year by year it had ascended and she had heightened her dress to hide it, until now it was about to invade her face”.<sup>39</sup> Unfortunately there was little that can be done for the patient. Before the advent of twentieth-century medicine, the Victorian surgeon was left with the option of treating the symptoms of the disease. Hargrave described his use of “zinc chloride”, a caustic chemical that was used to remove cancerous tissue with the risk of damaging healthy skin.<sup>40</sup> This would only treat the symptoms leaving the cancer untouched. The possibility of successful treatment is limited. A point Hargrave conceded somewhat uneasily, “I did what I could. But it may break out again”.<sup>41</sup>

---

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> *Oxford Concise Colour Medical Dictionary*, 4th edn. (Oxford: Oxford university Press, 2007), p. 630 and p. 72.

<sup>39</sup> Rodin and Key, *Conan Doyle’s Tales of Medical Humanism*, p. 210.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., p. 211 and pp. 216-217.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., p. 211. Claude Quétel notes that a similar procedure was used in treating the appearance of syphilis. This was deemed a ‘radical response’ because it ‘involved mutilating operations’ and it ‘did not

A close reading of Hargrave's case reveals questions of morality, sexuality and religion that occur in Doyle's medical realism. His patient's interest in fashion and her passion for low-cut dresses that revealed her beautiful 'shoulders', a word utilised here by Hargrave as a euphemism for her breasts, sexualises her. In this story, the narrator does not suggest she is in any way licentious, though her pride, indicated by her refusal to seek medical assistance, is revealing. Hargrave states she "had been too proud to confess her trouble, even to a medical man"<sup>42</sup> His use of 'confess' not only suggests her embarrassment and fear at the progress of her skin condition, it is also evocative of a religious or legal discourse. The former possibility is more relevant as her pride is indicative of a deadly sin, not just for her refusal to seek medical help but for her pride in her beauty. The description of her condition adds to this sense of original sin. The serpiginous ulcer that leaves the "red streak of its tail" below the "line of her bust" is "coiling" around her neck as it was "eating its way upwards" towards her face.<sup>43</sup> 'Serpiginous' is used here in its medical sense, referring to an ulcerated skin lesion that progress with a wavy edge.<sup>44</sup> The word is derived from the Latin 'serpere', meaning to creep, linking it etymologically with 'serpent', a creature evocative of the Fall of Man in *Genesis*. As we have seen in chapter one, in *The Stark Munro Letters* Doyle rejects biblical notions of sin and redemption, defining illness as a test of fitness in the creator's plan for racial evolution. In 'A Medical Document', Hargrave describes his female patient as "one of those beautiful white-and-pink creatures who are rotten with struma. You may patch but you can't mend"<sup>45</sup> Hargrave's unease at being unable to

---

prevent the appearance of the secondary symptoms', in: Claude Quétel, *History of Syphilis*, trans. by Judith Braddock and Brian Pike (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992), p. 117.

<sup>42</sup> Rodin and Key, *Conan Doyle's Tales of Medical Humanism*, p. 210.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> *Oxford Concise Medical Dictionary*, p. 651.

<sup>45</sup> Rodin and Key, *Conan Doyle's Tales of Medical Humanism*, p. 211. A modern description of struma is a swelling of the thyroid gland, *Oxford Concise Medical Dictionary*, p. 687. However, Doyle also used the term to refer to a 'hereditary form of chronic ill-health' in: Doyle, *Through the Magic Door*, (London: Smith Elder, 1907; London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, [n.d.]) p. 77.

successfully treat his patient is offset by his detached tone. Doctor Foster's response to Hargrave's case is: "[d]ear! dear! dear! [...] I suppose we mustn't think ourselves wiser than Providence, but there are times when one feels that something is wrong in the scheme of things".<sup>46</sup> The tension between an individual's suffering and the detachment required to believe such frightening and dangerous conditions are all part of a benevolent creator's plan further complicates Doyle's religious views of racial evolution.

In 'A Medical Document' Hargrave's case reveals how Doyle's early religious ideas were being threatened by the anxiety created by an individual's suffering that is beyond the help of medical science. James Krasner argues that such anxiety is expressed in terms of the gothic. Hargrave's patient is sexualised, despite a lack of clear evidence of a lascivious character and the snake-like cancer coiling through her body towards her beautiful face achieves a gothic quality as she is being consumed from within. Krasner notes that Hargrave goes out of his way to 'avoid realism' and to present his experiences in a gothic mode by using 'literary mediation to retrospectively compose the medical scene, de-emphasizing their [the doctors'] anxiety through narrative devices and literary conventions'.<sup>47</sup> Krasner argues that unpleasant details of medical facts are displaced into the gothic ensuring that such accounts cannot be medical realism. He proposes that such examples contribute to an understanding of Doyle's personal experience as a young medical practitioner. By creating a controlling narrative of the patient's illness, a doctor is able to psychologically distance himself from the patient and any uncomfortable symptoms that they may possess. However, as Meegan Kennedy argues that there is a close relationship between the gothic and clinical case histories of

---

<sup>46</sup> Rodin and Key, *Conan Doyle's Tales of Medical Humanism*, p 211.

<sup>47</sup> James Krasner, 'Arthur Conan Doyle as Doctor and Writer', *Mosaic: a Journal for the Interdisciplinary Study of Literature*, 33.4 (2000), 19-34 < <http://lion.chadwyck.co.uk/> > [accessed 20 December 2011] (para. 25).

the nineteenth century evident in the unusual, yet natural experiences shared by doctor and patient. Her genre of Gothic medicine, noted in my introduction, incorporates ‘the ghost of “the curious” that ‘still lurks within clinical medicine’ resulting in the pairing of the two.<sup>48</sup> For Doyle in *Round the Red Lamp* medical realism incorporates unusual circumstances that while being expressed in gothic modes are indicative of the possibility of potentially supernatural phenomena. In Doyle’s fictions these gothic modes manifest through notions of sexual contamination and can be traced through Hargrave’s patient in ‘A Medical Document’ and Sir Francis Norton in ‘The Third Generation’.

### **Sexual Contamination and Disfigurement: ‘The Third Generation’ and ‘A Medical Document’**

‘The Third Generation’ is another example of how unease at sexual licentiousness can be transformed into the gothic. In ‘The Third Generation’ a desperate young man, Sir Francis Norton, pays a nocturnal visit to a leading medical specialist, Dr Horace Selby. The need for discretion is conveyed by the late hour of Norton’s visit and the narrator’s description of Selby’s residence and place of practice. He states, ‘Scudamore Lane [...] lies at night in the shadow of two black and monstrous walls which loom high above the glimmer of the scattered gas-lamps’.<sup>49</sup> This ‘monstrous’ setting is one of many examples of the gothic in *Round the Red Lamp*. In ‘The Third Generation’ Selby’s somewhat ‘old-fashioned’ home is at odds with his potentially lucrative ‘European reputation’ as a ‘specialist’.<sup>50</sup> The fact that at night it offers his patients the possibility of a discreet entrance and exit is also advantageous to his patients and his practice. In Selby’s area of medical expertise ‘patients do not always

---

<sup>48</sup> Meegan Kennedy, ‘The Ghost in the Clinic: Gothic Medicine and Curious Fiction in Samuel Warren’s *Diary of a Late Physician*’, *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 32. 2 (2004), 327-351 (p. 345).

<sup>49</sup> Rodin and Key, *Conan Doyle’s Tales of Medical Humanism*, p. 67.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*

consider seclusion to be a disadvantage'.<sup>51</sup> As with other stories in this compilation, matters of a sexual nature are not directly expressed and this includes defining Selby's speciality directly. When Norton is allowed into the consulting room to await the doctor's arrival he observes the 'five books which Dr Horace Selby had written upon the subject with which his name is peculiarly associated'.<sup>52</sup> The word 'peculiarly' is expressive of an unusual professional distinction from other doctors. However, the nature of his patients' complaints aligns his peculiar speciality within the framework of extraordinary experiences of doctors.

The reason Norton consults Dr Selby is because of the emergence of alarming physical symptoms of syphilis. In 'The Third Generation' this disease is not mentioned specifically. Even when merely alluded to, syphilis contributed to the disgust expressed by *The Spectator* as being, 'worse than nightmares which overwhelm human misery and sin'.<sup>53</sup> Similarly, it would have been controversial to have presented Norton as having brought this disease upon himself by his own sexual activities. However, Doyle was not roundly criticised for this story. For example Robert Darby notes how the *Speaker* complimented Doyle's "lightness of touch and an instinctive delicacy of feeling that enable him to deal with even the most gruesome of subjects without offending the most sensitive of tastes".<sup>54</sup> Doyle manages this by presenting Norton sympathetically as a victim of hereditary syphilis, evidenced by Norton's anguished appeal, "[s]o help me God, doctor [...] I have nothing in my life with which to reproach myself".<sup>55</sup> He continues to describe his character as being beyond moral impeachment, "I love all that is gentle and beautiful, music and poetry and art. The coarse and animal is abhorrent to

---

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., p. 79.

<sup>53</sup> *The Spectator*, 16 February 1895, pp.238-9.

<sup>54</sup> Darby, p. VII.

<sup>55</sup> Rodin and Key, *Conan Doyle's Tales of Medical Humanism*, p. 71.



me. Ask any of my friends and they would tell you that”<sup>56</sup> Norton’s inheritance of syphilis presents the reader with a more acceptable face of such illnesses, removing his actions from sexual immorality and censorship.

Although Hargrave’s patient in ‘A Medical Document’ and Norton in ‘The Third Generation’ suffer from different conditions they are both sources of anxiety due to their semiotic association with the fear of contagion caused by venereal disease. Hargrave’s female patient appears to be suffering from a form of cancer and not exhibiting symptoms of syphilis. However, they both share the threat of further contamination and how such conditions can be observed upon the body. As Mary Spongberg notes ‘medical authorities in Great Britain began to suggest that it was possible to distinguish likely carriers of syphilis and other venereal diseases by the way they looked’, especially, if not exclusively, if they were women.<sup>57</sup> Spongberg argues that this is of special significance to an understanding of the development of legal measures attempting to control and limit the spread of venereal disease. Women were the focal point of such unjust legislation. Incarcerated women suspected of prostitution were legally compelled to be medically examined.<sup>58</sup> As Spongberg observes, ‘from the 1830s onwards the female body came to be medicalized, not merely as a sexed body but as a diseased body – a space where disease could and did fester’.<sup>59</sup> In ‘A Medical Document’ Hargrave’s unease is caused by his patient’s physical symptoms and her sexuality implied by her activity on the social scene. This is similar to Norton’s position in ‘The Third Generation’, in particular the skin condition affecting his right shin. Selby notes that, as with Hargrave’s patient, the condition is “[s]erpiginous” adding “[t]here

---

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., p. 73.

<sup>57</sup> Mary Spongberg, *Feminizing Venereal Disease: The Body of the Prostitute in Nineteenth-Century Medical Discourse* (New York: New York University Press, 1997), p. 1.

<sup>58</sup> For a detailed historical examination of this, see: Judith R Walkowitz, *Prostitution and Victorian Society: Women, Class and the State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980; repr. 1995).

<sup>59</sup> Spongberg, p. 35.

are indications of a strumous diathesis. In broad terms I may say that you have a constitutional and hereditary taint”<sup>60</sup> Selby’s use of ‘broad terms’ here is of some importance. Primarily, it contributes to the rather vague presentation of his diagnosis of Norton’s disease. Secondly, a ‘strumous diathesis’ is a general term with ‘strumous’ operating as an adjective meaning a condition that relates to ‘struma’, or a swelling. ‘Diathesis’, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary* is a ‘permanent (hereditary or acquired) condition of the body which renders it liable to certain special diseases or affections; a constitutional predisposition or tendency’.<sup>61</sup> Rodin and Key define strumous diathesis as “a widespread condition of many tissues”, diagnosing Norton’s condition as “a sudden development of a serpiginous ulcer of the skin”,<sup>62</sup> which is indicated by Selby asking if it appeared “[s]uddenly?” to which Norton replies “[t]his morning”<sup>63</sup> However, Darby argues Norton’s strumous diathesis is a condition ‘now known as ‘saber shins’, an abnormality of the lower leg’ involving a sharp anterior bowing of the tibia and is recognized as a symptom of congenital syphilis.<sup>64</sup> The serpiginous ulcer of the skin described by Selby, as well as Rodin and Key, may also be an early symptom of saber shins. Doyle’s medical realism is again apparent here. He establishes some of the details relating to Norton’s condition, the presence of a ‘serpiginous’ skin condition, a sudden visit to a specialist and elements of hysteria. These two physical symptoms are common elements shared by Selby and Hargrave’s respective patients. However, they are not identical. The female patient’s condition in ‘A Medical Document’ is not caused by a sexually transmitted disease and she is not

---

<sup>60</sup> Rodin and Key, *Conan Doyle’s Tales of Medical Humanism*, p.71 and 72.

<sup>61</sup> John C Waller describes diathesis within the context of late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries as being ‘conventionally defined as a constitutional predisposition to a narrow range of chronic diseases’ in ‘The Illusion of an Explanation’: The Concept of Hereditary Disease, 1770 - 1870’, *Journal of the History of Medicine*, 57 (October 2002), 410-448 (p.410).

<sup>62</sup> Rodin and Key, *Medical Casebook*, p. 144.

<sup>63</sup> Rodin and Key, *Conan Doyle’s Tales of Medical Humanism*, p. 70.

<sup>64</sup> Darby, p. 40; and <<http://medical-dictionary.thefreedictionary.com/saber+shin>> [accessed 21 December 2011].

infectious. Medical advice, argues Spongberg, ‘was written for the male sufferer, with women being confined to the role of contaminator’.<sup>65</sup> Despite her lack of sexually transmitted disease, the source of unease caused by Hargrave’s patient is the fear of contamination. Hargrave’s patient is interpreted as being pathologically dangerous. This is the distinction between her and Norton in ‘The Third Generation’. Hargrave’s female patient creates anxiety as the immediate source of contamination regardless of the medical nature of her physical ailment. Her physical disfiguration in combination with her activity on the social scene would allow a skilled observer to misinterpret the signs of sexual promiscuity, consequently labeling her as pathologically dangerous. What makes her threatening is that until these symptoms manifest themselves in such a recognizable way, regardless of the actual validity of such a process, she can pass undetected in high circles of society. She is free from the controls of legislation that stigmatized and recorded the movements of working class women. The unspoken possibility that she may be a pathological threat to a potential male lover is the source of Hargrave’s anxiety. Her threat is immediate although her sexual attraction is comfortingly diminished due to her disfiguration.

This is not the only story in *Round the Red Lamp* where a female socialite is disfigured. In ‘The Case of Lady Sannox’ (1893) Douglas Stone, a ‘celebrated operating surgeon, the man of steel nerves’ shares many of the traits enjoyed by Hargrave and celebrated by Doyle in ‘The Romance of Medicine’.<sup>66</sup> In this story, Stone is having an affair with the ‘notorious’ socialite Lady Sannox.<sup>67</sup> They are caught by Lady Sannox’s husband who devises an unusual form of retribution for the couple. He manipulates Stone into disfiguring Lady Sannox’s face as a punishment for her sexual

---

<sup>65</sup> Spongberg, p. 3

<sup>66</sup> Rodin and Key, *Conan Doyle’s Tales of Medical Humanism*, p. 163.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

transgressions. Lord Sannox intercepts a note sent between the couple arranging a clandestine liaison. On that evening Lord Sannox, disguised as “Hamil Ali, Smyrna” a wealthy man originating from “Asia Minor”, visits Stone and pays him a fee of one hundred pounds to visit his ailing wife.<sup>68</sup> Stone, eager to be away, pays scant attention to the woman’s face, which is partially covered with a yashmak. The patient is heavily sedated with opium and Stone is unaware that it is Lady Sannox. The disguised Lord Sannox convinces Stone that his wife has been poisoned on her ‘lower lip’ by an accidental cut from “cursed dagger of Almohades”.<sup>69</sup> Stone expresses a professional reluctance to operate immediately without more evidence to suggest poisoning. However, Stone is more reluctant to return the large fee promised for immediate action. The story concludes with his horrified realization of having mutilated his lover’s face by attempting to remove the poisoned tissue. This orientalist gothic story is quite explicit in its controversial depiction of extramarital sex, revenge and domestic violence. Lord Sannox assures Stone that the lesion on his wife’s lip was caused by “nothing more dangerous than my signet ring”, administered by a blow to her face.<sup>70</sup> Elaine Showalter reads the incision on Lady Sannox’s ‘lower lip’ as an oblique reference to female circumcision. She notes the operation performed by Stone is ‘a displaced clitoridectomy, with the “under lip” a metaphor for the female genitals’, arguing ‘what has got Lady Sannox into trouble is her loose lower lip, her ‘notorious’ sexual exploits, and her labile and indiscreet speech’.<sup>71</sup> Lord Sannox states, “[i]t was really very necessary for Marion, this operation [...] not physically, but morally, you know,

---

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., pp. 166-167.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., p. 167.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., p. 172.

<sup>71</sup> Elaine Showalter, *Sexual Anarchy: Gender and Culture at the Fin de Siècle*, (London: Virago, 1991; repr. 2001), p. 136.

morally””, presenting his revenge as a moral right to control his wife’s body and behavior.<sup>72</sup>

Darby notes the British reading public’s familiarity with ‘Middle Eastern practices of female genital mutilation’ brought to the ‘attention of the English public by travellers [sic] such as Richard Burton’.<sup>73</sup> Darby describes how female circumcision provided a ‘brief vogue in the early 1860s as a cure for various ‘nervous complaints’’, but explains that it ‘was not practiced in England’, something Doyle was aware of.<sup>74</sup> Instead, he argues that in a ‘Latin-literate age readers knew that the Latin for lips was *labia*, and some might well have known that the Renaissance anatomist Gabriele Falloppio used the word for the male foreskin as well as the external genitalia of the female’.<sup>75</sup> Darby reads Lady Sannox’s operation within the context of the advocacy of male circumcision in infants. What is noteworthy here is that it was touted as a preventative procedure to ward off various psychological and physical ailments including syphilis.<sup>76</sup> Showalter and Darby’s readings of ‘The Case of Lady Sannox’ locate sexual revenge and mutilation as both a means of masculine domination and attempts to control sexually transmitted disease. Disfigurement caused by a variety of conditions exhibit physical markers of the threat of sexual contamination, while revealing a displaced anxiety in establishing effective preventative measures. In ‘The Case of Lady Sannox’ and ‘A Medical Document’, Lady Sannox and Hargrave’s patient represent one strand of the gothic evident in Doyle’s attempt to portray medical realism. They exhibit the tension and anxieties associated with promiscuity and untreatable sexual diseases evident within nineteenth century medical discourse.

---

<sup>72</sup> Rodin and Key, *Conan Doyle’s Tales of Medical Humanism*, p. 172.

<sup>73</sup> Darby, p. 108.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., p. 109.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., p. 108.

### **Hereditary Syphilis and the Sins of the Creator: ‘The Third Generation’**

Another gothic strand apparent in Doyle’s medical realism occurs in ‘The Third Generation’ when Norton is confronted by the unjust generational consequences of hereditary syphilis, a threat that exhibits potentially supernatural phenomena. Norton’s sexual threat is generational in that he exists as a direct source of pollution, not only to his innocent wife, but to their future issue. This counters Munro’s argument in *The Stark Munro Letters* that regressive elements such as syphilis die out in the third generation. The title of ‘The Third Generation’ is biblical in origin, referring to the retribution for the sins of the fathers visited onto the third or fourth generation.<sup>77</sup> The notion of generational curses is again recognizable, a subject discussed in chapter one. Its recurrence in ‘The Third Generation’ is representative of a notable strand running throughout Doyle’s writings. Norton represents the third generation because he has inherited congenital syphilis from his paternal grandfather. The symptoms of syphilis are well documented, although the problems of an accurate diagnosis were manifold during the nineteenth century.<sup>78</sup> This was partly due to the misdiagnosis of other venereal diseases. For example, it was believed that gonorrhoea was evidence of syphilis and not a separate disease.<sup>79</sup> Furthermore, the symptoms of syphilis were complicated and could go into several phases preceded by a long period of latency.

An uncertain diagnosis of syphilis created tension and anxiety for patient and doctor alike. The initial symptoms of syphilis that had been contracted via direct sexual contact could appear within twenty-four days. Typically, a sore or chancre would appear near or on the sexual organ(s). Within six to eight weeks secondary syphilis would develop, appearing as a rash that that appeared across the body. It would not be unusual

---

<sup>77</sup> See Exodus 20. 5 and Numbers 14. 18.

<sup>78</sup> For a discussion on the difficulties and consequences of the difficulties of diagnosing syphilis during the nineteenth century see: Quétel; Spongberg; and Walkowitz.

<sup>79</sup> Roy Porter, *The Greatest Benefit to Mankind: A Medical History of Humanity from Antiquity to the Present* (London: Harper Collins, 1997; repr. 1999), p. 452, Quétel, pp. 111-12.

for a victim to complain of tiredness and low spirits. There then followed a long period of latency that could last for decades before tertiary syphilis set in, which included bone disorders as well as damage to the liver, heart, lungs and brain.<sup>80</sup> The long period of latency between secondary and tertiary syphilis is, according to Judith Walkowitz, what ‘confused and troubled the Victorians’.<sup>81</sup> The problems of accurate diagnoses were coupled with the difficulty of accurately defining the development of a disease that appeared to ‘combine the qualities of a specific ‘virus’ and a general degenerative condition’.<sup>82</sup> It is this degenerative effect of syphilis that concerns Norton and Selby in ‘The Third Generation’. Upon an initial examination, Selby can barely contain his excitement at his discovery of a patient exhibiting symptoms that he describes as “‘typical - very typical indeed’”.<sup>83</sup> Norton’s complaint of weak eyesight combined with the unusual peg-like shape of his teeth constitutes the ‘typical’ symptoms recognized by Selby. Upon closer examination, Selby diagnoses the former symptom as “‘interstitial keratitis’”, an inflammation of the inner layers of the cornea, when combined with the condition of his teeth form two traits of what was known as Hutchinson’s triad.<sup>84</sup> The third symptom, that of progressive deafness is not evident in Norton’s case. Hutchinson’s triad was taken to be indicative of congenital syphilis, something that is apparent in Selby’s remark that Norton suffers from a “‘constitutional and hereditary taint’”.<sup>85</sup> Before considering the implications of the ‘taint’ suffered by Norton, it is

---

<sup>80</sup> Walkowitz, pp. 50-51.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 51.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>83</sup> Rodin and Key, *Conan Doyle’s Tales of Medical Humanism*, p. 71.

<sup>84</sup> Darby, p. 34. Also see: Arthur M Silverstein and Christine Ruggere, ‘Dr. Arthur Conan Doyle and the Case of Congenital Syphilis’, *Prospectives in Biology and Medicine*, 49.2 (Spring 2006), 209-219 (p. 210).

<sup>85</sup> Darby, *Round the Red Lamp*, p. 34. There is a great deal of information relating to this subject during this period. For example, see two related articles written by a physician attending The Hospital for Epilepsy and Paralysis in London during the 1890s consider the diagnosis and prognosis of hereditary syphilis and information on interstitial keratitis with reference to Hutchinson: George Ogilvie, ‘A Rare Case of Hereditary Syphilis, With Remarks on Interstitial Keratitis’, *The Lancet*, 141.3641 (10 June 1893), 1372-1374 and 141.3642 (17 June 1893), 1436-1438.

important to reflect on the difference between congenital and hereditary conditions in Victorian medicine because theories of how such contagion was caught and passed onto the next generation revealed regressive fears and gothic potential in Doyle's medical realism.

In modern terminology Norton's condition would have originated with his paternal grandfather. According to Arthur Silverstein and Christine Ruggere, 'Norton's diseased grandfather must have infected his wife; she then infected Norton's father by transplacental transmission; his father then infected his mother; and finally, Norton himself was infected in utero by his mother'.<sup>86</sup> As Silverstein and Ruggere contend, this modern view was not likely to have been shared by Doyle or his contemporaries. Hereditary, as the *Oxford English Dictionary* confirms, means a condition or state that is 'transmitted in a line of progeny, passing naturally from parents to offspring', implying a manner associated in modern times with genetics.<sup>87</sup> Congenital refers to a condition 'that is recognized at birth or that is believed to have been present since birth'.<sup>88</sup> However, theories of heredity concerning a wide range of physical and psychological conditions extend back to well before the nineteenth century and include the belief that a hereditary constitution could pass through generations of a family line. For the Victorians, the possibility that a syphilitic man could pass on the disease to the future embryo via his contaminated sperm, thus leaving a woman unaffected by the disease during and after conception, challenged the belief that the woman was solely responsible for the spread of hereditary syphilis. In 'The Third Generation' this notion inculcates Norton as a major threat due to the possibility of his passing hereditary syphilis on to the future generations of his family. In considering the importance of this

---

<sup>86</sup> Silverstein and Ruggere, p.210.

<sup>87</sup> Also see: *Ibid.*, p. 212.

<sup>88</sup> *Oxford Concise Medical Dictionary*, p. 159; and Silverstein and Ruggere, p. 212.



belief, Spongberg notes how the ‘idea of paternal infection created a model of degeneracy’ that ‘presumed that some acquired pathology in the father was the direct cause of the stigmata of degeneracy in the next generation’.<sup>89</sup> That Norton and his father are themselves blameless of lascivious or lecherous sexual conduct is irrelevant. This is what Selby is alluding to by observing his patient’s constitutional and hereditary taint. The use of the word taint is significant as Norton’s hereditary illness exemplifies theories of degeneration as well as the gothic theme of hereditary curses.

Fears of the extent to which syphilis could affect a person’s physical constitution are evident in Selby’s use of the word ‘taint’. Norton’s syphilis represents a contamination of his body that could be passed on to future generations. Syphilitic infection could cause a constitutional taint.<sup>90</sup> This would mean that adverse consequences could be passed on as a depraving influence to his offspring, theoretically corrupting a child’s moral as well as his physical constitution.<sup>91</sup> As discussed in chapter one, in *The Stark Munro Letters* this degenerative process is a means of evolutionary natural selection that rooted out the immoral or the terminally ill. The paternal origin of Norton’s degenerative condition indicates Doyle’s concerns about the spiritual effects of his father Charles’s addiction and insanity. When diagnosing such infections, the doctors’ role involved respecting the confidentiality of the individual patient as well as the moral duty to protect the future spouse and progeny and by implication the future health of an entire nation. It is not difficult to imagine the doctors’ dilemma, summarised by Jean Alfred Fournier in a series of lectures delivered at the St Louis Hospital in Paris. Fournier argued that a wrong diagnosis of syphilis could also result in

---

<sup>89</sup> Spongberg, p. 152.

<sup>90</sup> Waller notes the ‘concept of hereditary malady from which few doctors would have demurred: that inherited diseases were rooted in the individual’s bodily constitution’, Waller, p. 436.

<sup>91</sup> Spongberg notes how ‘[c]ongenital syphilis came to be equated with hereditary moral degeneracy. The disease was not only seen to cause degeneracy of the constitution, but to affect the moral sense’, Spongberg, p. 169.

untold misery for the male patient who would be denied marriage and family, or infection for the spouse and the possibility of contaminated progeny.<sup>92</sup> These were serious matters for any medical practitioner concerned with the welfare of his patient and their families as evidenced by articles published in *The Lancet* during this period. For example, Frederick W Lowndes testified to the terrible symptoms suffered by a female patient who had been infected by syphilis after wedlock:

The greater portion of her face was gone, her sight was gone; it was with the greatest difficulty that she was fed, and the stench which filled the room was the most sickening I ever encountered. I only saw her once, as she died two days after my visit.<sup>93</sup>

Despite the caveat that this ‘was a very exceptional case’ Lowndes is aware of the ‘very grave reflections’ that ‘this case suggests’.<sup>94</sup> Primarily, these concerns relate to an uninfected woman acquiring the disease post-marriage from a man who took the ‘precaution of seeking medical advice and obtaining medical sanction’ for his marriage.<sup>95</sup> Despite weighing the benefits of wedlock and the rights of those who desire marriage, Lowndes is cautious considering the risk taken by women unaware of their potential husband’s medical state. Lowndes argues that ‘it is not generally recognised that the worst cases of tertiary syphilis occur, not among prostitutes, nor the male patients of lock hospitals, but among respectable married women’.<sup>96</sup> They were the victims not just of males who do not consult their doctors, but, alarmingly, those that do. Considering the uncertainty and unease at being placed in a position of regulating marital union, Lowndes tone is cautionary: ‘[n]ow, I maintain that no woman should be

---

<sup>92</sup> published in English as: Alfred Fournier, *Syphilis and Marriage*, trans. by P. Albert Morrow (New York: D. Appleton, 1882), pp. 4-17

<<http://www.archive.org/stream/syphilismarriage00four#page/n3/mode/2up>> [accessed 16 January 2009].

<sup>93</sup> Frederick W Lowndes, ‘Syphilis and Marriage’, *The Lancet*, 120.3071 (1882), 7-9 (p. 7).

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, p.8 and p. 7.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8. This was the plot of an episode of a BBC miniseries: *Murder Rooms: Mysteries of the Real Sherlock Holmes*, Episode 1: *The Dark Beginnings of Sherlock Holmes*, dir. by Paul Seed (BBC, 2000).

permitted to encounter such risk, and neither man nor woman is justified in exposing to this risk an unborn child'.<sup>97</sup>

In 'The Third Generation' the horror of Norton's situation is not limited to concerns as to the immediate physical welfare of his future wife and offspring. It is linked to a fear of the dangers inherent in continuing a tainted family line. Selby has this in mind when he advises Norton to cancel his marriage to a young woman who is unaware of his condition. It is not that there is no hope for a marriage to occur, although it would have to be after "many years" to "eliminate it" from Norton's "system".<sup>98</sup> It is with this information that Norton leaves Selby and the story finishes tragically. Unable to think of a means of cancelling his imminent wedding without tarnishing his good name, Norton undertakes an alternative method of preserving his honour and that of his fiancé. The next morning, Selby reads in his paper that Norton slipped and fell under the 'wheels of a heavy two-horse dray' ending his life in so 'sudden and tragic a fashion'.<sup>99</sup> Norton ends the threat to the next generation by taking his own life. This is an ironically selfless act that contradicts Doyle's notion in *The Stark Munro Letters* of the benevolent creator weeding out the morally inferior.

In 'The Third Generation', Norton expresses the despair felt at inheriting syphilis: "But where is the justice of it doctor?", he demands, "[i]f I were heir to my grandfather's sins as well as to their results I could understand it", but he is not. Instead he is the innocent victim, suffering from a "vile, loathsome thing" rendering him "polluted to the marrow, soaked in abomination!"<sup>100</sup> It is important to note that Selby

---

<sup>97</sup> Lowndes, p. 8. Compare this to advice printed in response to an anonymous letter submitted to the *British Medical Journal* from which advice is sought regarding a syphilitic male patient's forthcoming marriage: '[i]t would not be safe for the patient to marry at present. In a year's time there would be much less risk, provided a course of treatment with mercury were undergone in the interval'. Junior Member, 'Syphilis and Marriage' *British Medical Journal*, 1.1269 (25 April 1885), 821-876 (p. 875).

<sup>98</sup> Rodin and Key, *Conan Doyle's Tales of Medical Humanism*, p. 74.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 77.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 73.

is unable to ameliorate Norton's condition physically or socially. Selby is unable to respond to Norton's demand for an explanation of the injustice of his situation. Instead, he adopts a somewhat condescending attitude relying on clichéd phrases such as, "from my heart, after fifty years of varied experience", before attempting to quote "Pope's famous couplet" as a summary of Norton's condition.<sup>101</sup> Sadly, Doyle leaves it to the imagination of his readers to determine what this couplet is as Selby is interrupted by his exasperated patient. Similarly, Selby's attempt to proffer a scientific explanation falls equally as flat. Selby asks:

What are we after all? Half evolved creatures in a transition stage; nearer, perhaps, to the medusa on the one side than to perfected humanity on the other. With half a complete brain we can't expect to understand the whole of a complete fact, can we, now?<sup>102</sup>

Selby's hint, that a greater good exists beyond our mortal comprehension, is a theme of the religious ideas presented in *The Stark Munro Letters*. Selby's reference to human progress echoes Munro's statement that 'evolution is still living and acting – that if we have an anthropoid ape as an ancestor, we may have archangels for our posterity?'<sup>103</sup> It is a restatement of Munro's uncertainty about the purpose of cruelty, tentatively expressing a hope that incomprehensible acts of injustice may, in the long term, work to the benefit of mankind. Doyle uses Norton to scrutinise the early religious arguments presented in *The Stark Munro Letters*. It is Norton's questioning of the justice of such an affliction and his suicide that represent a serious challenge to the notion of a benevolent creator utilising the process of evolution for the long term benefit of humanity. Norton summarises the injustice of his condition in 'The Third Generation':

---

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

<sup>103</sup> Doyle, *The Stark Munro Letters: Being A Series of Twelve Letters Written by J. Stark Munro, M.B., to his Friend and Former Fellow Student, Herbert Swanborough, of Lowell, Massachusetts, During the Years 1881-1884* (Fairfield IA: 1st World Library, 2004), p. 44.

‘Haven’t I a right to ask why? Did I do it? Was it my fault? Could I help being born? And look at me now, blighted and blasted, just as life was at its sweetest! Talk about the sins of the father! How about the sins of the Creator!’<sup>104</sup>

This is a critical point for Doyle where sin is no longer located within lines of heredity. Instead his early union of religion and evolution is abandoned as his focus shifts to the sins of the creator. Although Doyle is retaining the notion of the creator, he is rejecting the idea that evolution driven by natural selection weeds out the morally unfit. Norton’s anguish is expressive of the injustice of those who are afflicted with medical and psychological illness through no fault of their own. Selby attempts to calm Norton with an inadequate response, ‘[w]e must take these great questions upon trust’.<sup>105</sup> Selby’s closing words, “[y]ou are placed in a cruel situation, but I trust that these may be but passing clouds”, fall upon deaf ears.<sup>106</sup> Despite Selby’s efforts the story concludes with his patient’s abject despair. But for Doyle there was no despair. Those elements that were deemed regressive, such as addiction and mental illness, separated from a religious schema of degeneration, could now be considered progressive. As we shall see, the gothic trajectory which he had tentatively expressed in ‘A Medical Document’ and ‘The Case of Lady Sannox’, as a means to displace social anxieties, were now able to reach their full expression in ‘The Third Generation’.

As with elements of ‘A Medical Document’ sexual anxiety is displaced into gothic and supernatural imagery, but in ‘The Third Generation’ it is more clearly defined. The prognosis of Norton’s condition is not solely linked to theories of degeneration.<sup>107</sup> The presence of syphilis in ‘The Third Generation’ as a disease that is

---

<sup>104</sup> Rodin and Key, *Conan Doyle’s Tales of Medical Humanism*, p. 73.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., p. 76.

<sup>107</sup> Waller argues that ‘the idea of hereditary disease arose as a by-product of a prior linkage forged between, on the one hand, the notion of incurable disease and, on the other, the ancient concept of the

not directly mentioned acts as a taboo that adds to the unease generated by licentious sexuality. As Norton explains it was his grandfather who originally contracted syphilis, Selby ‘instantly’ recollects a memory of “‘Sir Rupert Norton’”, a ‘notorious buck of the thirties’, who ‘steeped himself in drink and debauchery until even the vile set with whom he consorted had shrunk away from him in horror’.<sup>108</sup> What occurs immediately after his recollection, as Selby looks across to his patient, creates an unusual gothic sensation:

there seemed for the instant to flicker up behind him [Francis Norton] some vague presentiment of that foul old dandy with his dangling seals, many-wreathed scarf, and dark, satyric face. What was he now? An armful of bones in a mouldy box. But his deeds - they were living and rotting the blood in the veins of an innocent man.<sup>109</sup>

Sir Rupert’s sexual debauchery is referenced by his ‘dark satyric face’ and the legacy of his licentiousness as ‘rotting’ the blood of his descendents.<sup>110</sup> But what is striking in this quotation is the ‘vague presentiment’ felt by Selby, who is portrayed as a level-headed man of science. This change in emphasis is typical of what Robert Mighall reads as, ‘what earlier took the form of a supernatural curse is refigured in wholly material terms’.<sup>111</sup> In the ‘scientific and rational age’ of the nineteenth century ‘the legacies of ancestral crime are carried in the bodies of descendents’ as either a taint of insanity, or as in Norton’s case, hereditary syphilis.<sup>112</sup> Selby’s ghostly image is not necessarily an apparition, or a spirit. Rather, it is created by his memory of Sir Rupert’s reputation

---

relatively unchanging individual constitution’, to partly excuse the medical profession’s inability to successfully cure diseases such as syphilis: Waller, p. 414.

<sup>108</sup> Rodin and Key, *Conan Doyle’s Tales of Medical Humanism*, p. 72.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

<sup>110</sup> The mythological satyr is also used metaphorically for a, ‘brutish or lustful man, and the neurotic condition in men characterized by the desire to have sexual intercourse with as many women as possible is known as satyriasis’; *Brewer’s Dictionary of Phrase and Fable: Millenium Edition*, Rev. by Adrian Room (London: Cassell, 1999; repr. 2001), p. 1044.

<sup>111</sup> Robert Mighall, *A Geography of Victorian Gothic Fiction: Mapping History’s Nightmares* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 94.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid. Dr Selby acts in loco parentis for Norton, while also protecting an innocent woman from the hereditary taint of a refigured gothic curse.

combined with a sense of foreboding. Nonetheless, it does present the possibility of a potentially supernatural phenomenon, similar to the gothic presentiment experienced by Colmore in ‘The Japanned Box’. In his description of Bollamore’s affliction in ‘The Japanned Box’, Colmore describes addiction as a supernatural fiend that threatens to overwhelm his employer. At this point Bollamore’s deceased wife intervenes on behalf of her husband. Colmore states:

And the dead woman, the woman who had spent her life in warding off this danger, took shape also to my imagination, and I saw her as a shadowy but beautiful presence which intervened forever with arms uplifted to screen the man whom she loved.<sup>113</sup>

What is evident here is Doyle’s depiction of a gothic curse with the type of heightened perception of potentially supernatural phenomena discussed in chapter one. It indicates Doyle’s uncertainty as to whether addiction, with its immoral legacy, damned an individual or marked them as possessing potentially progressive traits. Doyle’s dilemma is highlighted by Norton’s status as an innocent, hereditary victim of his grandfather’s notorious past.

### **From the Gothic to Scientific Progress: ‘A Medical Document’ and ‘Lot No. 249’**

In ‘A Medical Document’ sexual transgression is expressed in the gothic mode, obscuring sexual details. Doctors stray into the subject of sex by the nature of their patients’ maladies, so the fairytale/gothic quality assists in distancing the doctor from the moral repercussions of a difficult case. As we have seen, ‘A Medical Document’ illustrates the extent to which extraordinary events in Doyle’s medical realism moves into the gothic. This is also apparent in one of the other doctor’s narratives in ‘A Medical Document’. Doctor Foster describes a patient’s home as resembling the scene of a gothic fairytale. Foster is initially visited by a ““little hunch-backed woman”” who

---

<sup>113</sup> *The Conan Doyle Stories* (London: John Murray, 1929; repr. 1960), p. 615.

asks him to consult her sister at their home.<sup>114</sup> Their house, “a very poor one” contains “two other little hunch-backed women, exactly like the first, waiting for me in the sitting-room”.<sup>115</sup> Foster consults his patient in her private quarters accompanied by the three “deformed” sisters who cast “three queer shadows” by the “lamp on the wall”.<sup>116</sup> Foster’s patient is the fourth sister who in marked contrast resembles the heroine of a fairy tale. She was a “remarkably beautiful girl in evident need of my assistance. There was no wedding ring upon her finger”.<sup>117</sup> Foster implies that the fourth sister is heavily pregnant and the absence of a wedding ring indicates her unmarried status.

As in Hargrave’s story, sexuality and the gothic are also evident in this narrative. Foster’s evasiveness at the beautiful sister’s sexual activity outside of wedlock is displaced into the gothic narrative he titles “the unfortunate beauty and her three crippled sisters”.<sup>118</sup> Foster’s uneasiness at female sexuality is expressed as a gothic tale with the beautiful sister cast as the captive of the three crones. While Foster attends the baby’s delivery, his discomfort increases. He describes how “The three deformed sisters seated themselves round the room, like so many graven images, and all night not one of them opened her mouth”.<sup>119</sup> As the beautiful girl’s labour proceeds Foster forces himself to remain calm. Outside a “fearful thunderstorm broke out” and it was “a queer thing when a spurt of lightening came to see those three twisted figures sitting round the walls” resembling gargoyles.<sup>120</sup> In order to maintain credibility Foster assures his audience that he is “not romancing” and that his story is “absolute fact”, revealing how the extraordinary occurs within Doyle’s medical realism while evoking

---

<sup>114</sup> Rodin and Key, *Conan Doyle’s Tales of Medical Humanism*, p. 205.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid.



gothic imagery.<sup>121</sup> Foster describes how shyness makes it appear that a young doctor's manner is "stiff and unsympathetic" when he is consulted by a woman upon "the most intimate family matters".<sup>122</sup> Even though Foster concludes that such shyness can only be cured through experience, the inherent uneasiness endures beyond a doctor's early years, evident in other stories in *Round the Red Lamp*.

Many of the stories comprising this collection were written as Doyle was working on *The Stark Munro Letters*. By reading these texts concurrently, it becomes possible to trace Doyle's changing ideas along the axis of medical realism through extraordinary events toward the gothic. In *Round the Red Lamp* Doyle's religious ideas are challenged. He develops his position that the supernatural does not exist, but rather it is an expression of unknown natural laws. This position was to be modified even further as he moved toward publicly endorsing spiritualism later in life. Such a development of Doyle's religious, scientific and spiritual views did not occur smoothly or without personal conflict. In 1924 Doyle attempted to summarise the conflict experienced at a much earlier period of his life. In his autobiography *Memories and Adventures* Doyle noted how:

Most men never use their reasoning power at all on the religious side, but if they did they would find it difficult sometimes to reconcile the sights which a physician sees with the idea of a merciful providence. If one loses the explanation that this life is a spiritual chastening for another, and thinks that death ends all, and that this is our one experience, then it is impossible to sustain the goodness or the omnipotence of God. So I felt at the time, and it made me a Materialist, but now I know well that I was judging the story on the strength of one chapter.<sup>123</sup>

---

<sup>121</sup> Ibid. This is evocative of Tougaw's discussion of the extraordinary circumstances of characters in the realist novel being brought about by the intense focus upon their ordinary experiences, albeit within a different context that is aligned more with Kennedy's notion of Gothic medicine noted in my introduction.

<sup>122</sup> Rodin and Key, *Conan Doyle's Tales of Medical Humanism*, p. 204.

<sup>123</sup> Arthur Conan Doyle, *Memories and Adventures* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 69.

It is not difficult to recognise an element of revisionism in this quotation. Here, Doyle establishes a dichotomy between materialist and spiritualist, representing his youth and old age respectively. This is not an accurate description because, as we have seen in the introduction to this thesis, by the time Doyle expressed his early views he was already interested in spiritualist phenomena in his days in Southsea. By adopting this revisionist viewpoint of his spiritual progression Doyle presents a dramatic story of revelation converting a dedicated materialist, a theme present in his later science fiction novels. Importantly, Doyle also expresses the idea that medical experience challenges the belief of a benevolent, omnipotent creator whose design of evolutionary laws benefits mankind. This uncertainty is reflected in *Round the Red Lamp* as his religious conviction is gradually replaced by a transitional phase of an interest in the possibility of scientific progress. The notion of such scientific progress finds an expression in ‘Lot No. 249’ where the possibility of supernatural phenomena can be traced through the psychological fragility of its two main protagonists.

As the full title to *Round the Red Lamp* indicates, the constituent stories are directly concerned with medical life. In the collection ‘Lot No. 249’ is a key story with the potential to provide a scientific premise capable of examining phenomena that might be misinterpreted as an incursion of the supernatural. At first glance, ‘Lot No. 249’ has a questionable claim for inclusion in a collection of fiction aimed at projecting medical realism. As a medical student at an Oxford University college, Abercrombie Smith provides the only tenuous medical content in the story. The narrative of ‘Lot No. 249’ features an unlikely attempt to resurrect an ancient Egyptian mummy by Edward Bellingham, a student at Smith’s college. On his command, Bellingham’s resurrected mummy terrorises the Oxford campus and assaults his enemies. The story itself initially seems to have more in common with Doyle’s earlier fiction that deals directly with the

supernatural. This is certainly the view taken by Rodin and Key who read the presence of the occult as being out of place in this medical anthology. They argue that this short-story ‘does not succeed as literature nor as science fiction nor even as horror fiction’, excluding it from their definition of what material constitutes medical literature.<sup>124</sup> They stress the importance of ‘medical content’, which seems reasonable given their stated aim of studying Doyle’s life and work within a medical context.<sup>125</sup> However, if ‘Lot No. 249’ fails generally as a piece of ‘literature’, or ‘science fiction’ and ‘horror fiction’, it raises the question of what type of story it is.

We have already noted the relevance of Doyle’s ‘preternatural’ imagination in the development of *Round the Red Lamp*. Added to this is the inclusion of the word ‘fancy’ in this collection’s sub-heading. As indicated by *The Oxford English Dictionary*, from a literary perspective, ‘fancy’ expresses an ‘aptitude for the invention of illustrative or decorative imagery’ that is exemplary of a creative mind. This word, however, also describes imaginative creations that may or may not be consistent with reality. As we shall see, it is this aspect, combined with Doyle’s movement from religion to science in *Round the Red Lamp* that justify its presence in this compilation. This becomes apparent after a reading of ‘Lot No. 249’. At the beginning an unnamed narrator presents this story as ‘the full and clear narrative’ of Abercrombie Smith.<sup>126</sup> This narrative is supported by ‘corroboration’ from various witnesses, a style familiar to gothic narratives that take the form of diaries or a collection of accounts with a fictional editor.<sup>127</sup> Nonetheless, this use of the gothic does little to justify the inclusion of a resurrected mummy in a collection of medical stories. As Rodin and Key emphasise,

---

<sup>124</sup> Rodin and Key, *Medical Casebook*, p. 127.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 120.

<sup>126</sup> Rodin and Key, *Conan Doyle’s Tales of Medical Humanism*, p. 219.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.* Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* (1897) is another famous example of this technique during this period. Also, for a full discussion of gothic fiction, see: Fred Botting, *Gothic* (London: Routledge, 1996; 2002).

‘[t]he implication is that the culprit is [Bellingham’s] mummy’.<sup>128</sup> The key word here is ‘implication’. Doyle stresses at the beginning of the story that Smith’s account may be the product of a disordered brain. Throughout ‘Lot No. 249’ there is an emphasis on the mental strain endured by Bellingham. For example after spending a night working on the mummy, Bellingham suffers from a nervous fit. Smith records how Bellingham ‘sunk his head onto his hands, and burst into peal after peal of hysterical laughter’.<sup>129</sup> After the two become better acquainted, Smith notes that despite Bellingham’s undoubted cleverness, he was able to ‘detect a dash of insanity in the man’.<sup>130</sup> Similarly, Smith is regarded as suffering from a nervous condition, a similar theme evident in ‘The Silver Mirror’, noted in chapter one. In ‘Lot No. 249’, his friend Peterson observes how Smith’s ““nerves are out of order with [his] work””.<sup>131</sup> Later Peterson informs Smith that ““your nerves”” are ““all unstrung, and your head full of this theory”” regarding Bellingham’s mummy.<sup>132</sup> This creates uncertainty as to the true nature of events surrounding the principle character – are they real or the product of a disordered brain?

As we have seen in chapter one, Doyle considered this notion through the artwork of his father Charles Doyle and in the story ‘The Silver Mirror’. Doyle suggested how an individual’s mental exhaustion, strained nerves or psychological collapse could create heightened perceptions that allowed the possibility of supernatural phenomena. In ‘Lot No. 249’ the uncertainty as to the psychological state of Smith and

---

<sup>128</sup> Rodin and Key, *Medical Casebook*, p. 127.

<sup>129</sup> Rodin and Key, *Conan Doyle’s Tales of Medical Humanism*, p. 227. The narrator contrasts Bellingham’s ‘olive-skinned and dark eyed’ looks crossed with a ‘Celtic intensity of manner’ against Smith’s ‘Saxon phlegm’, *ibid.*, p.226. Bellingham’s apartment resembles ‘a museum rather than a study. Walls and ceiling were thickly covered with a thousand strange relics from Egypt and the East’, casting him as the feminised Other, unsurprisingly prone to hysteria, *ibid.*, p.225. See also Thaddeus Sholto in Doyle’s *The Sign of Four* (1890).

<sup>130</sup> Rodin and Key, *Conan Doyle’s Tales of Medical Humanism*, p. 231.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 248.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*

Bellingham permits the possibility, however extraordinary, that an Egyptian mummy has been resurrected. This is a point tackled by the narrator at the beginning of the story:

most will think that it is more likely that one brain, however outwardly sane, has some subtle warp in its texture, some strange flaw in its workings, than that the path of nature has been overstepped in open day in so famed a centre of learning and light as the University of Oxford.<sup>133</sup>

The narrator questions whether it is more likely that Smith's mind is unbalanced as opposed to there being a breach of the natural order focusing upon the tension between insanity and the possibility of the supernatural. Presumably this is partly because Oxford University is a 'centre of learning and light' where science and knowledge oppose such things. This is supported by the narrator's observation that 'in the main, the story must rest upon Smith alone', because key episodes of the drama are not observed by witnesses.<sup>134</sup> It is significant that 'Lot No. 249' is not an examination of aberrant states of mind. If it had been so, it might have been easier to have located it within *Round the Red Lamp* and presumably ease some of the concerns raised by Rodin and Key as to its presence in this collection. For Doyle, the importance is that in a collection of medical realism 'Lot No. 249' encourages a sense of wonder at the possibilities of the natural world while cultivating the imagination to tolerate an expansion of scientific boundaries.

In 'Lot No. 249' Oxford exists as a 'centre of learning and light' capable of illuminating the metaphorical darkness of the unknown beyond the limits of known natural law. Importantly, Doyle's use of this metaphor in 'Lot No. 249' has larger repercussions not just to *Round the Red Lamp*, but to his subsequent literature and his spiritual quest. Doyle writes:

---

<sup>133</sup> Ibid. 219.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid.

Yet when we think how narrow and how devious this path of Nature is, how dimly we can trace it, for all our lamps of science, and how from the darkness which girds it round great and terrible possibilities loom ever shadowly upwards.<sup>135</sup>

This complicated metaphor describes the natural world as a crooked path that is only dimly lit by the ‘lamps of science’. This represents a limited circle of knowledge that is surrounded by the darkness of the unknown. It is from this ‘darkness which girds it round’ where unknown phenomena challenge those who are bold and imaginative enough to expand the scientific limits of natural law. The narrator states how it would take ‘a bold and confident man’ to ‘put a limit to the strange by-paths into which the human spirit may wander’.<sup>136</sup> This is a key concept for Doyle because it allows him to locate unknown phenomena such as heightened perceptions, spiritualism and the existence of other world that infringe upon our own within the boundaries of hitherto unknown laws of nature. The ‘lamps of science’ are currently unable to illuminate the entire ‘path of Nature’, yet Doyle expresses faith in its ability to do so – if they possess the willingness to proceed. However, the potential remains to misinterpret such phenomena originating in the natural world as supernatural. In Doyle’s writings this misunderstanding originates in an unwillingness to acknowledge the existence of ‘great and terrible possibilities’ that ‘loom ever shadowly upwards’ from beyond the limits of current scientific knowledge. This then creates the added tension of where scientific enquiries might lead one adventurous enough to expand the limits of human knowledge and understanding.

This point is also stressed in ‘The Surgeon of Gaster Fell’ when James Upperton utilises a similar metaphor to describe the direction and consequences of his own studies. In this story Upperton is attacked in his lonely dwelling on the Yorkshire moors

---

<sup>135</sup> Ibid.

<sup>136</sup> Rodin and Key, *Conan Doyle’s Tales of Medical Humanism*, p. 219.

by a deranged elderly man who exhibited ‘signs of mental aberration’ diagnosed as ‘overwork and the effect of a sunstroke’.<sup>137</sup> Upperton’s assailant is described in suitably gothic terms: ‘[t]he features were human, but the eyes were not. They seemed to burn through the darkness with a greenish brilliancy of their own’, reminiscent of the hellish glow of the hound of the Baskervilles.<sup>138</sup> Eventually the assailant’s condition deteriorates and after consultation with an alienist a diagnosis of ‘intermittent’ periods of madness taking on a fixation with religion or a violent homicidal rage is given. In order to prevent incarceration in an asylum the patient’s son, the surgeon of Gaster Fell, secludes his father on the moors. Upperton has more in common with Bellingham in ‘Lot No. 249’ as both men share an interest in the occult. At one point Upperton engages with an ‘Egyptian papyrus’ seeking to unravel its ‘mystic meaning’ in order to comprehend the ‘huge symmetrical design’ of the cosmos.<sup>139</sup> When expressing his use of the occult to expand human knowledge, Upperton states: ‘I had left the great drove of mankind, and had wandered away, for better or worse, upon a side-path of my own’.<sup>140</sup> Upperton’s ‘side-path’, or his ‘study of the mystic and hermetic philosophies, Egyptian, Indian, Grecian and medieval’ cultures, eventually remind him that ‘it is an ill thing to strive to break the bond which binds us to our fellows’, hinting at the perils of straying too far along nature’s crooked pathway, far from the lamp of scientific knowledge.<sup>141</sup> But as Doyle writes in ‘Lot No. 249’ as well as the ‘terrible possibilities’ within the ‘darkness which girds it round’ are the ‘great’ possibilities waiting for illumination from those willing to undertake such scientific enquiry.

---

<sup>137</sup> Darby, p. 244.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 243.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 234 and 220.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 231.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 220 and 222.

Although not technically a medical story, ‘Lot No. 249’ is included in *Round the Round Lamp* as an example that urges the expansion of scientific boundaries. While unpleasant details are displaced by the gothic, unusual occurrences hint at the possibility of a wider order of nature that can be explained by new avenues of scientific discovery. In *Round the Round Lamp* and in particular ‘Lot No. 249’, Doyle was moving from medical realism towards a scientific approach capable of explaining apparent cases of supernatural phenomena. Doyle’s metaphor of a ‘darkness which girds it round’ potentially offers to unify this theme by suggesting that what appears to be supernatural may, in fact, be phenomena originating in unknown natural laws. *Round the Round Lamp* indicates the importance of science in his movement from the religious ideas expressed in *The Stark Munro Letters* towards his later public advocacy of spiritualism. In ‘Lot No. 249’ the narrator’s metaphor describes the natural order as being a crooked path, lit imperfectly by the light of science. The boundaries of this light are constantly challenged by what it seeks to explain and to understand. As Doyle explains in his Preface to *Round the Red Lamp*, the ‘[r]ed Lamp [...] is the usual sign of the General Practitioner in England’.<sup>142</sup> The red lamp evokes the early process of blood-letting as an imagined cure for many medical maladies.<sup>143</sup> Doyle wrote in the postscript to the American edition with reference to the doctor’s red lamp, stating “[i]ts crimson glare, scarcely noted by the hale [...] becomes the centre of the thoughts and hopes of the unfortunate”, highlighting the significance of the lamp’s symbolism to the sick and how it is barely acknowledged by the ‘hale’.<sup>144</sup> It is the allusion to a beacon of hope and

---

<sup>142</sup> This postscript was first included in the first American edition of *Round the Red Lamp* (1894), but subsequently appears as a common feature in more modern editions. Rodin and Key, *Conan Doyle’s Tales of Medical Humanism*, p. xii.

<sup>143</sup> This, in turn, probably relates to the practice of placing a pole outside the premises of the barber-surgeon, utilised by those who would grasp it to swell their veins in order for blood to be let. The pole would rapidly become coated with blood and it was swathed spirally with a bandage and stored as an advert outside the shop, see: <<http://sacred-texts.com/etc/mco/ml06.htm>> [accessed 15 April 2009].

<sup>144</sup> *Arthur Conan Doyle: A Life in Letters*, ed. by Jon Lellenberg, Daniel Stashower and Charles Foley (London: Harper Collins, 2007), p. 334.



illumination coupled with Doyle's inclusion of 'Fact and Fancies' in the finished title of *Round the Red Lamp* that suggests how the extraordinary events that occur in medical realism may also engage with phenomena that might be attributable to the supernatural.

In *Round the Red Lamp* Doyle acknowledges that the light cast by the doctor's red lamp at his practice is ignored by the healthy and looked at with hope by the sick, or their relatives. In 'A Medical Document' and 'The Third Generation', while covering medical 'fact' and the fears of those whose health is far from 'hale', also engage with 'fancy', including the gothic, fairy tale and hints of the supernatural. Doyle's medical training and experience were influential to the formulation of this. While being located within the broader context of medical and literary realism, uncertain clinical prognoses and the consequent anxiety mark a beginning of the trajectory that led Doyle from extraordinary experiences expressed through gothic modes to a contemplation of the boundaries of the natural world. The spectral appearance of Norton's grandfather in 'The Third Generation', regardless of whether it is a figment of Selby's imagination and memory, deftly serves as an example of the 'great and terrible possibilities' that 'loom ever shadowly upwards' in the above quotation. In 'The Third Generation' the inability of Selby to cure or comfort Norton, leads to the patient's despair and eventual suicide. Here, the crooked path of nature, Selby's inability to counter Norton's hereditary syphilis, is triumphant over science. As we have seen in chapter one and in this chapter, Doyle was already developing his position of the supernatural from a young age. His use of various types of writing and his themes of addiction and mental illness coupled with his medical realism all converge into the possibility that scientific progress could illuminate the undefined darkness of the natural world. 'Lot No. 249' asserts that the metaphorical light of human knowledge is imperfect. As the narrator of 'Lot No. 249' reminds us, the various lights of science may indeed burn brightly, but it has not

illuminated the limits of natural law. The unknown, if ignored by scientific orthodoxy, has the potential to be mistaken for the supernatural threatening the superstitious and challenging those who would explore these limits. This notion is also evident in *The Hound of the Baskervilles* in the next chapter where I examine how Doyle used his most successful creation, Sherlock Holmes, to illustrate how unusual phenomena misinterpreted as supernatural might be investigated.

## CHAPTER THREE

### **Investigating the Unknown in *The Hound of the Baskervilles***

In the previous chapter I discussed Doyle's progression from medical realism to the gothic and the supernatural in his medical fiction. I argued that Doyle was not being inconsistent by including an occult story, 'Lot No. 249' (1894), in a collection aimed at portraying medical realism. Doyle used his writings to demonstrate how phenomena that had the potential to be interpreted as the supernatural might, in fact, originate in natural laws that have yet to be explained. In this chapter I begin to explore how Doyle's interest in expanding the boundaries of science become apparent within the wider context of his writings, beginning with *The Hound of the Baskervilles* (1902) before moving on to his imperial fiction and science fiction in later chapters. Before exploring the less obvious intrusions of unusual phenomena in the Sherlock Holmes stories, (as I do in chapter four), it is important to focus upon Doyle's most famous literary creation, *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, as it contains a significant example of such occurrences. I begin this chapter by discussing how in later life Doyle combined his belief in spiritualism with his interest in criminal history. I consider how in *The Hound* the characters of Holmes and Mortimer represent two differing views of the natural world. Holmes, I argue, is similar to Doyle's position in that there are ordinary and extra-ordinary laws of nature that permit the existence of a phenomenon that can be misinterpreted as supernatural. Mortimer, on the other hand, examines the evidence surrounding unusual phenomena and misinterprets it as supernatural, as demonstrated with his willingness to believe in a spectral hound. I then argue that Doyle's interest in spiritualism, in particular the practice of fraudulent mediums, becomes important to my reading of *The Hound*. Nils Clausson notes the contrast between Watson's 'complex, impressionistic and highly imaginative narrative' that typifies a Gothic novel and

Holmes as a detective who seeks to restore scientific order by being able to “put into a single connected narrative one of the most singular and sensational crimes of modern times”.<sup>1</sup> Clausson seeks to define *The Hound* as exemplifying ‘two conflicting genres, ratiocinative detective story and Gothic tale’.<sup>2</sup> However enlightening as this definition might be to a study of the development of the detective novel, it does little to determine *The Hound*’s subtle and complex relationship to the history of psychic research. If, as Clausson argues, it is too limiting to define Sherlock Holmes as ‘not only the voice of scientific detection, but also the preserver of the political and social status quo’, then it is just as reductive to ignore Holmes’s (and *The Hound*’s) thematic links to scientific attempts to understand and define unusual phenomena.<sup>3</sup> Consequently, I argue that *The Hound* can be read as Doyle’s portrayal of a method of investigating and exposing fraudulent mediums. This is important because the broader aim of my thesis is to argue that for Doyle there was no division between the natural and supernatural world. This is because phenomena perceived to be supernatural originate in the natural world. Furthermore, this chapter engages with Doyle’s notions of how it should be investigated. I begin with Doyle’s collection of essays published in his last book titled *The Edge of the Unknown* (1930). This book has been typically regarded as a work on spiritualism by his biographers.<sup>4</sup> Nonetheless, it is of relevance to *The Hound* because

---

<sup>1</sup> Doyle, *The Penguin Complete Sherlock Holmes* (London: Penguin, 1981), p. 753.

<sup>2</sup> Nils Clausson, ‘Degeneration, *Fin-de-Siecle* Gothic, and the Science of Detection: Arthur Conan Doyle’s *The Hound of the Baskervilles* and the Emergence of the Modern detective Story’, *Journal of National Theory*, 35.1 (Winter 2005), 60-87, p. 69. He also examines the section of the novel in which Holmes is absent and argues that the ‘Gothic plot undermines not only the detective story’s (and Holmes’s) confident endorsement of science and reason, but also the late-Victorian confidence that biological evolution necessarily entails social and moral progress, that modern, progressive English civilization, with Holmes as its defender, is self-evident proof that evolution inevitably leads upward’, *Ibid.*, p. 65.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 62.

<sup>4</sup> Booth defines it as ‘a collection of essays on spiritualism’, Martin Booth, *The Doctor and the Detective: A Biography of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle* (New York: Thomas Dunne Books, 1997; repr. 2000), p. 352. It is also described as ‘one of the author’s many [...] spiritualist works’ in Daniel Stashower, *Teller of Tales: The Life of Arthur Conan Doyle* (London: Penguin, 2000), p. xiii. It is also described as one of Doyle’s ‘general pieces about the paranormal’, Andrew Lycett, *Conan Doyle: The Man Who Created Sherlock Holmes* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2007), p. 430. Green and Gibson more favourably cast it as

of its fusion of spiritualism and the process of detecting and preventing crime. Doyle's position was that if spiritualism belonged to the natural world then there should be no problem with utilising it scientifically to investigate criminal activity.

One of the essays in *The Edge of the Unknown* is related to Doyle's life-long interest in real-life crime. Traditionally this interest is characterized by his intervention in two famous cases of police and judicial injustice, involving George Edalji and Oscar Slater. His essay 'A New Light on Old Crimes' (1920), which appears in *The Edge of the Unknown*, was previously published ten years earlier in January 1920 for the entertainment of *The Strand Magazine's* readers. In the preface to *The Edge of the Unknown* Doyle argues, '[w]e who believe in the psychic revelation' have 'hurled ourselves against the obstinacy of our time'.<sup>5</sup> As the essay's title and the collection's preface imply, Doyle's essay argues that the 'new light' of spiritualism could help in solving cases that had been considered unexplainable by the authorities. Doyle examined a number of cases and argued that those criminals who were brought to justice by conventional detective work could have been apprehended sooner if the investigators had been more receptive to spiritualism. Unaided by mediums or ignorant of the value of prophetic dreams and the evidence supplied by recipients of visions ensured a slower, inefficient means of justice. In his essay Doyle describes how in mid-nineteenth-century France, a medium, Mme Huerta, a 'well-known clairvoyante', was consulted to track down the whereabouts of Paul Dupont's brother Eugene.<sup>6</sup> Eventually two men were arrested and convicted of the missing brother's murder, though Doyle protested that 'the police would have saved themselves much trouble, and come to a

---

'the most enduring legacy of the author's work in the field of spiritualism', Richard Lancelyn Green and John Michael Gibson, *A Bibliography of A. Conan Doyle* (Boston: Hudson House, 1983; repr. 2000), p. 341.

<sup>5</sup> Doyle, *The Edge of the Unknown* (London: John Murray, 1930; repr. Teddington: The Echo Library, 2006), 'Preface'.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p.135.

swifter conclusion, had they themselves consulted Mme. Huerta in the first instance'.<sup>7</sup> Doyle reasoned that '[i]t should be possible at every great police-centre to have the call upon the best clairvoyant or other medium that can be got, and to use them freely, for what they are worth'.<sup>8</sup> Even Doyle's qualification on the use of psychics, '[n]one are infallible. They have their off-days and their failures. No man should ever be convicted upon their evidence', appears to do little in mitigating the gulf between Doyle's spiritualist writings and his creation Sherlock Holmes.<sup>9</sup> Nevertheless, in his essay Doyle argues that the term 'supernatural' was inaccurate in describing the phenomena he advocated. Spirit sightings and dream visions for example, were a subject open for rational discussion and examination. As we shall see in this chapter, Doyle's spiritualist writings and his Sherlock Holmes stories share the common approach of empiricism when tackling the problem of defining such phenomena. Holmes, the empiricist, must always first seek evidence for an objective rational solution to the problems he encounters. It may seem that this was a position Holmes shared with his creator Doyle, however this is not the case. Doyle, unlike Holmes in *The Hound*, claimed he followed a chain of evidence but it was to the subjective conclusion of his spiritualist revelation. Furthermore, by the end of his life Doyle had left scientific empiricism behind in favour of evidence that he felt was more reliable, a subject I discuss in chapter five.

### **Spiritualism, Natural Laws and 'A New Light on Old Crimes'**

In his essay, 'A New Light on Old Crimes', Doyle appeals for both tolerance and a sustained examination of spiritualism. In particular, Doyle was keen to express his belief that spiritualism was governed by natural laws that could be explained by scientific research. For Doyle, it was important to challenge assumptions that such

---

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p.136.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid. Stashower's observation of how Doyle's 'outspokenness, weighed against the cool logic of Sherlock Holmes, seemed to invite public scorn', is indicative of the contrasts made between Doyle and his creation, *Teller of Tales*, p. xiv.

activities were in fact supernatural, in the sense that psychic phenomena were considered to be beyond immutable laws of nature and scientific fact. This parallels Doyle's position towards the end of the nineteenth century as demonstrated in my analysis of 'Lot No. 249' and discussed in chapter two. In 'A New Light on Old Crimes', Doyle contended that research into this relatively new field of scientific enquiry had already made 'progress'.<sup>10</sup> This, he felt, was 'surprising' since 'it has been done by a limited circle of students whose results have hardly reached the world at large, and have been greeted rather with incredulous contempt than with the appreciation which they deserve'.<sup>11</sup> Doyle had become a member of the Society for Psychical research in 1893 and was aware of the professional risks involved for scientists pursuing this field of enquiry in spite of the 'obstinacy' of their 'time'.<sup>12</sup>

By 1930 Doyle had attempted to re-examine a number of cases that had been unsatisfactorily explained and had been determined as either 'extraordinary coincidences or as interpositions of Providence'.<sup>13</sup> In relation to 'Providence', Doyle challenges any assumptions of direct divine intervention in the natural world. He argues:

people must learn that no such thing has ever been known as an interposition of Providence save through natural law, and that when it has seemed inexplicable and miraculous it is only because the law has not yet been understood.<sup>14</sup>

According to this view, events that have been defined as miraculous have been done so because the laws which dictate their occurrence have not been adequately understood

---

<sup>10</sup> Doyle, *The Edge of the Unknown*, p. 124.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Doyle notes how some scientists, including William Crookes who is discussed in this chapter, 'risked their reputations and careers for what they knew to be the truth' in Doyle, *The Wanderings of a Spiritualist* (New York: George H Doran, 1921), p. 73.

<sup>13</sup> Doyle, *The Edge of the Unknown*, p. 124.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

and defined; however, the possibility of God remaining as a prime motive for such laws remains. Doyle's ideas in 'A New Light on Old Crimes' are a more developed expression of his early religious notions stated in *The Stark Munro Letters* (1895), as discussed in chapter one. Doyle begins 'A New Light on Old Crimes' by examining 'borderland' criminal cases that could be solved by spiritualist influences.<sup>15</sup> In such 'borderland' cases Doyle was trying to convey objectively the point that there might not be adequate evidence to prove the intervention of spiritual influences. However, he still maintained that such cases could 'beyond all question' be 'influenced by the spirit of the dead'.<sup>16</sup> It is unsurprising that Doyle should organise his essay in this fashion: he was attempting to convince a sceptical and frequently hostile audience of the psychic revelation and the benefit of a 'psychic science' to humanity.<sup>17</sup>

Doyle attempted to demonstrate how a 'borderland' case could be interpreted by such a 'psychic science'. In 1827 the body of a young woman, Maria Marten, was recovered after her mother had 'dreamed upon three nights running that her daughter had been murdered'.<sup>18</sup> This in itself was unsurprising since 'it may have only reflected her vague fears and distrust', though the dreams were in fact 'absolutely definite' in revealing the location of her daughter's corpse. Once recovered it was only a matter of time before a young farmer named Corder was arrested and hanged.<sup>19</sup> 'Now here is a case about which there is no possible doubt', Doyle claims, because '[t]he murder was unquestionably discovered by means of the triple dream, for which there could have been no natural explanation'.<sup>20</sup> Later in life, Doyle confidently expressed a belief in the type of prescient visions he had written about in his early fictional writings, discussed in

---

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 125.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 124.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 136.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 126.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.



chapters one and two. In this instance, his use of ‘no natural explanation’ was a reference to what could be called a rationalisation in concord with accepted notions of natural law. There remained ‘two psychic explanations’, the first is ‘telepathy or thought-reading’.<sup>21</sup> Doyle proposes that through telepathy ‘the murderer thought of the girl’s mother upon three successive nights and also upon the scene of the crime, thus connecting up the vision of one with the brain of the other’.<sup>22</sup> The second psychic explanation is that those dreams ‘just before the final waking, do at times convey information which seems to come from other intelligences than our own’.<sup>23</sup> Doyle’s preference was for the second explanation. He states ‘I am of the opinion that the spirit of the dead woman did actually get in touch with the mind of the mother, and impressed upon her the true facts of her unhappy fate’.<sup>24</sup> Doyle argues, ‘[i]f any student thinks’ that telepathy ‘is the more probable explanation he is certainly entitled to accept it’.<sup>25</sup> What concerns him was that this route was taken by those, such as the Society for Psychical Research, whose acceptance of telepathy provided a safer alternative than that of a belief in disembodied intelligences providing prophetic dreams. While an acceptance of telepathy would permit the possibility of thought-transference and prove an expansion of natural laws, it would also limit the potential of investigating other phenomena such as contact from the spirits beyond the borders of this world, a subject considered in chapter five. Doyle argues that:

thought-reading, a phenomenon which, of course, exists, as anyone can prove who experiments with it, but which has been stretched to most unreasonable lengths by those

---

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p. 127.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

who would prefer any explanation to that which entails disembodied intelligence.<sup>26</sup>

The essay contends that at the very least, such phenomena detailed in ‘A New Light on Old Crimes’ should not be ignored or dismissed entirely as coincidence. A greater concern for Doyle was that the mother’s dreams were likely to be dismissed as coincidence by scientists who were not interested in considering a psychic alternative, regardless of whether it involved spirit contact or telepathy. It is possible to detect more than a note of frustration in this essay. In considering such events, he writes, there is a ‘big fact standing up as clear as the Nelson Column, and to turn away one’s eyes, pretend not to see it, and make no attempt to fit it into the general scheme of the universe, is neither science nor common sense’.<sup>27</sup> It is this notion of ‘common sense’ that provides common ground between Doyle’s spiritualist writings and Sherlock Holmes. In particular it is Doyle’s insistence upon scientific enquiry and even his conviction that unexplainable phenomena must follow natural laws is an attribute shared by Holmes. In ‘A New Light on Old Crimes’ Doyle argues:

Law, inexorable law, still governs every fresh annexe which we add to our knowledge, and only by defining and recognizing its limitations will we gain some dim perception of the conditions of the further life and its relation to the present one.<sup>28</sup>

---

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p. 126. Thought transference or telepathy (a word coined by Frederic Myers from the Greek *tele*, meaning ‘far’ and *pathy*, meaning ‘feeling’) was a serious subject of interest for The Society for Psychical Research (S.P.R.). Doyle, who joined the S.P.R. in 1893, had been encouraged by Myers in investigating his early interest in the possibility that intellect could survive the death of the human body. See: Lycett, pp. 130-133; Janet Oppenheim, *The Other World: Spiritualism and Psychical Research in England, 1850-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), pp.120-123.

<sup>27</sup> Doyle, *The Edge of the Unknown*, p. 130.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 133.

Even though Doyle's bias towards spiritual survival after death is apparent in this extract, we can also recognise his attempts to prioritise an empirical method of investigating apparently supernatural phenomena in unsolved criminal cases. 'Law and obedience to law', he contends, 'run through the whole subject'.<sup>29</sup> Consequently, a psychic science would also serve as a method of investigating undiscovered laws of nature that would provide 'a fresh annexe to our knowledge' of the natural world.

This can be best illustrated by examining the case of the disappearance of Owen Parfitt, a resident of Somerset, detailed by Doyle at the beginning of 'A New Light on Old Crimes'. Doyle is quick to present an objective opinion of the crime, 'it is really impossible to say whether it is psychic or not; but if it were not, it forms one of the most piquant mysteries which ever came before the British public'.<sup>30</sup> Parfitt returned to Britain after a long spell abroad as a seaman. He eventually settled in Somerset at around 1760, moving into a cottage that was kept by his sister. Periodically Parfitt would make a visit to Bristol and return with money, though 'how he gained it was his secret'. Doyle explains how Parfitt was a 'wicked old creature, with many strange tales of wild doings, some of which related to the West Coast of Africa, and possibly to the slave trade'.<sup>31</sup> On the morning of June 6, 1768, Parfitt, who was by this time infirm, disappeared. His sister was found by a neighbour 'wringing her hands in great bewilderment' as to what had happened to her brother.<sup>32</sup> An extensive search was undertaken but Owen Parfitt was never seen again. Doyle theorises it was possible that Parfitt's visits to Bristol 'were connected with blackmail, and that some deeper villain

---

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 135.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p. 124.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., p. 125.

in the background found means to silence that dangerous tongue'.<sup>33</sup> The article also establishes an alternative possibility. It describes Parfitt's 'unsavoury character, some reminiscences of the Obi men and Voodoo cult of Africa' and how the locals believed 'the devil had laid his claws upon the old seaman'.<sup>34</sup> According to Doyle there were two possibilities: one involved blackmail and murder, but, he asks 'how was it done?'<sup>35</sup> Alternatively, there was a possibility of the supernatural and that Parfitt's devilish past had finally overtaken him. Doyle argues that this case was a 'freakish, insoluble borderland case', though he also made an observation that linked his thoughts strongly with the words of Holmes, '[n]o psychic explanation can be accepted in any case until all reasonable normal solutions have been exhausted'.<sup>36</sup> As we shall see, this statement is almost identical to comments made by Sherlock Holmes when he is confronted by a tale of a murderous devil creature in *The Hound of the Baskervilles*. Although separated by nearly thirty years, the appearance of a similar statement in Doyle's serious spiritualist writings and *The Hound* permits an examination of Sherlock Holmes that would demonstrate what investigative qualities were needed to examine unusual phenomena. This is because, for Doyle at least, there was no distinction between investigating crime and spiritualism as they were both rooted in natural law.

---

<sup>33</sup> Ibid. There are a number of Sherlock Holmes stories in which blackmail and imperial crimes are connected. For example see 'The Boscombe Valley Mystery' (1891), 'The Adventure of the "Gloria Scott"' (1893) and 'The Adventure of the Solitary Cyclist' (1903).

<sup>34</sup> Ibid. The practice of Obi (or Obeah) is defined as 'a kind of sorcery or witchcraft prevalent in west Africa and formerly in the West Indies. Obeah is a native word and signifies something put into the ground to bring about sickness', *Brewer's Dictionary of Phrase and Fable: Millenium Edition*, Rev. by Adrian Room (London: Cassell, 1999; repr. 2001), pp. 839-40.

<sup>35</sup> Doyle, *The Edge of the Unknown*, p. 125.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid. Doyle's essay is also examined in: Peter Costello, *Conan Doyle Detective: True Crimes Investigated by the Creator of Sherlock Holmes* (London: Constable and Robinson, 2006), pp. 217-20. Doyle makes an almost identical point, '[o]ne is bound to exclude spirit explanations until all natural ones have been exhausted' in his serious spiritualist book *The Vital Message* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1919), p. 33 < <http://books.google.co.uk/> > [accessed 23 June 2010].

### Sherlock Holmes: Mediator of Natural Laws

In *The Hound* Sherlock Holmes discusses the possibility of a supernatural explanation to the crimes he and Watson are about to investigate upon the urging of Dr. Mortimer. In *The Hound*, Holmes informs Watson:

Of course, if Dr. Mortimer's surmise should be correct, and we are dealing with forces outside the ordinary laws of Nature, there is an end of our investigation. But we are bound to exhaust all other hypotheses before falling back upon this one.<sup>37</sup>

Holmes's statement evokes Doyle's ideas of the natural world in 'Lot No. 249'. It is also expressive of the uncertainties Victorians faced when investigating the supernatural. As I discussed in the introduction to this thesis, Richard Noakes considers how such phenomena could be interpreted. One view considered manifestations as being opposed to natural law and by definition supernatural. Others suggested that manifestations might originate from new natural causes. In *The Hound* Holmes's view parallels these interpretations. When Holmes states that phenomena could exist 'outside the ordinary laws of Nature' he is suggesting it is in opposition to such natural laws and is therefore supernatural. This is not to say that Holmes will irrefutably confirm any supernatural agency involved in a crime he investigates.<sup>38</sup> Importantly, Holmes's use of 'ordinary laws' does not rule out the possibility of extra-ordinary laws of nature. Such extra-ordinary laws would be in concordance with new natural causes or laws, that have the potential to be investigated, a position that Doyle also advocated. Consequently,

---

<sup>37</sup> *The Penguin Complete Sherlock Holmes*, p. 684.

<sup>38</sup> O'Gorman notes how *The Hound* 'has a hidden sub-theme about the possibilities of the supernatural, which is not simply part of the gothic *frisson* of the tale. Rather, it is a matter of importance to Conan Doyle himself, a man of science and one increasingly concerned with the nature of the paranormal', Doyle, *The Hound of the Baskervilles with 'The Adventure of the Speckled Band'*, ed. by Francis O'Gorman (Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview Press, 2006), p. 34. Contrary to my reading of *The Hound*, Smajić reads Holmes as a 'closet believer in things supernatural who had managed to pass himself off as a materialist', Srdjan Smajić, *Ghost-Seers, Detectives, and Spiritualists: Theories of Victorian Literature and Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 132.

Holmes insists upon a methodology that must ‘exhaust all other hypotheses’ first. In *The Hound* Holmes serves as a mediator between Doyle’s views on natural laws and how they might be investigated. In order to discount a supernatural reason for Sir Charles’s death, it is necessary to investigate with an open and objective mind. As Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison note in *Objectivity* (2010) this was a difficult thing to achieve during this period because of the self-conscious policing of objectivity and subjectivity necessary for the construction of a ‘scientific self’.<sup>39</sup> This position is always delicately balanced in *The Hound*. Sir Henry, Sir Charles Baskerville’s only apparent heir, neatly summarises this point. He asks Holmes about the nature of the threat facing the Baskervilles, “[d]o you mean danger from this family fiend or do you mean danger from human beings?” Holmes answers, “[w]ell, that is what we have to find out”.<sup>40</sup> Once the reader reaches the novel’s denouement it may have seemed ridiculous at the outset of the novel to have seriously considered a supernatural origin of the threat to the Baskervilles. Watson’s keen ability to measure Holmes’s moods reveals how Watson ‘knew from [Holmes’s] drawn brows and keen face that his mind, like my own, was busy in endeavouring to frame some scheme into which all these strange and apparently disconnected episodes could be fitted’.<sup>41</sup> Holmes’s own methods depend on gathering sufficient empirical data, working out a theory and then testing it against new information and clues that are uncovered in his investigation.<sup>42</sup> On the balance of probability, Holmes’s investigative tactics immediately focus upon empirical data: missing boots and types of perfume and so forth. Mortimer deploys comparative investigate tactics to Holmes although they differ in their respective conclusions.

<sup>39</sup> Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison, *Objectivity* (New York: Zone Books, 2010), p. 37.

<sup>40</sup> *The Penguin Complete Sherlock Holmes*, p. 689.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid*, p. 696.

<sup>42</sup> Jonathan Smith reads Holmes as a ‘testimonial to the power of an inductive methodology charged with the speculative and often mysterious process of hypothesis, intuition, and deduction’ that was an element of the development of a new scientific methodology, Jonathan Smith, *Fact and Feeling: Baconian Science and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (London and Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin, 1994), p. 10.

Whereas Holmes seeks to define the hound as a natural occurrence, Mortimer is not bound by such a premise, despite his apparent scientific background.

### **Dr Mortimer: A Man of Science**

In *The Hound* Mortimer represents the triumph of superstition over rationalism. Mortimer provides a cautionary insight to the burgeoning and controversial study of the supernatural by scientific minds in the nineteenth century. Mortimer and Holmes's different approaches to the supernatural redefine Mortimer's role in the novel. It is significant that Mortimer comes to consult Holmes primarily with the possibility of there being some truth to the legend's supernatural origins. Holmes neatly summarises the novel's interaction with the supernatural and science by reminding Watson that Mortimer is a "professional brother of yours" before asking "[w]hat does Dr. James Mortimer, the man of science, ask of Sherlock Holmes, the specialist in crime?"<sup>43</sup> Jesse Oak Taylor-Ide notes how 'Mortimer is continually referred to as a 'man of science'', which indicates 'the degree to which pure science is unable to come to terms with the threat of the hound'.<sup>44</sup> Taylor-Ide is not alone in defining Mortimer as an authority on the scientific issues of the day. Lawrence Frank defines Mortimer as 'a man of science, apparently of a Galtonesque, Lombrossian persuasion' who seems willing enough to 'reduce disease and criminality to physiology and heredity by invoking the concept of atavism'.<sup>45</sup> It should not be surprising then that *The Hound* has been interpreted along the lines of atavism and degeneration. Christopher Frayling notes how the theme of reversion and atavism in Mortimer's writings 'play an important part in the plot of *The Hound*'.<sup>46</sup> However, the basis of this interpretation is reliant upon Mortimer's status as a

---

<sup>43</sup> *The Penguin Complete Sherlock Holmes*, p. 671.

<sup>44</sup> Jesse Oak Taylor-Ide, 'Ritual and the Liminality of Sherlock Holmes in *The Sign of Four* and *The Hound of the Baskervilles*', *English Literature in Transition, 1880-1920*, 48.1 (2005), 55-70, p. 59.

<sup>45</sup> Lawrence Frank, 'The Hound of the Baskervilles, the Man on the Tor, and a Metaphor for the Mind', *Nineteenth-Century Literature*, 54.3 (1999), 336-372 (p.340).

<sup>46</sup> Frayling, p. 169.

published scientist. It is important to consider Frank's claim that Mortimer is a man of science whose published essays link criminality and heredity via atavism. According to this reading, Mortimer's role is to highlight the impact of degeneration in *The Hound*. Mortimer's prize-winning essays are titled 'Is Disease a Reversion?' as well as 'Some Freaks of Atavism' and 'Do We Progress?'<sup>47</sup> It is not a coincidence these essays directly engage with Doyle's earlier religious and spiritualist questions. Mortimer, like Doyle and Munro in *The Stark Munro Letters*, is concerned as to the role of disease as a check to human evolution questioning racial progress and degeneration. Consequently, this expands any critical interpretation of Mortimer's role in *The Hound*. Doyle did not cast Mortimer directly as a voice of scientific authority. Mortimer represents a stage of Doyle's earlier religious and scientific development. As discussed in chapter two, Doyle abandoned the idea of degeneration in religious questions as it was an example of an unjust regressive schema that marked those suffering from addiction and madness out for extinction. Mortimer's engagement with these regressive ideas allows another interpretation of his presence in the novel, in particular his role as a medical and scientific authority.

In *The Hound* it is relevant to question Mortimer's right to be considered an authority, because there is a danger of overlooking or sidelining other possible interpretations of the novel's themes. After Holmes and Watson's lengthy discussion of Mortimer in the opening chapter of *The Hound*, it becomes apparent that Mortimer is not a great medical authority in the novel. This is partly why Doyle did not present the reader with an image of Mortimer as the "successful, elderly medical man, well-esteemed" imagined by Watson.<sup>48</sup> It is important to consider Mortimer's qualifications as a medical professional. In *The Hound* he is referred to frequently as Dr Mortimer.

---

<sup>47</sup> *The Penguin Complete Sherlock Holmes*, p. 671.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 669.



Holmes is the first to voice this, though he is immediately interrupted by his client, who corrects Holmes by stating, “Mister, sir, Mister – a humble M.R.C.S.”.<sup>49</sup> Mortimer held the position of “House surgeon” from “1882 to 1884, at Charing Cross Hospital” a position Holmes describes as being “little more than a senior student”.<sup>50</sup> In addition, Holmes speculates Mortimer could not be on the staff at Charing Cross Hospital, “since only a man well-established in a London practice could hold such a position” and he would not abandon such a prestigious position to “drift into the country”.<sup>51</sup> Unlike Taylor-Ide and Frank above, I argue it would be incorrect to regard Mortimer as a great authority on scientific questions of the day. His professional position outside his small rural community is neither influential nor important enough to register amongst the great minds of Victorian science. Holmes’s opinion of Mortimer’s personality does little to improve a reader’s perception of the man. Holmes surmises his visitor was “a young fellow under thirty, amiable, un-ambitious, absent-minded”.<sup>52</sup> Holmes believes he is “fairly justified” in his “inferences” because it is “only an amiable [...] man who receives testimonials, only an unambitious one who abandons a London career for the country, and only an absent-minded one who leaves his stick and not his visiting card”.<sup>53</sup> If Doyle is not portraying Mortimer as an authority on medicine and science, then it important to consider what his exact role in the novel is.

Doyle casts Mortimer in the role of a cautionary figure indicative of an incorrect method

---

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., p. 672. M.R.C.S. is the acronym for a Member of the Royal College of Surgeons, which in Mortimer’s day was one of two qualifications typically acquired after the ‘Apothecaries Act’ (1815) stated all general practitioners of medicine required a License from the Society of Apothecaries (an L.S.A), which Mortimer does not have. Technically, he is also not entitled to be referred to as ‘doctor’ because he does not possess a postgraduate university medical degree (an MD, DM, DPhil, or PhD for example), unlike Watson and Conan Doyle. For a description of the complicated history of Victorian British medical reform see, Irvine Loudon, ‘Medical Education and Medical Reform’, in *The History of Medical Education in Britain*, ed. by Vivian Nutton and Roy Porter (Amsterdam GA: Editions Rodopi B. V., 1995), pp. 229-249. See also: Irvine Loudon, ‘Why are (Male) Surgeons still Addressed as Mr?’, *BMJ.com* <<http://www.pubmedcentral.nih.gov/articlerender.fcgi?artid=1119265>> [accessed 12 April 2008].

<sup>50</sup> *The Penguin Complete Sherlock Holmes*, p. 671 and p. 670.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., p. 670.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., p. 671.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

of investigating potentially supernatural phenomena. To examine this notion, it is relevant to repeat Holmes's question to Watson moments before Mortimer's arrival at Baker Street, "[w]hat does Dr. James Mortimer, the man of science, ask of Sherlock Holmes, the specialist in crime?"<sup>54</sup> In reply, Mortimer does not ask Holmes to investigate the death of Sir Charles Baskerville. Holmes is asked what advice should be given to the last Baskerville heir, regarding the legend of the spectral hound as context. Despite Mortimer's apparent medical authority, his willingness to seek advice from Holmes on how to counter the supernatural demonstrates how his scientific credentials have been compromised.

**“And you, a trained man of science, believe it to be supernatural?”**

When Mortimer consults with Holmes he presents him with a document recording a supernatural occurrence and a warning to the heirs of the Baskervilles. Holmes initially protests about having to listen to the legend of the hound of the Baskervilles by reminding Mortimer, “I understand that it is something more modern and practical upon which you wish to consult me?” Mortimer assures him the manuscript is “intimately connected with the affair”.<sup>55</sup> Holmes listens to the legend with closed eyes and an ‘air of resignation’ unmoved by Mortimer's question, “[d]o you not find it interesting?” after the reading.<sup>56</sup> Holmes's response highlights the problematic nature of this source of evidence, “[t]o a collector of fairy tales”.<sup>57</sup> This is suggestive of the type of material evocative of the wider range of Doyle's gothic writings as well as the preternatural imagination of his father Charles. This document is problematic to Sherlock Holmes because it is an account of a supernatural event, namely the death of Hugo Baskerville by a spectral hound. Holmes's response

---

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., p. 673.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., p. 673 and p. 676.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

illustrates the scientific scepticism of the time and the problem of classification of the legend, should it be regarded as evidence, or as an irrelevant fantasy?<sup>58</sup>

It is striking the lengths Mortimer goes to in order to determine the legend's validity as a supernatural phenomenon. Despite his medical training and scientific interests, Mortimer is unsure how to classify the legend. He is keen to maintain scientific objectivity and seeks to corroborate these sightings by investigating their origins. This action is reminiscent of the efforts undertaken by members of the Society for Psychical Research in order to validate the numerous accounts of apparitions as preparation for a book entitled *Phantasms of the Living* (1886).<sup>59</sup> Edmund Gurney, who co-authored the book with Frank Podmore and Frederic Myers, carried out much of this initial research work. Keenly aware of the level of criticism their work would receive, it was decided that each account of supernatural activity received by the society was to be checked and whenever possible corroborated by a witness to the event.<sup>60</sup> Mortimer explains how he “cross-examined these men, one of them a hard-headed countryman, one a farrier, and one a moorland farmer”.<sup>61</sup> Mortimer's use of ‘cross-examined’ is worthy of note. It implies a level of enquiry with a stricter, almost legal approach. He is careful to assure Holmes of his thorough methods and he makes it clear he did not meet these witnesses as an informal neighbour on the moor. Furthermore, by describing a witness as ‘hard-headed’, Mortimer is attempting to establish one of the men, and by

---

<sup>58</sup> The close scrutiny of legends and fairy-tales had extended by the mid-point of the nineteenth century to analytical study of *The Bible*, challenging its literal truth or at least reducing Christ's miracles (for example) to the same level of credibility as other supernatural phenomena. For a discussion of biblical criticism see, Alan Gauld, *The Founders of Psychical Research* (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), pp. 48-53.

<sup>59</sup> Edmund Gurney, Frederic W. H. Myers and Frank Podmore, *Phantasms of the Living*, 2 vols (London: Trübner and Co, 1886).

<sup>60</sup> Gauld, pp. 161-162.

<sup>61</sup> *The Penguin Complete Sherlock Holmes*, p.681.

implication all of them, as credible witnesses.<sup>62</sup> Mortimer states his witnesses “all agreed that it was a huge creature, luminous, ghastly, and spectral”.<sup>63</sup> Having established his witnesses as hard headed and therefore reliable Mortimer presents their coinciding eyewitness accounts as proof of the hound’s supernatural qualities. The countrymen “tell the same story of this dreadful apparition, exactly corresponding to the hell-hound of the legend”.<sup>64</sup> The reader eventually learns that these men were not mistaken in their observations, only in their conclusions, and it is that which highlights the difference between Mortimer and Holmes. This is indicative of Daston and Galison’s notion of the “subjective self” prone to selective judgement in the interpretation of evidence, which in this instance is rooted in preconceived superstitions. Mortimer argues, “there is a reign of terror in the district”, which does not rule out the possibility of its origin being man made.<sup>65</sup> We have already seen how Holmes rejects the supernatural outright at the beginning of such an investigation as this, and his response to Mortimer is one of derision. He says, “I have hitherto confined my investigations to this world. [...] In a modest way I have combated evil, but to take on the Father of Evil himself, would, perhaps, be too ambitious a task”.<sup>66</sup> Here Holmes’s investigations confined to this world evoke his assessment that extraordinary laws of nature might exist upon which such phenomena could be investigated. In regards to Mortimer’s belief in the supernatural, Holmes admonishes “you, a trained man of science, believe it to be supernatural?” to which Mortimer replies, “I do not know what to believe”.<sup>67</sup> Holmes’s scorn is similar to the attitude taken by many men in the scientific community towards their brethren dedicated to investigating the

---

<sup>62</sup> Mortimer uses a similar tactic when describing his own character and Sir Charles’s: “[h]e was a strong minded-man, sir, shrewd, practical, and as unimaginative as I am myself”, implying a stolid approach to supernatural events, *ibid.*, p. 673.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 681.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>66</sup> P. 681.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*

supernatural. It establishes Mortimer's role in the novel as an absent-minded man of science who misinterprets a phenomenon as supernatural that can be located and investigated in the natural world.

Mortimer's methodology, including his careful cross-examination of eyewitnesses and the gathering of written reports are similar to those who tried to classify and understand the supernatural such as Catherine Crowe and Harbert Mayo noted in my introduction. He informs Holmes how, before Sir Charles's death, he had heard that "several people had seen a creature upon the moor which corresponds with this Baskerville demon, and which could not possibly be any animal known to science".<sup>68</sup> Taking these spontaneous reports of sightings as a basis to begin an enquiry, Mortimer's thesis is that the hound, if it exists, may be "hard to reconcile with the settled order of Nature".<sup>69</sup> When Holmes pushes the point, "you must admit that the footmark [of the hound] is material", Mortimer's response, "[t]he original hound was material enough to tug a man's throat out, and yet he was diabolical as well", exasperates the detective.<sup>70</sup> Holmes argues, "I see that you have quite gone over to the supernaturalists".<sup>71</sup> Holmes's statement acknowledges how Mortimer has ignored the possibility of the extra-ordinary laws of nature. This small section of dialogue between the detective and the man of science demonstrates how Mortimer's willingness to consider the possibility of the existence of a supernatural spectral hound is enough to earn the scorn of a fellow professional scientist, Sherlock Holmes.

Mortimer informs Holmes that his belief in the authenticity of this incident led him to keep information relating to Sir Charles's death a secret. There were two reasons why he did not reveal the presence of the footprints of the hound at Sir Charles's

---

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

inquest. One of Mortimer's motives was that any addition to the legend of the hound would increase Baskerville Hall's "grim reputation", ensuring it would "remain untenanted".<sup>72</sup> However, it is the main reason why Mortimer withheld details from the inquest that is of interest. Mortimer informs Holmes his "motive for withholding it from the coroner's inquiry is that a man of science shrinks from placing himself in the public position of seeming to endorse a popular superstition".<sup>73</sup> It is not surprising that Watson notes how Mortimer 'had begun to show signs of some strong emotion' while admitting this, as this personal opinion could have serious consequences to his professional career.<sup>74</sup> Mortimer's fear of being a man of science who may appear to be endorsing a popular superstition is of importance in understanding his position in the middle to late part of the nineteenth century. When Mortimer's emotional state prevents him from elaborating his position, Holmes asks, "[w]hy do you hesitate?" to which Mortimer replies, "[t]here is a realm in which the most acute and most experienced of detectives is helpless".<sup>75</sup> Mortimer is claiming that rational and scientific study might not be enough in a confrontation with the supernatural. Mortimer and Holmes share an empirical interest in investigating the possibility of the existence of a hound roaming the moors. But according to Holmes the difference between the two men is that Mortimer is far too eager to base his enquiry on his a priori assumption that the hound is indeed supernatural, which is indicative of the dangers of subjectivism noted by Daston and Galison. Doyle utilises Mortimer as a cautionary figure in the novel to illustrate the predicament of those who incorrectly attempted to investigate phenomena, concluding it was supernatural in origin.

---

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., p. 678.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., p. 680.

## Victorians Investigating the Supernatural

Mortimer's classification and interpretation of the Baskerville legend illustrates this character's critical importance to a reading of *The Hound*. Mortimer is portrayed as a man of science with interests in phrenology and atavism but is also a believer in the supernatural. A closer reading of him reveals significant information about the study and investigation of the supernatural in late Victorian society. He offers an insight into investigations into the supernatural by professional organisations such as the Society for Psychical Research.

Phenomena such as ghost sightings and apparitions had been recorded by various means for centuries and were regarded with increased scepticism by the scientific community of the nineteenth century.<sup>76</sup> Activities undertaken by the Society for Psychical Research included collecting and collating reports of supernatural events, ensuring the subject remained present in the public and scientific eye. Deborah Blum notes the 'question had always been what to do with such odd reports, how to classify such irregular events, where to place them in our orderly descriptions of how the world worked'.<sup>77</sup> The question of classification was paramount especially when many of the accounts raised were not easily confirmed by scientific fact. Mortimer's discussion with Holmes illustrates some of this tension, especially when it concerns the issue of how the legend should be classified. It is material to the context of Sir Charles's death as the legend inspired Stapleton to plot the murder of Sir Henry. However, Holmes and Mortimer differ in their opinions of the legend's usefulness to an investigation of Sir Charles's death.

---

<sup>76</sup> Blum notes: '[i]n general, nineteenth-century scientists felt a personal responsibility not to investigate claims of the supernatural but to debunk them out of hand', typically attributing such claims to psychological aberration, Deborah Blum, *Ghost Hunters: William James and the Search for Scientific Proof of Life after Death* (London: Century, 2007), p.15.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 25.

Up until the early years of the 1870s, research into psychical phenomena was of a disparate and disorganised kind. People from all levels of British society, with little or no claim to scientific professionalism, undertook enthusiastic experimentation.<sup>78</sup> An article in *The Times* observed the paradox involved when, in a so-called progressive and scientific age, ‘fanatics’ boast of ““twenty millions”” of followers in various psychical phenomena ‘without its falsity having been demonstrated to the satisfaction of all but the very ignorant’.<sup>79</sup> Its solution to this problem is indicative of the cultural impetus behind men such as Mortimer who were investigating unusual phenomena, whether it is spiritualism or the spectral hound. *The Times* continues, either ‘the subject’ of ‘Spiritualism’ is ‘surrounded by unusual difficulties or that in this matter our scientific men have signally failed to do their duty by the public, which looks to them for its facts. We believe the latter to be the case’.<sup>80</sup> This article summarises Mortimer’s predicament accurately. The point *The Times* is making is that the public has been let down because the psychical phenomena have not been exposed as false. It argues that this is the case because the scientific community has more or less ignored the issue, leaving the masses vulnerable to the exploitative ‘fanatics’. When educated men took up the issue, it was not intended that they should believe in nor seek to validate such events. Men such as Mortimer were risking the anger of a scientific community eager to buttress its position as the voice of truth in late Victorian society.

This problem for the scientific community was already becoming acute by 1872 when there had been at least two important publications of attempts to investigate mediums scientifically. In 1869 the London Dialectical Society established a committee

---

<sup>78</sup> Oppenheim describes in great detail the religious and political points of view and its relation to social changes. For a description of Frederic Myer’s upbringing and the impact of religious doubt on the middle-classes of England see, Gauld, pp. 32-65.

<sup>79</sup> ‘Spiritualism and Science’, *The Times*, 26 December 1872, p. 5, in *The Times Digital Archive* <<http://infotrac.galegroup.com>> [accessed 21 December 2007].

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.* See also Gauld, p. 84.



with over thirty men, including Alfred Russel Wallace, to investigate spiritualist mediums such as Daniel Dunglas Home. Six sub-committees were formed and over forty meetings took place. As with the later investigations of the Society for Psychical Research, no professional mediums were used however some mediums served on the committees. The first sub-committee obtained results that were in line with the reported psychic phenomena that had swept the nation since the 1850s. Items of furniture were moved and raps were heard that appeared to indicate the presence of otherworldly intelligences, perhaps similar to those sounds heard in the presence of the young Fox sisters in North America.<sup>81</sup> In claiming this, the Society's *Report* (1871) failed to do their duty as defined by the *Times* a year later. Rather than attempt to expose the phenomena of spiritualism as fraudulent, the Society produced a report that was far from hostile. This in turn led to questions about the Society's operation as a scientific body. Podmore noted discrepancies between accounts of a séance and its description in the report, which he argued invalidated the enquiry.<sup>82</sup> The *Report* itself was controversial amongst members of the Society, revealing some truth to the observation in *The Times* that the whole subject was 'surrounded by unusual difficulties', albeit problems of a non-spiritual nature.

Another investigation in 1871 illustrates the difficulties in undertaking a scientific study of the supernatural. William Crookes published his account of a series of experiments with Home in the *Quarterly Journal of Science*, of which he was editor

---

<sup>81</sup> *Report on Spiritualism of the Committee of the London Dialectical Society Together with the Evidence, Oral and Written, and a Selection of the Correspondence* (London: Longmans, Green, Reader and Dyer, 1871), pp. 390-391 <<http://www.archive.org/details/reportonspiritu00socigoog>> [accessed 06 January 2012 ]. In 1848, Margaret and Kate Fox, two adolescents from Hydesville in America, convinced their parents and neighbours that they could communicate with spirits who answered by a series of disembodied knocks, or raps. For a description of the spirit rapping of the Fox sisters see, Gauld, pp. 24-27.

<sup>82</sup> Frank Podmore, *Modern Spiritualism A History and a Criticism*, 2 vols (London: Methuen, 1902), II, pp. 150-151. See also Gauld, pp. 85-86.

at the time.<sup>83</sup> When Crookes turned his attention to Home his reputation as a scientist came under close scrutiny and his method of investigation, his detective work in the field of psychic research, came under attack.<sup>84</sup> Crookes's intention to apply the standard of scientific enquiry to investigations of spiritualism was fraught with difficulty.<sup>85</sup> Home was a controversial character who had apparently produced stunning effects at the séance table surrounded by many educated witnesses. He was unusual at the time for his ability to conduct a séance in what would then be described as adequate light.<sup>86</sup> Crookes detailed several experiments with Home in his article 'Experimental Investigation of a New Force' (1871). One such experiment involved the suspension of a large mahogany board between a spring balance apparatus and a table. The purpose of this experiment was to record the disproportionate oscillation of the board apparently caused by the light pressure of Home's fingertips that were placed on it as he sat at the table opposite the spring balance apparatus. Crookes reported favourably and came under immediate attack from his scientific peers in a manner that would have been recognizable to Crowe and Mayo.<sup>87</sup> William Benjamin Carpenter, a leading physiologist and author of *Principles of General and Comparative Physiology* (1839) had entered the fray by explaining table-tilting was a result of what modern psychologists would call subconscious reflex movement of the muscles. Carpenter did

---

<sup>83</sup> William Crookes enrolled at the Royal College of Chemistry in 1848 at the age of 16. His discovery of the element thallium in 1861 contributed to his election to the Royal Society in 1865. In 1887 he was awarded a knighthood and the Order of Merit in 1910.

<sup>84</sup> William Crookes, 'Experimental Investigation of a New Force', *Quarterly Journal of Science*, 01January 1871  
<[http://www.mindserpent.com/American\\_History/books/Crookes/researches/investigation.htm](http://www.mindserpent.com/American_History/books/Crookes/researches/investigation.htm)> [accessed 05 January 2012].

<sup>85</sup> For a discussion of Crookes's article, see: Ruth Brandon, *The Spiritualists: The Passion for the Occult in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (London: George Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1983), pp. 77-87.

<sup>86</sup> As with the Fox sisters, Home is mentioned in just about every book on psychical research I have studied. For a concise description of Crookes and Home, see: Blum, pp. 44-49.

<sup>87</sup> See: Catherine Crowe, *The Night Side of Nature: or Ghosts and Ghost Seers*, ed. by Gillian Bennett, (London: Wordsworth, 2000), p. 18 and Herbert Mayo, *On the Truths Contained in Popular Superstitions: with an Account of Mesmerism* Second ed., (London: William Blackwood and Sons, 1851), p. 11.

not just settle for attacking Crookes's methods of investigation.<sup>88</sup> In an article originally published anonymously Carpenter also questioned Crookes's credentials as a scientist as well as his award of a Fellowship of the Royal Society. Carpenter intended to smear Crookes by inaccurately claiming the 'distinction' of his award of the Fellowship of the Royal Society was 'conferred on him with considerable hesitation'.<sup>89</sup> Carpenter writes 'we are assured, on the highest authority' that Crookes was regarded amongst his fellow chemists as a 'specialist of specialists, being totally destitute of any knowledge of Chemical Philosophy, and utterly untrustworthy as to any inquiry which requires more than technical knowledge for its successful conduct'.<sup>90</sup>

Despite Mortimer's less exalted position in the scientific community in *The Hound*, he could have found himself in a similar position to men such as Crookes and his reputation in his little community of Grimpen threatened. These men came from varied backgrounds and many had great scientific achievements to their credit. They each staked their reputation on endorsing the need for a vigorous examination of the limits of current scientific thought, a point raised by Carpenter in 'Spiritualism and its Recent Converts' (1871). He argues, 'a man may have acquired a high reputation as an investigator in one department of science, and yet be utterly untrustworthy in regard to another'.<sup>91</sup> In particular, this comment was aimed at Crookes; a man Carpenter argued was more of a 'specialist of specialists', an expert at coordinating and integrating the work of greater scientists who were experienced in scientific observation and experimentation. The trained scientific observer, Carpenter felt, would be less inclined to mistake spiritualism's legerdemain as evidence of an as yet unidentified law of

---

<sup>88</sup> Crookes's objectivity is questionable due to his subjective interpretation of evidence.

<sup>89</sup> William Benjamin Carpenter, 'Spiritualism and its Recent Converts', *The Quarterly Review*, 131 (October 1871), 301-353 (p.343) <<http://0-gateway.proquest.com.wam.leeds.ac.uk>> [accessed 09 December 2007].

<sup>90</sup> Ibid. See also: Brian Inglis, *Natural and Supernatural: A History of the Paranormal from Earliest Times to 1914* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1977), pp. 256-258.

<sup>91</sup> Carpenter, p. 340.

nature. The ‘average public’, he argues may perhaps be excused their ‘gullibility’, but ‘many of those who command’ the people’s ‘respect’, the ‘teachers of religion’ or the ‘successful scientific investigators’, are not.<sup>92</sup> His point echoes that of the article in *The Times* above, which argues that the scientists have failed to do their duty to the public by exposing the whole subject as nonsense. Carpenter argues that this failure ‘has made us reflect seriously as to what it is in our present system of education which constitutes the chief ‘predisposing cause’ of the Spiritualist epidemic’.<sup>93</sup>

There is, then, another possible interpretation of Mortimer’s reference to a “‘realm”” where the “‘most experienced of detectives is helpless””.<sup>94</sup> This is a shrewd comment as reputations could easily flounder if they contradicted orthodox methods of the scientific ‘realm’ of investigation. Holmes’s incredulity of Mortimer, made evident in his comment “[a]nd you, a trained man of science, believe it to be supernatural?”, raises questions about Mortimer’s capability in accurately investigating events such as the death of Sir Charles Baskerville.<sup>95</sup> Carpenter offers his own conclusion regarding the predisposition of some scientists in this field of enquiry. He argues that the fault lies in ‘*the deficiency of early scientific training*’ (Carpenter’s italics).<sup>96</sup> To make up this deficit would require a substantial reform of basic scientific training. Carpenter proposes a four point program centred on observation, induction, theorising and testing. Interestingly, this program and methodology also reflected part of what Jonathan Smith regards as the development of a hypothetico-deductive model of investigation based on the Victorian modification of Baconian theory. Carpenter’s first point urges the ‘acquirement of habits of correct *observation* of the phenomena daily taking place

---

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., p.351

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> *The Penguin Complete Sherlock Holmes*, p. 680.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., p. 681

<sup>96</sup> Carpenter, p. 351.

around us'.<sup>97</sup> This would be supplemented by the 'cultivation of the power of *reasoning* upon these phenomena' to enable an observer to 'arrive at *general principles* by the *inductive* process'.<sup>98</sup> His third point urges the 'testing the validity of such inductions by *experiment*' and finally the application of '*deductive*' principles 'acquired to the *prediction* of phenomena which can be verified by observation'.<sup>99</sup> One only has to look at the words italicized by Carpenter to recognise the elements of an investigation that would win Holmes's approval. Mortimer's role in *The Hound* highlights the criticisms scientists such as Crookes faced when lacking the objectivity required when investigating phenomena that may originate in either unknown laws of nature or the supernatural. When the supernatural is readily endorsed it denies the possibility of other methods of investigation located in the ordinary and extra-ordinary laws of nature. If Carpenter's definition of a deductive method could be used to locate such natural laws, it falls to Holmes in the novel to provide the illumination required when investigating unusual phenomena.

### **Sherlock Holmes, Deduction and the Investigation of Natural Law**

Holmes's method of investigation, his science of deduction, can be read as being congruent with that advocated by men such as Carpenter. Holmes's tactics are based upon theorizing after gathering as much relevant data as possible and then testing and modifying his thesis as more information is gathered. Carpenter's insistence on the use of 'observation' and 'reasoning' in order to arrive at 'general principles' based upon the 'inductive process', (the scientist's inference of general laws based upon his knowledge of the natural world), enable him to deduce explanations for particular phenomena. Like Holmes, such predictions are then 'verified' by future observations. What is of importance to the investigation of the hound is that unlike Mortimer, Holmes is able to

---

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid. pp. 351-52.

correctly interpret evidence while keeping his subjective self under control. Mortimer, along with other misguided witnesses on the moor, have been too eager to endorse popular superstition while misinterpreting witness reports and evidence as being supernatural. What they actually encounter is in fact a living hound covered in phosphorous, which leads them to believe that it is supernatural in origin. Their superstition is an important element in their interpretation of their correct observations, a fact brilliantly utilised by Stapleton. It was Sir Charles's morbid superstition and the fear of the family curse that contributed to his ill health and consequently to his death.

Holmes, however, is free from such superstition. In one of Watson's earliest recorded cases, 'A Scandal in Bohemia' (1891), he observes how Holmes's 'cold, precise but admirably balanced mind' enables his work as a 'trained reasoner'.<sup>100</sup> Holmes's mental faculty is of the type lauded by *The Times*, which explains how, 'the nature of the phenomena and of human nature are such as to force us to suspect imposture and legerdemain until we can satisfy ourselves of the true causes, whatever these may be'.<sup>101</sup> It is sentiments such as this that put Holmes onto the scent of Stapleton, once enough information has been gathered in his investigation. Carpenter urges scientists to investigate the claims of spiritualists and mediums seriously, and on their own terms, in order to expose them as fraudulent. This point is stressed in the article from *The Times*, which argues that scientists must 'meet the "mediums" on their

---

<sup>100</sup> *The Penguin Complete Sherlock Holmes*, p. 162.

<sup>101</sup> 'Spiritualism and Science', *The Times*, p. 5. *The Times* is of importance to Holmes in *The Hound*. Most of the words in the message warning Sir Henry not to return to his ancestral home are cut out of this newspaper and we learn that Holmes regards the study of newspaper typefaces as being "one of the most elementary branches of knowledge to the special expert in crime", describing *The Times*'s "leader" as "entirely distinctive", *The Penguin Complete Sherlock Holmes*, p. 687. *The Times* is referred to frequently in the Sherlock Holmes stories. In 'The Adventure of the Engineer's Thumb' (1892) Holmes reads the agony column of *The Times*, *ibid.*, p. 276. In 'The Adventure of the Noble Bachelor' (1892) Holmes claims the agony column "is always instructive", sometimes presenting clues in an investigation or offering him an insight into human nature, *ibid.*, p. 288.

own ground, and, if possible, cut that ground from under their feet'.<sup>102</sup> 'Surely', protests *The Times*, 'a scientific man is a match for a medium, even in the dark,' and if a scientist refuses to operate within the terms stipulated by a medium then the result is a success for the spiritualists: '[c]auses are not ascertained, delusions are not exposed, impositions are not detected, and the company of fools are confirmed in their belief'.<sup>103</sup> The article argues that if mediums will only agree to operate in darkened chambers then little is gained by a scientist's refusal to study them in this condition.

It is Holmes's interest in the unusual and the fantastic that draws him into investigations such as *The Hound*. Holmes is asked by Mortimer to offer advice on what course of action Sir Charles's heir should take after becoming the master of Baskerville Hall. As Holmes states, at the simplest level he is being hired for his advice, though this is not the only reason for his interest in the case. Holmes positions himself in society as a consulting detective, whose skills as an expert in criminal knowledge and expertise in a wide field of scientific enquiry are sought by potential clients in various difficulties and circumstances. In *A Study in Scarlet* in a chapter called 'The Science of Deduction' Holmes describes how his profession involves advising folk who are "in trouble about something and want a little enlightening".<sup>104</sup> In *The Sign of Four* (1890) Holmes describes himself as the "last and highest court of appeal in detection", who attempts to "examine the data, as an expert, and pronounce a specialist's opinion."<sup>105</sup> Holmes also admits he is driven by the need for mental stimulation to oppose his cocaine habit and occasionally Watson romanticises his friend's attitude, writing for example, how the consulting detective, 'like all great artists, lived for his art's sake'.<sup>106</sup>

---

<sup>102</sup> 'Spiritualism and Science', *The Times*, p. 5.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

<sup>104</sup> *The Penguin Complete Sherlock Holmes*, p. 24.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., p. 90.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., pp. 89-90 and p. 559.

In ‘The Five Orange Pips’ (1891) John Openshaw informs Holmes that his problem “‘is no ordinary one’”.<sup>107</sup> Holmes’s response, “[n]one of those which come to me are”, highlights the detective’s interest in the extraordinary occurrences that can occur to the most ordinary of people.<sup>108</sup> In Openshaw’s case the mystery is secular, as it is in ‘The Adventure of the Six Napoleons’ (1904), when Lestrade remarks to Holmes, “‘I know that you have a taste for all that is out of the common’”.<sup>109</sup> It is Watson who manages to encapsulate, as far as it is possible to do so, Holmes’s various reasons for embarking upon an investigation. In ‘The Adventure of the Speckled Band’ (1892), Watson notes his companion tended to enjoy ‘working’ for ‘the love of his art than for the acquirement of wealth, he refused to associate himself with any investigation which did not tend towards the unusual, and even the fantastic’.<sup>110</sup> Typically, Watson is unable to refrain from romanticising Holmes’s work, though it is his claim that the detective is attracted to ‘unusual’ and ‘even the fantastic’ that is of interest. In this case the word ‘fantastic’ could apply to the imaginations of Holmes’s clients who tend towards the strange and eccentric due to the excessive nature of their problems. However, Holmes’s interest in cases that are ‘fantastic’ in the sense that they are strange, eccentric or odd, leads him into territory that men such as Mortimer might associate with the supernatural.

Holmes’s fascination with ‘fantastic’ or odd cases demonstrates his interest in investigating unusual phenomena with potential to be misinterpreted as the supernatural. As we have seen in *The Hound*, Holmes rules out investigating the supernatural. This is because any such phenomena would violate a scientific and rational understanding of the natural world rendering Holmes’s science of deduction ineffective. Holmes does

---

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., p. 219.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid., p. 583.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid., p. 257.



concede that if unusual phenomena exist within ordinary or even undetermined extraordinary laws of nature, then such cases can be investigated. Holmes's method enables him to correctly interpret various phenomena that counter superstition through the application of natural laws. Importantly, an unwillingness to investigate hitherto unknown laws of nature leaves you at the mercy of those that do, such as in the case of Professor Gilroy in *The Parasite* (1894), as discussed in chapter two. When confronted by unusual phenomena that do not fit easily into a narrow definition of what is possible in the natural world, a superstitious individual is more likely to consider a supernatural explanation. This can leave you at the mercy of sophisticated tricksters like Stapleton in *The Hound*. His use of the Baskerville legend and Mortimer's willingness to endorse and investigate this apparent supernatural phenomenon allows Stapleton to take advantage of those superstitious or the gullible regardless of their scientific training or lack thereof. In contrast, with an objective, deductive method that considers all natural law, ordinary or extra-ordinary, there can be a thorough investigation. For Doyle, Holmes is the vehicle of such an idea. In *The Hound*, it is important to note that there are no extra-ordinary natural laws in evidence, but what Doyle is suggesting is that the method is the same for both instances; this is the significance of Doyle's advocacy of a psychic science in *The Hound* that does not accept a supernatural explanation, but considers the need to examine the hitherto unknown laws of nature that can explain unusual phenomena.

### **Stapleton, Phosphorous and Fraudulent Mediums**

As we have seen, Doyle's belief in the investigation of natural laws is evident in *The Hound*. It is important to re-evaluate Stapleton's role in the novel to further consider Doyle's position on the supernatural. While it is appropriate to read the triumph of Baker Street empiricism over rural superstition as a theme of *The Hound*, it

is also fitting to recognise the novel's relevance to the development of Doyle's argument that phenomena misinterpreted as supernatural actually originated in the natural world. Stapleton plays a vital role in this reading because, as we shall see, he can be interpreted as sharing qualities similar to fraudulent mediums. In Doyle's broader interest of investigating spiritualism, Stapleton's role can be read as a further example of how it should be investigated using an empirical method. Holmes's investigative tactics are similar to those advocated by *The Times*. As we have seen, *The Times* argues scientists must 'meet the "mediums" on their own ground, and, if possible, cut that ground from under their feet'.<sup>111</sup> The inverted commas enclosing 'mediums' indicates scepticism as to their professed ability to contact the dead. In *The Hound* Stapleton is not a medium. He is unable to truly summon a spirit hound, unlike the medium in Doyle's short-story 'Playing with Fire' (1900), discussed in chapter four, who conjures such an entity before losing control over it. Instead, Stapleton operates in the same manner as some fraudulent mediums, in particular through his use of phosphorous on the hound to give it a spectral appearance. It is his use of this chemical that exposes his role in the novel. His use of phosphorous is congruent with some mediums who used it in their séances to dupe the gullible, something Doyle and other investigators would have been aware of.

In Doyle's *The Parasite*, Professor Gilroy reveals some of the problems prevalent in visiting a séance during the late Victorian period. He also offers an insight into the use of phosphorous. He notes in his journal how, '[w]ith the paid performer you may pounce upon him and expose him the instant that you have seen through his trick. He is there to deceive you, and you are there to find him out'.<sup>112</sup> Gilroy's statement is reminiscent of those investigators who attended séances in order to expose fraudulent

---

<sup>111</sup> 'Spiritualism and Science', *The Times*, 26 December 1872, p. 5.

<sup>112</sup> Catherine Wynne, *The Parasite & The Watter's Mou* (Kansas MO: Valencourt, 2009), p. 7.

mediums. Most séances took place in darkened rooms and occasionally the medium would remain concealed behind heavy curtains or even a large box with a chair to which they could be secured with ropes. In exposing a spiritualist medium, who may well be close in some fashion to a friend or colleague, Gilroy acknowledges this is a potential problem and speculates as to a course of action should he encounter fraudulent behaviour in the domestic séance room:<sup>113</sup>

Are you to turn on a light suddenly and expose her slapping a surreptitious banjo? Or are you to hurl cochineal over her evening frock when she steals round with her phosphorus bottle and her supernatural platitude?<sup>114</sup>

In the above extract, Gilroy contemplates the scene caused by his unexpected action of turning the light on and catching a medium playing a musical instrument that was supposed to have been played by a spirit. Such spirit activities were common in the séances of amateur and paid performer alike, and were featured in the displays of such psychics as Home, the Davenport Brothers and Eusapia Palladino, to name a few.<sup>115</sup> Gilroy's reference to 'cochineal', a dark coloured dye obtained from pulverised insects, is intended to cover an apparent spirit projection created by the medium.<sup>116</sup> Typically, a hidden item such as a glove or piece of cloth would be coated in 'luminous oil, made of

---

<sup>113</sup> For a discussion of mesmerism, spiritualism and the domestic space, see: Wynne, 'Arthur Conan Doyle's Domestic Desires: Mesmerism, Mediumship and *Femmes Fatales*', in *Victorian Literary Mesmerism*, ed. by Martin Willis and Catherine Wynne, Costerus New Series, 160 (New York: Rodopi B. V., 2006), pp. 223-243.

<sup>114</sup> Wynne, *The Parasite & The Watter's Mou*, p. 7.

<sup>115</sup> There are many accounts of these activities in print. See, for example, Blum who gives a full account of Home, the Davenports and Palladino amongst others.

<sup>116</sup> In 1880 Stuart Cumberland, a mind-reader, 'squirted a materialised visiting spirit with cochineal, stubborn traces of which remained on the face of the medium after the lights had come up', Roger Luckhurst, 'Passages in the Invention of the Psyche: Mind-reading in London 1881-84' in *Transactions and Encounters: Science and Culture in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. by Roger Luckhurst and Josephine McDonagh (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), pp. 117-150 (p.123).

phosphorus' and mixed with other chemicals that would glow faintly in a darkened room.<sup>117</sup> Such obvious trickery was usually accepted by those desperate to believe.

In 1855, Robert Browning, at his wife's request, attended a séance held by Home. Browning already held a low opinion of mediums in general, but developed a dislike of Home despite his wife's enthusiasm for the supernatural.<sup>118</sup> Whatever the cause of Robert Browning's aversion to Home, he was never able to catch the medium deceiving his audience. In 1864, Browning released *Dramatis Personae* including the poem 'Mr Sludge, "The Medium"', based on Home.<sup>119</sup> In this poem Sludge is caught cheating and he makes a brazen confession of his trickery to the poem's narrator:

[...] I cheated when I could,  
Rapped with my toe-joints, set sham hands at  
work,  
Wrote down names weak in sympathetic ink,  
Rubbed odic lights with ends of phosphor-match,  
And all the rest.<sup>120</sup>

Like Doyle, Browning shows knowledge of the trickery employed by fraudulent mediums. Sludge's rapping with his 'toe-joints' is a reference to some explanations for the raps heard in the presence of the Fox sisters for example, and the 'sympathetic ink' is invisible ink, possibly used in preparation of so-called spirit writing. His 'sham hands', above, suggests the use of false hands used like the 'glove' operated '[a]t end o' your [the medium's] slipper'.<sup>121</sup> Such artificial limbs could have been prepared with 'the ends of phosphor-match' enabling it to glow with 'odic lights', above. Podmore notes that at a séance in Springfield U.S.A. on the 25 May 1851, lights were seen to appear and move around the darkened room. Podmore quotes an account stating how

---

<sup>117</sup> Blum, p. 29.

<sup>118</sup> See: Oppenheim, pp. 12-13 and Blum, pp. 27-30.

<sup>119</sup> Daniel Karlin notes that Browning claimed to have caught Home 'in the act of cheating'. Home retaliated by claiming Browning was jealous because the "spirits" had crowned [Browning's] wife with a wreath during the séance and passed him over'. Robert Browning *Selected Poems*, ed. By Daniel Karlin (London: Penguin, 1989; repr. 2004), p. 324.

<sup>120</sup> Browning, p. 226 (l. 800- 805).

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 216 (l. 447-448).

the lights “sometimes” resembled “phosphorescent flames, sometimes forming luminous clouds”.<sup>122</sup> The validity of this observation is called into question by Podmore, although the presence of the adjective ‘phosphorescent’ by a man accustomed to activities of mediums suggests a familiarity with the properties of this chemical in such circles.

In J. W. Daniels’s *Spiritualism Versus Christianity; or, Spiritualism Thoroughly Exposed* (1856), spiritualism is attacked as being the ‘anti-christian movement of the present age, and one of the worst delusions which has ever afflicted the world’.<sup>123</sup> While recognising that most cases of spiritualism are fraudulent, Daniels argues ‘the reality of many of the manifestations, and that the phenomena are utterly inexplicable on any other hypothesis than that of spiritual agency’.<sup>124</sup> Here, spiritualism represents a danger to society because their work is not ‘the work of God, of holy angels, nor departed saints. We deem the intercourse sinful, fascinating, deceptive and very dangerous’.<sup>125</sup> As Oppenheim notes, the official stance of the Church of England is one of ‘longstanding opposition to the conjuring of spirits or any other kind of unconsecrated magic’.<sup>126</sup> Spiritualism posed a threat to Anglican authority at a time when it was under increasing pressure from science and alternative spiritual beliefs. It is also possible to detect a note of genuine concern in Daniels’s work as to the nature of the spirits allegedly contacted during séances. Daniels records an account of a séance during which spirit hands were alleged to have materialised. To enable those sitting at the table to witness the movement of the hands, ‘a weak *solution of phosphorus*’ (Daniels’s

---

<sup>122</sup> Podmore, *Modern Spiritualism*, I, p. 233.

<sup>123</sup> J. W. Daniels, *Spiritualism Versus Christianity; or, Spiritualism Thoroughly Exposed* (New York: Miller Orton & Mulligan, 1856), p. vii. <[http://books.google.com/books?id=SNbc\\_Xkaz8IC](http://books.google.com/books?id=SNbc_Xkaz8IC)> [accessed 09 February 2008].

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, p. viii.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>126</sup> Oppenheim, p. 68.

italics) was prepared in advance.<sup>127</sup> The hands would immerse themselves in this solution to provide enough light for the witnesses to see them by. The account continues by stating “Spirit-hands with phosphorus upon them passed around the room” adopting “various ways and positions, which no mortal hand could assume or occupy – demonstrating them to be veritable spirit-hands”.<sup>128</sup> While such exhibitions were fraudulent, the use of phosphorus in this case was to enable a witness to see an object that was supposed to have been a supernatural materialisation. The phosphorus was prepared in advance to enable the ‘spirit-hands’ to become visible in the dark, unlike the displays in which hidden objects, such as pieces of material for example, were secretly covered with phosphorous to give it an eerie appearance.

Phosphorus was employed by the Davenport brothers, Ira and William, in their stage shows that crossed the Atlantic from America in the mid-nineteenth century. A report for *The Manchester Weekly Times* describes the events occurring during a private séance held by the brothers.<sup>129</sup> The séance was held in darkness and the brothers were tied by several guests before taking their seats and a ‘tambourine, a guitar, and a bell’ were placed on a table behind the two brothers.<sup>130</sup> Before long the ‘sound of the notes of the guitar was heard, floating in the air about the room’, followed by the tambourine.<sup>131</sup> Such sights and sounds were doubtlessly experienced in various dining rooms across the country. What distinguishes the Davenport brothers is the theatricality of their performance. Being bound by ropes and fastened to chairs was the hallmark of such entertainers as Harry Houdini and those familiar with stage magicians would be on the lookout for fraudulent activity. A second aspect of their performance was the use of

---

<sup>127</sup> Daniels, p. 24.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid., p. 25.

<sup>129</sup> ‘The Davenport Brothers’, *The Manchester Weekly Times*, 11 February 1865, p. 2, in *19<sup>th</sup> Century British Newspapers* <<http://find.galegroup.com>> [accessed 21 December 2007].

<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid.

phosphorous. The article continues to describe how ‘the experiment of applying phosphoric oil to the guitar and tambourine was also exceedingly successful’.<sup>132</sup> The word ‘experiment’ in this quotation offers some insight into the close proximity of science and theatricality in the public mind.<sup>133</sup> The writer notes ‘[s]mall phosphoric points were seen floating dimly in the air, and carried almost to the ceiling, without, of course, visible intervention’.<sup>134</sup> The tone of the article is sceptical and it regards such phenomena as being entertaining puzzles rather than spiritually enlightening. The article concludes by judging the Davenport’s ‘displays’ are ‘sufficiently good, puzzling, exciting and inexplicable to merit the highest commendation’.<sup>135</sup> The above examples demonstrate how phosphorus is used to convince an audience as to their ability to summon supernatural powers during a séance. Doyle’s familiarity with phosphorous during a séance is of significance to considering Stapleton as employing the qualities of a fraudulent medium.

The obvious presence of séances and mediums are absent from *The Hound*, at least in its form as a novel. In the book, Mortimer informs Holmes that there are frequent gatherings of the few “‘men of education’” in close proximity to Baskerville Hall, who discuss their shared “‘interests in science’”.<sup>136</sup> These gatherings are evocative of Doyle’s involvement in similar, albeit larger, societies in his early years in Southsea discussed in my introduction to this thesis. It would not be too far a stretch to imagine the scientific discussion or experimentation possibly undertaken at these gatherings. Holmes informs Watson, “[t]here is our friend Dr. Mortimer, whom I believe to be

---

<sup>132</sup> Ibid.

<sup>133</sup> Martin Willis, ‘On Wonder: Situating the Spectacle in Spiritualism and Performance Magic’, in *Popular Exhibitions, Science and Showmanship, 1840-1910*, ed. by Joe Kember, John Plunkett and Jill A Sullivan, *Science and Culture in the Nineteenth Century*, 16 (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2012), pp. 167-182.

<sup>134</sup> ‘The Davenport Brothers’, *The Manchester Weekly Times*, p. 2.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid.

<sup>136</sup> *The Penguin Complete Sherlock Holmes*, p. 678.

entirely honest, and there is his wife, of whom we know nothing”<sup>137</sup> Frayling notes the significance of this observation arguing, ‘we never, in fact, discover anything more about Mrs Mortimer’.<sup>138</sup> She exists merely to provide an ‘excuse’ for Mortimer to return home swiftly ‘rather than stay all the time with the others at Baskerville Hall’.<sup>139</sup> It does seem that her presence serves simply as a plot device in the novel. However, subsequent screen adaptations expand Mrs Mortimer’s character making her a medium. The inclusion of a séance elevates the supernatural element in the story.<sup>140</sup> Frayling speculates that the inclusion of a séance in the 1939 adaptation ‘was probably a reference to Conan Doyle’s own much-publicised interest, a little later in his life, in spiritualism’.<sup>141</sup> In doing so, this film also contributes further into considering Stapleton’s role sharing qualities of a fraudulent medium. This is because, as I have demonstrated, Doyle’s Holmes stories can be read in concordance with his wider range of writings that focus upon spiritualism as well as other potential supernatural phenomena.

In the 1939 film adaptation of *The Hound* Mrs. Mortimer offers to contact Sir Charles Baskerville’s spirit to resolve the mystery surrounding his death. In the film, Frankland, Mortimer, Watson, Sir Henry and the Stapletons gather at Merripit House. Mrs Mortimer’s séance is disrupted by the sound of the Hound howling on the moor. The BBC’s 2002 adaptation of *The Hound* also includes the séance but it builds upon Stapleton’s association with the tricks deployed by fraudulent mediums.<sup>142</sup> In this

---

<sup>137</sup> Ibid., p. 699.

<sup>138</sup> Doyle, *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, ed. Christopher Frayling (London: Penguin Classics, 2001; repr. 2003), p. 179.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid.

<sup>140</sup> *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, dir. by Sidney Lanfield (20th Century Fox, 1939) [on DVD]. David Stuart Davies notes in his commentary accompanying the 2007 DVD release of the 1939 adaptation, this change to the narrative greatly increases the supernatural atmosphere of the film, something that is easily missed in adapting the novel for cinema

<sup>141</sup> Frayling, p. 179.

<sup>142</sup> *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, dir. by David Attwood (BBC: 2002) [on DVD].



adaptation, Mrs Mortimer succeeds in contacting Sir Charles although she too is interrupted by the hound. What is of significance here, however, is that the hound itself makes an appearance. The séance is interrupted by its giant paw striking the window. It is not, however, by chance that the hound arrives at Merripit House. It is, in fact, summoned by Stapleton blowing a dog whistle, a movement disguised by his hand rising to his face to cover a cough. In this adaptation of the novel, Stapleton's actions are very similar to those of a fraudulent medium. A letter published in the *Liverpool Mercury* records the experiences of one guest at a private séance held by the Davenport Brothers.<sup>143</sup> Signed only by 'Investigator', this letter notes the activities of the brothers after the lights are lowered in the room, immediately before the alleged supernatural phenomena began:

Mr. William Davenport begins to give a series of low coughs, as if he had an affection of the throat, which does not trouble him when the gas is lighted.<sup>144</sup>

'Investigator', a name aptly suited to this particular witness, argues that the 'series of low coughs' are a pre-arranged signal for a hidden person to begin manipulating the various props in the darkened room. Stapleton, a man who is not playing the part of a medium, nonetheless disguises his pre-arranged signal to summon the supposedly supernatural hound. The fact that he uses a séance to produce his supernatural phenomena illustrates the extent to which he can be compared with a fraudulent medium. These ideas are not solely located in the screen adaptations. Stapleton's use of other methods employed by fraudulent mediums is implicit in the original novel.

---

<sup>143</sup> 'The Davenport Brothers', *The Liverpool Mercury*, 15 February 1865, p. 7, in *19<sup>th</sup> Century British Newspapers* <<http://find.galegroup.com>> [accessed 21 December 2007].

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.*

### “Meet the ‘mediums’ on their own ground” – Exposing the Fraudulent Medium

In the novel of *The Hound Stapleton* is successful in recreating not only a fraudulent spectacle of the supernatural, but a brilliant recreation of the legend of the hound of the Baskervilles. Stapleton gathers enough information to perpetrate a crime based on the appearance of a devil-hound, a trick dependent on the victim’s belief in the supernatural. He cultivates a friendship with Sir Charles in order to discover a weakness to exploit. This becomes apparent in his conversation with Watson during their first meeting on the moor. Stapleton informs Watson that Sir Charles’s “nerves were so worked up that the appearance of any dog might have had a fatal effect upon his diseased heart”.<sup>145</sup> Stapleton also admits to knowing that Sir Charles’s “heart was weak” because Mortimer had told him.<sup>146</sup> Later in the novel, Holmes tells Watson Stapleton’s plot was “suggested, of course, by the story of the family hell-hound, and by the desire to frighten old Sir Charles to death”.<sup>147</sup> Stapleton was already aware of Sir Charles’s fear of the supernatural as he admits to Watson that the legend of the hound of the Baskervilles “took a great hold upon the imagination of Sir Charles, and I have no doubt that it led to his tragic end”, cold-bloodedly admitting to the baronet’s murder.<sup>148</sup> Stapleton attempts to repeat the same tactic with his second victim, Sir Henry. He asks: “Sir Henry has, I suppose, no superstitious fears in the matter?”<sup>149</sup>

This type of research into the backgrounds of potential targets was frequently

---

<sup>145</sup> *The Penguin Complete Sherlock Holmes*, p. 706.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.* It is significant that Watson appears undisturbed by Stapleton’s admission because, if true, this compromises Mortimer’s position as a medical practitioner. The Hippocratic Oath has provided an ethical standard for doctors since ancient Greece see: ‘Hippocratic Oath’ in *The Royal Society of Medicine Health Encyclopedia* <<http://www.credoreference.com/entry/2229054>> [Accessed 2 March 2008]. One element of this Oath, translated from ancient Greek, is: ‘[w]hatever I see or hear, professionally or privately, which ought not to be divulged, I will keep secret and tell no one’, Roy Porter, *The Greatest Benefit to Mankind: A Medical History of Humanity from Antiquity to the Present* (London: Harper Collins, 1997; repr. 1999), p. 63. Mortimer’s unethical violation of doctor – patient confidentiality provides further evidence that he is not the expert critics assume him to be.

<sup>147</sup> *The Penguin Complete Sherlock Holmes*, p. 760.

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 706.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*

undertaken by fraudulent mediums, who like Stapleton, were interested in financial gain. Associates of a medium would visit churchyards to investigate the tombstones for information, or to research old newspapers, or even to interview distant family-members or friends.<sup>150</sup>

Stapleton uses research and phosphorous, two tactics utilised by fraudulent mediums, in order to manipulate the superstitious fears of Sir Charles as well as those who are disinclined to believe. Stapleton's hound momentarily paralyses Holmes and Watson upon their encounter with it on the moor. Watson's description of the hound is comparable with the beast of legend. Watson notes, '[n]ever in the delirious dream of a disordered brain could anything more savage, more appalling, more hellish be conceived than that dark form and savage face' of Stapleton's hound.<sup>151</sup> Watson observes how the hound had 'eyes' that 'glowed with a smouldering glare, its muzzle and hackles and dewlap were outlined in flickering flame'.<sup>152</sup> This substance is immediately recognised by Holmes as phosphorous, a chemical in common use in industry until its corrosive effects were later discovered.<sup>153</sup> Holmes describes the phosphorus as a "cunning preparation" which has no scent to impede the hound's sense of smell.<sup>154</sup> Stapleton's plan was to use a dog bought in London from a dealer called 'Ross and Mangles', which Holmes describes as the "strongest and most savage in their possession".<sup>155</sup> Holmes explains that an "ordinary schemer would have been content to work with a savage hound", but Stapleton's "use of artificial means to

---

<sup>150</sup> Blum, p. 141. Brandon notes, '[w]hen a medium visited a new town, he was advised to visit the local cemetery and make a note of names, dates and any other information to be obtained from the tombstones', p. 46.

<sup>151</sup> *The Penguin Complete Sherlock Holmes*, p. 757.

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>153</sup> Doyle, *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, ed. by W. W. Robson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), pp. 187-188.

<sup>154</sup> *The Penguin Complete Sherlock Holmes*, p. 757.

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 762.

make the creature diabolical was a flash of genius upon his part”<sup>156</sup> Its supernatural appearance, combined with the fog on the moor, is described by Watson as an ‘apparition’.<sup>157</sup> Here Doyle’s language strongly evokes the ghostly apparitions that appeared at the séances of fraudulent mediums and stage conjurors. In *The Hound* this is a momentary phase, caused mainly by the eerie glow of the phosphorus in the dark. It is dispelled entirely by Holmes and Watson’s gunshots that wound the hound. Watson concludes if the hound ‘was vulnerable he was mortal, and if we could wound him we could kill him’.<sup>158</sup> As the pair confidently move to destroy Stapleton’s hound, the fraudulent methods that made the apparition ‘diabolical’ is finally exposed as originating within the ordinary laws of nature. Thematically the supremacy of Holmes’s Baker Street empiricism is imposed over the superstitious atmosphere of Stapleton’s moor. If the hound is not supernatural, then Holmes is in a position to investigate. When Watson encounters Holmes on the moor, the detective admits that his case against Stapleton remains mostly circumstantial. Holmes explains how he did not have “‘a case which could go to a jury’”.<sup>159</sup> The crucial piece of evidence Holmes lacks is “‘the connection between the man and the beast’”, or the link between Stapleton and his hound.<sup>160</sup> In order to prove this connection, Holmes argues that he had “‘no alternative but to catch [Stapleton] red-handed’” by using Sir Henry as “‘bait’” which proves to be a dangerous experiment.<sup>161</sup> Holmes succeeds in exposing the hound as a fraud, but only after it has attacked his client. As *The Times* suggests, Holmes meets the fake medium on his own ground by challenging Stapleton’s supremacy of the moor. Holmes is that “‘scientific man” who is “‘a match for a medium, even in the dark’”, ascertaining the

---

<sup>156</sup> Ibid.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid., p. 757.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid., p. 765.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid., p. 744.

<sup>161</sup> Ibid., p. 765.

cause and exposing the delusion.<sup>162</sup> In the novel, Holmes has the skills to investigate ordinary and extra-ordinary laws of nature. This, coupled with Stapleton as a fraudulent medium, allows a reading of *The Hound* as Doyle's earlier expression of how to investigate unusual phenomena that may be misinterpreted as supernatural.

William Benjamin Carpenter argued that the public are gullible when it comes to the supernatural. Superstition is brilliantly utilised by Stapleton who makes use of Sir Charles's ill health and morbid fear. Mortimer's belief in the supernatural limits the scientific potential of what can occur in the natural world. The failure of those who tried to explain or, indeed, to expose spiritualism as fraud were also perceived as being unable to protect the public, a duty they had on trust. William Crookes claimed to apply scientific rigour to his investigation of Home. His methodology was questionable, as was his attachment to his cause and eventually his reputation as an arbiter on such issues was discredited due to his subjective interpretation of evidence. Despite his less exalted position, Mortimer is in danger of placing himself in a similar position as Crookes. Carpenter argued that ignorance and superstition are the root causes of the spiritualist epidemic and it explains the influence of its more fanatical adherents. The inhabitants of the moor, combined with Sir Charles's fear of the family curse and Mortimer's uncertainty, illustrate how the whole of society is at risk of exploitation at the hands of merciless tricksters like Stapleton. Baker Street empiricism counters the gullible and the superstitious. In *The Hound*, Holmes examines data as an expert and renders a specialist's opinion. He does not openly declare, or privately confess to an interest in investigating spiritualism. However, a bohemian streak admits a cocaine addiction and a need for mental stimulation, which reveals itself in his interest in unorthodox and extraordinary cases. This leads him occasionally into territory others

---

<sup>162</sup> 'Spiritualism and Science', *The Times*, p. 5.

might consider to be supernatural although his investigations are rooted firmly in the natural world. An occurrence of a phenomenon beyond what Holmes calls ordinary laws of nature would result in the end of his investigation. However, the possibility of extra-ordinary laws of nature, phenomena that have not yet been explained by science is held in reserve. While this is not manifest in *The Hound*, it is concurrent within the wider context of Doyle's fictional and non-fictional writings.

Stapleton is not presented as a medium in *The Hound*. The manner in which he manipulates those who are fearful of the Baskerville curse, as well as those who are generally superstitious, associates him with the tactics used by fraudulent mediums. His use of phosphorus, a chemical regularly used in séances in this period, is just one tactic that he has in common with these tricksters. Stapleton researches the histories and characters of his intended victims, a feature of elaborate deceptions of the clients of some mediums, who booked 'sittings' in advance. In *The Hound*, Holmes's exposure of Stapleton's fraudulent manipulation of the supernatural demonstrates Doyle's broader argument for the investigation of such phenomena. Holmes's investigative method is capable of meeting fraudulent mediums on their own ground. It is a method of enquiry that leaves open the possibility of extra-ordinary laws of nature that are explainable by science, although this is beyond the scope of *The Hound*. Consequently, such an investigator retains the potential to explore the limits of natural law in order to explain unusual phenomena.

Doyle's 'A New Light on Old Crimes' argues that the term "supernatural", was problematic. Like many advocates of such studies, he argues that his contemporaries should be prepared to expand their understanding of natural law. In doing so, he felt underlying and as yet unnoticed laws of nature would become evident, needing a new branch of study that, with its new terminology, would make the need to misinterpret

unusual phenomena as supernatural in origin redundant. Doyle's essay was published nearly thirty years after *The Hound* at which time he had not yet arrived at this position. However, Doyle's argument in his essay, namely that no psychic explanation should be considered until all other possibilities have been exhausted, with its proximity to Holmes's thoughts on the natural world in *The Hound* indicates that he was already on this path. After Doyle's public advocacy of spiritualism in 1916 he became more confident in expressing a spiritualist message in his fiction. This eventually included the conversion of dedicated materialists such as Professor Challenger in *The Lost World*. However, at the time of writing *The Hound* Doyle was not ready to include a dramatic conversion of Holmes the materialist into a spiritualist. Instead Doyle utilised Sherlock Holmes to express his ideas on what traits were necessary to investigate misinterpreted supernatural phenomena. I argue for a significantly different reading of *The Hound*, in that Doyle's purpose in writing this novel is to highlight the necessity and manner of investigating unusual phenomena in a scientifically credible manner. As we shall see in the next chapter, Doyle further contests what he perceived as the limitations of scientific orthodoxy's obstinacy in refusing to expand investigative boundaries. It is through his interest in imperialism and exploration that medical self-experimentation with an exotic drug in another Sherlock Holmes story 'The Adventure of the Devil's Foot' (1910), can provide a further method of investigating unusual phenomena.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Exploration and Medical Self-experimentation in ‘The Adventure of the Devil’s Foot’

In my first three chapters I explored Doyle’s ideas of how unusual phenomena could be misinterpreted as being supernatural and how his investigative process into the unknown aspects of the natural world is expressed in *The Hound of the Baskervilles* (1902). Having investigated the religious, medical and scientific origins of this process, I now turn to Doyle’s lifelong interest in imperialism and exploration. In this chapter I examine the historical context of explorers and their discovery of unusual toxins. Doyle’s interest in imperial fiction interacts with his medical knowledge via the variety of drugs returned to England by explorers. In chapter two I introduced Doyle’s notion of the romance of medicine, its emphasis of courage and fortitude as a response to the more unpleasant facts of medical practice. In this chapter I read the historical context of self-experimentation as representing another facet of Doyle’s romance of medicine, a subject worthy of inclusion in *Round the Red Lamp* (1894). I explore how self-experimentation evidences a form of scientific exploration capable of uncovering unknown phenomena that can be incorporated into an understanding of hitherto unknown laws of nature. In this chapter I discuss Holmes and Watson’s self-experiment with a deadly hallucinogen brought to England by Dr Leon Sterndale, an explorer of Africa. Empire, exploration and medical self-experimentation merge in ‘The Adventure of the Devil’s Foot’ (1910), a theme influenced by Doyle’s youthful exposure to historical explorers and their interest in exotic toxins. However, it is Watson’s experiences while under the influence of Sterndale’s deadly hallucinogen that I read as being similar to the type of spirit encounters that occur in Doyle’s later spiritualist writings and science fiction and discussed in chapter five. In the ‘Devil’s Foot’ Watson



is in a similar condition to those visionaries in Doyle's earlier fictions, as discussed in chapter one of my thesis. Watson's encounter with a potential spirit-entity while under the influence of the Devil's-foot root drug can also be read alongside some of Doyle's non-Sherlock Holmes stories that portray creatures and realms existing at the limits of the known laws of the natural world as well as indicating the dangers associated when experimenting with spiritualism.

Doyle's interest in medical self-experimentation began early in life. In June 1879, while residing as a medical assistant at Dr Reginald Ratcliff Hoare's practice in Birmingham, Doyle wrote a letter to his mother Mary that contained alarming news. While still only a third year medical student at Edinburgh University Doyle wrote:

I have been experimenting upon myself with Gelsemium.<sup>1</sup>  
Mrs H[oare] said she would write to you unless I stopped  
it. I increased my dose until I reached 200 minims, and  
had some curious physiological results.<sup>2</sup>

He did not explain that these 'curious physiological results' included difficulty in focussing his eyesight, depression, lassitude, headaches and debilitating diarrhoea, which forced him to conclude his self-experiment with this drug after one week.<sup>3</sup> It was not just these effects of gelsemium that alarmed Dr Hoare's wife, however; the drug is also highly toxic.<sup>4</sup> Part of the reason for Doyle's risky self-experiment is due to his desire to progress his medical career. At a time when the medical profession was

---

<sup>1</sup> Gelseminum, or gelsemium, 'is the dried' root of 'yellow jasmine. Its actions are similar to those of nicotine, but with a stronger central depressant action'. During this period the drug was used in treating 'pneumonia, pleurisy, neuralgia and intermittent and yellow fevers', Rodin and Key, *Medical Casebook of Doctor Arthur Conan Doyle: From Practitioner to Sherlock Holmes and Beyond* (Malabar FL: Robert E Krieger Publishing Company, 1984), p. 82.

<sup>2</sup> *Arthur Conan Doyle: A Life in Letters*, ed. by Jon Lellenberg, Daniel Stashower and Charles Foley (London: Harper Collins, 2007), p. 117.

<sup>3</sup> Doyle, 'Gelseminum as a Poison', *British Medical Journal*, 2.977 (20 September 1879), 481- 484 (p. 483), Repr. in Darby, pp. 265-266 (p. 265).

<sup>4</sup> Rodin and Key, *Medical Casebook*, p. 323. Doyle was aware of the drug's toxicity and the dangers of exceeding the commonly regarded safe dosage. In 'Gelseminum as a Poison', he noted his actions were in 'spite of a case described some time ago in which 75 minims proved fatal', Darby, p. 265.

saturated with young medical graduates, there was a need to stand out professionally.

Once again, Doyle explained his strategy to his mother in a letter during 1882.

Let me once gain my footing in a good hospital and my game is clear – observe cases minutely, improve in my profession, write to the *Lancet*, supplement my income by literature, make friends and conciliate everyone I meet, wait ten years if need be, and when my chance comes be prompt and decisive in stepping into an honorary surgeonship.<sup>5</sup>

Writing to the *British Medical Journal* while still an undergraduate reveals the seriousness and the ambition of his medical talent. This is also indicated by the professional standard of his case study. In ‘Gelseminum as a Poison’ (1879), Doyle carefully recorded the effects of increasing doses of self-administered tincture displaying his keen observational skills. He explained his rationale: ‘I determined to ascertain how far one might go in taking the drug, and what the primary symptoms of an overdose might be’.<sup>6</sup> While sounding dangerous and reckless, Doyle was far from being a solitary practitioner of self-experiments. Rodin and Key describe this experiment as ‘an apparent example of the selfless contribution of a medical student to the delineation of the side effects of a drug’, a tradition that, as we shall see, was firmly established at Doyle’s university.<sup>7</sup> In fact, what might have made Doyle’s project appear as reckless was not the relevant concern expressed by his employer’s wife, because such concern was and is, all too common. It was his potentially dangerous conclusion, ‘a healthy adult may take as much as 90 minims with perfect immunity’ that could be questioned on the basis that it generalised the effects of a drug based on a very narrow field of research.<sup>8</sup> In Doyle’s case, he was a student practicing with incredibly limited resources, a reasonable mitigation of this criticism. It does, however, reveal another aspect of

---

<sup>5</sup> Lellenberg, Stashower and Foley, *A Life in Letters*, pp. 152-153.

<sup>6</sup> Darby, p. 265

<sup>7</sup> Rodin and Key, *Medical Casebook*, p. 82.

<sup>8</sup> Darby, p.265.

Doyle's character – a love of risk and adventure that characterised his early life in particular.<sup>9</sup> This is at least one trait that Doyle shared with his fictional imperial heroes as well as Sherlock Holmes.

In the Sherlock Holmes stories, a significant number of cases portray Holmes as a student of chemistry, a skill that assists his role as a consulting detective. This chapter examines a number of these stories that are relevant to a study of Doyle's personal interest in chemistry. Doyle utilised his knowledge of chemistry in his detective fiction, although I read its significance as being more important than its use as a criminal weapon or as an investigative tool for Holmes to catch them with. For Doyle, chemistry was yet another vehicle for his interest in expanding the known boundaries of the natural world. In the 'Devil's Foot', identifying the effects of sustained exposure to the drug is vital to understanding the strange death of two people and the insanity of a further two victims. Holmes focuses his investigation into the properties of the Devil's-foot root, a fictional hallucinogenic drug, used as a weapon of vengeance in a family feud over the division of property. Yet as we shall see later in this chapter, it is this moment of Holmes and Watson's self-experimentation and rationalisation that provides the potential of witnessing unusual phenomena that exist within hitherto unknown laws of nature.

### **Strange Toxic Effects: Hallucinogenic Drugs in the 'Devil's Foot'**

As with Holmes and Watson's investigation in *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, a belief in superstition and a misunderstanding of the cause of the crime raises the possibility of a misinterpreted supernatural threat. In the 'Devil's Foot', the first instance of this possibility occurs when Mortimer Tregennis relates the circumstances of

---

<sup>9</sup> Rodin and Key, *Medical Casebook*, p.83. An example of Doyle's reckless taste for adventure occurred in 1880 while serving on board a whaling ship. Doyle took to the ice during a seal hunting expedition against the captain's advice. Unobserved by the crew, he slipped into the water before fortuitously hauling himself out by grasping the flipper of a dead seal upon the ice narrowly avoiding death, Arthur Conan Doyle, *Memories and Adventures* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), pp. 40-41.

his sister's death and the madness of his two brothers. Tregennis had visited the three the night before the incident and they had spent a quiet evening playing cards. Tregennis had left the group sometime after ten in the evening. The following day revealed the consequences of the tragedy that had occurred at some point after his departure. In a highly emotional state, Tregennis exclaims:

‘It’s devilish, Mr Holmes; devilish! [...] It is not of this world. Something has come into that room which has dashed the light of reason from their minds. What human contrivance could do that?’<sup>10</sup>

As with *The Hound*, a man named Mortimer is raising the possibility of the supernatural with Holmes. In this instance, however, Tregennis is attempting to cover his tracks as it is he who has attempted to murder his siblings in revenge for a sleight in the division of their inheritance. The same cannot be said of the vicar of the parish, Mr Roundhay who also echoes the mistaken supernatural threat. When Tregennis is found dead later in the story in similar circumstances to that of his sister, Roundhay exclaims “[w]e are devil-ridden, Mr Holmes! My poor parish is devil-ridden! [...] Satan himself is loose in it! We are given over into his hands!”<sup>11</sup> Holmes’s response to such superstition is very similar to that in *The Hound*. In the ‘Devil’s Foot’, Holmes assesses their position in the investigation and rejects the intrusion of satanic forces of the supernatural. After Tregennis’s initial outburst Holmes asks Watson rhetorically, “I take it, in the first place, that neither of us is prepared to admit diabolical intrusions into the affairs of men. Let us begin by ruling that entirely out of our minds”<sup>12</sup>. He states, “I fear [...] that if the matter is beyond humanity it is certainly beyond me. Yet we must exhaust all natural explanations before we fall back upon such a theory as this”<sup>13</sup>. This statement

---

<sup>10</sup> Doyle, *The Penguin Complete Sherlock Holmes* (London: Penguin, 1981), p. 958.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 963.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 960.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 958.

presents a method that, as has been discussed in chapter three of this thesis, relies on an exhaustion of all explanations based upon ordinary or extra-ordinary laws of nature.

Holmes is convinced that the three victims had been stricken by ““some conscious or unconscious human agency. That is firm ground””.<sup>14</sup> The focal point of Holmes’s investigation is piecing together the events of the night when the Tregennises were stricken down. In this story, Holmes displays the imagination that leads to the development of a theory supported by a correct interpretation of facts described by Jonathan Smith and noted in my introduction. Holmes theorises that the possibility of someone creeping up to the window, as implied by Tregennis’s claim that one of his brothers saw something move outside, is unlikely due to the darkness and the rain clouds. He also speculates that it is unlikely such a person could have ““produced so terrific an effect that he drove those who saw it out of their senses””.<sup>15</sup> Holmes examines the physical environment where the bodies were found and uncovers unusual traces of a chemical that has been burned on the fire in the room. It is this agency, unconsciously or consciously created by man that is of importance in solving this mystery. By investigating the nature of this agency, a drug with hallucinogenic properties that is not easily identified, Holmes highlights the use of chemistry and medicine in Doyle’s medical experiences as a method of exploring the limits of the natural world.

Central to the plot of the ‘Devil’s Foot’ is Holmes’s attempts to identify the agent responsible for killing a woman and driving her two brothers insane. This agent is identified as the drug ‘*Radix pedis diaboli*’, or the ““Devil’s-foot root”” named after its resemblance to the shape of a ““foot, half human, half goat like””.<sup>16</sup> Holmes discovers that some form of toxic agent is at work by connecting the use of a fire in the first case, a lamp lit during the daylight in the second case and the oppressive air on both

---

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 960.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 961.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 968 & 969.

occasions. This suggested “an atmosphere causing strange toxic effects”.<sup>17</sup> It is a powerful poison, one of only two known samples in Europe, kept by the famous lion hunter and explorer of Africa Dr Leon Sterndale. Sterndale is responsible for the death of Mortimer Tregennis, who stole a portion of this drug in order to murder his sister and two brothers by dropping the drug upon the fire immediately prior to his departure. His motive was revenge over a disagreement over the division of the proceeds of the sale of the family venture in tin-mining. Sterndale reciprocated in kind in revenge for the death of Brenda Tregennis, a woman he was in love with. The origin of the fictional Devil’s-foot root as a poison discovered during Sterndale’s exploration of Africa is of relevance to locating drug usage in Doyle’s Holmes stories. As we shall see, the Devil’s-foot root drug’s properties include the potential to heighten an individual’s perception to witness unusual phenomena. It originates in Doyle’s interest in the themes of imperial exploration and medical self-experimentation. This combined effect illustrates Doyle’s advocacy of the need to explore and expand geographical, spiritual and scientific boundaries that culminate in the figure of the imperial explorer.

### **Explorers of the Empire and the Medical and Historical Context of Drugs**

Doyle expressed his interest in Victorian quest romance, typified by the works of Rudyard Kipling and Henry Rider Haggard. Doyle noted ‘a new method of story writing had appeared which was very different from my own adherence to the careful plot artfully developed’, here distinguishing his own attempts at historical literature

---

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 964. There is some difficulty in determining the properties of this drug, caused by aficionados of Sherlock Holmes otherwise known as players of the ‘Great Holmesian Game’. For a description of this ‘game’, see: Philip Weller, *The Hound of the Baskervilles’: Hunting the Dartmoor Legend* (Dartmoor: Devon Books, [2001?]), pp.6-8. Adherents to this game insist on a playful and intellectual fiction based on reading the Sherlock Holmes stories as a documentation of real events. Consequently, the fictional identification of the Devil’s Foot Root is intertwined with a wide ranging debate upon locating the true source of the drug. For a summary of this problem, see: Doyle, *The New Annotated Sherlock Holmes*, ed. by Leslie S. Klinger, 3 vols (New York: W.W. Norton, 2005), II, pp. 1419-20.

from the loosely plotted and action driven tales from Victorian quest romance.<sup>18</sup> The extent of Doyle's interest in the figure of the explorer and adventurer is his creation of Professor Challenger, hero of a number of adventures, the most famous being *The Lost World* (1912), and a character of relevance in chapter five.<sup>19</sup> By the time the 'Devil's Foot' was published, this figure of imperial romance was already anachronistic, as it was becoming so by 1897, the year this story was set. In the 'Devil's Foot', Watson describes Sterndale as 'the great lion-hunter and explorer' of Africa.<sup>20</sup> While there is no definitive biographical source for the character of Sterndale, there is one compelling historical figure, Charles Waterton.<sup>21</sup> Like Doyle, Waterton had been a student at Stonyhurst, a Jesuit school with a reputation for providing its young male charges with a solid grounding in education. Waterton, a naturalist and explorer of South America, died three years before Doyle entered Stonyhurst. However, the distinguished alumnus donated part of his natural history collection to the school.<sup>22</sup> Andrew Lycett argues Doyle would have been aware of Waterton who 'remained strong in [Stonyhurst's] collective memory'.<sup>23</sup> In fact, the library at Stonyhurst has several copies of Waterton's book, *Wanderings in South America* (1825), one of which was almost certainly presented by the author himself and so would have been at the college during Doyle's

---

<sup>18</sup> Doyle, *Memories and Adventures*, p. 252. For a summary of this mode of fiction and Doyle's relationship to it, see: Robert Fraser, *Victorian Quest Romance: Stevenson, Haggard, Kipling and Conan Doyle* (Plymouth: Northcote House, 1998).

<sup>19</sup> Challenger was partially based upon Haggard's hero, Ludwig Holly from *She* (1887), as well as William Rutherford a professor of physiology at Edinburgh University during Doyle's years as a medical undergraduate. This is one of many times Doyle fictionalised people who influenced his early development as a writer and medical doctor, the most famous being Dr Joseph Bell as the source of Holmes's observational skills.

<sup>20</sup> *The Penguin Complete Sherlock Holmes*, p. 961.

<sup>21</sup> For a discussion of Waterton's history, his interest in toxins and his legacy, see: J. R. Maltby, 'Charles Waterton (1782-1865): Curare and a Canadian National Park', *Canadian Journal of Anesthesia / Journal Canadien d'anesthésie*, 29.3 (May 1982), 195-202.

<sup>22</sup> Maltby notes: '[m]uch of Waterton's natural history collection from South America remained in the school for many years', in: 'History of Medicine: Sherlock Holmes and Anaesthesia', *Canadian Journal of Anesthesia / Journal Canadien d'anesthésie*, 35.1 (January 1988), 58-62 (p. 61).

<sup>23</sup> Andrew Lycett, *Conan Doyle: The Man Who Created Sherlock Holmes* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2007), p. 31.

residency.<sup>24</sup> Furthermore, Doyle provides some indication of his interest in the college's library in a letter home towards the end of 1871, 'you had better not send any books. not [sic] because I am less a bookworm than I was before, but because there is a large lybrary [sic] under my nose'.<sup>25</sup> Doyle, always the avid reader as a child and adult, is likely to have been influenced by Waterton's collection and writing.

At the beginning of *Wanderings in South America*, Waterton expresses the reason for his travels 'were to collect a quantity of the strongest Wourali poison; and to reach the inland frontier fort of Portuguese Guiana'.<sup>26</sup> The reason for collecting a sample of the strongest poison was in response to Sir Joseph Banks, President of the Royal Society, who doubted that the poison would be strong enough to kill a large animal or a man.<sup>27</sup> Wourali is synonymous with curare, a poison that acts upon injection by 'blocking the transmission of nerve impulses that signal a muscle to contract, thus causing muscle paralysis' that eventually affects the heart and lungs causing death if not aided by artificial respiration.<sup>28</sup> During the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, scientists, mindful of the dangers of general anaesthetics such as ether and chloroform, eagerly experimented upon animals and later upon humans with curare. This drug was used as a local anaesthetic for operations that were difficult or impractical to perform upon an unconscious patient. The drug could also be used in combination with a general anaesthetic to reduce the dosage of the latter required to operate.<sup>29</sup> South American

---

<sup>24</sup> This information was provided by the Curator at Stonyhurst: Jan Graffius 'Wanderings in South America and Arthur Conan Doyle', E-Mail, 17 September 2009, [Online] <curator@stonyhurst.ac.uk>.

<sup>25</sup> Lellenberg, Stashower and Foley, *A Life in Letters*, p. 44. Doyle's concern was related to the provision of his Christmas hamper, provided by the families of those staying on at Stonyhurst over the holiday. This was a serious issue considering the extent to which the boys had to depend on this to supplement their food supply over the period.

<sup>26</sup> Charles Waterton, *Wanderings in South America, the North-West of the United States, and the Antilles, in the Years 1812, 1816, 1820 and 1824* (London: J. Mawman, 1825), p. 1 <<http://books.google.co.uk>> [accessed 15/08/09].

<sup>27</sup> Maltby, 'Curare and a Canadian National Park', p. 196.

<sup>28</sup> Lawrence K. Altman, *Who Goes First? The Story of Self-Experimentation in Medicine* (Wellingborough: Equation, 1986; repr. 1988), p. 75.

<sup>29</sup> For a description of Curare and its eventual use as a local anaesthetic and as a supplement to a general anaesthetic, see: <<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/146779/curare>> [accessed 15/08/09] and



tribesmen were aware, as was Waterton, that the flesh of an affected animal could be eaten with impunity, as long as there were no lesions on their hands or mouths.<sup>30</sup> They also understood that in some cases ‘curare arrow injuries could be treated successfully if the poison was sucked out of the wound’.<sup>31</sup> However, Waterton expresses a belief that there is no definite cure noting that the Indians carried no antidote around with them and that they took great precautions when preparing the poison exhibiting ‘horror’ when ‘you point a poisoned arrow at them’.<sup>32</sup>

The use of poison in ‘The Adventure of the Sussex Vampire’ (1924) is rooted in Doyle’s early years at Stonyhurst. An apparent act of vampirism by Robert Ferguson’s South American wife, Dolores, upon their newborn baby boy is central to its plot. Holmes, once again confronted with the possibility of the supernatural, is immediately dismissive of vampirism, after swiftly detecting the use of poison utilised by Dolores’s stepson, Jack, in a jealous attack upon his half-brother. Upon his arrival at the Ferguson household, Holmes takes note of a ‘fine collection of South American utensils and weapons’.<sup>33</sup> Included in this collection is a ‘little empty quiver beside the small bird-bow’.<sup>34</sup> It is from the tips of the missing arrows that young Jack Ferguson extracts the poison curare, frequently used by native South American tribes in hunting and in war. As we have seen, Waterton donated much of his collection from South America to Stonyhurst including blowpipes, bows, darts and arrows and it is not difficult to imagine Doyle’s youthful imagination fired by such an exotic display.<sup>35</sup> Dolores sucks the poison from the wound, an action misinterpreted by Ferguson when he witnesses his wife rising up from their baby with blood on her mouth. Dolores’s actions were

---

Altman pp. 76-77. Initially, it was hoped that curare may have assisted in curing tetanus, lock-jaw and hydrophobia, see: Maltby, ‘Curare and a Canadian National Park’, pp. 196 and 200.

<sup>30</sup> Waterton, p.62 and Altman, p. 75.

<sup>31</sup> Altman, p. 75.

<sup>32</sup> Waterton, p. 71. For his account of the preparation of the poison see, pp. 53-58.

<sup>33</sup> *The Penguin Complete Sherlock Holmes*, p. 1039.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1043.

<sup>35</sup> J. R. Maltby, ‘History of Medicine’, p. 61

misinterpreted by her husband mistrustful of her “foreign birth and of her alien religion” and ‘fiery tropical’ emotions.<sup>36</sup> Holmes explains, “it would mean death if the venom were not sucked out”, indicating Doyle’s familiarity with curare.<sup>37</sup> It is not just the collection of South American weapons that associate ‘The Sussex Vampire’ with *Wanderings in South America*. Young Jack Ferguson experiments with the residual curare on the weapons by poisoning the family pet dog.<sup>38</sup> In his book Waterton records a number of experiments upon animals in order to determine curare’s effects, including tests on a bird, sloth, ox and a dog.<sup>39</sup> Waterton records the swiftness of the poison, paralysing the dog within four minutes and killing it in fifteen.<sup>40</sup>

There is a wide range of drugs and poisons utilised throughout the Sherlock Holmes stories.<sup>41</sup> What is significant in ‘The Sussex Vampire’, however, is how the boy experiments on the dog in order to determine an effective dose of curare with the purpose of harming a human child. Explorers such as Waterton provide Doyle with the romance of exploration and the potential of new exotic poisons. This finds articulation

---

<sup>36</sup> *The Penguin Complete Sherlock Holmes*, pp. 1035 and 1038.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1043. In his book, Waterton established that curare did not pollute the meat of game for human consumption and that the effects of the poison were related to the level of the dose administered. He did not write about sucking the poison from a wound as a cure, observing that because the natives did not carry an antidote they did not believe there was one, Maltby, ‘Curare and a Canadian National Park’, p. 199. Waterton also thought of artificial respiration as a potential cure until the curare wore off, something that was experimented with on humans later in the twentieth century; see Altman, pp. 82-85. Sir Benjamin Brodie experimented with artificial respiration and curare on animals as early as 1811, preceding the publication of Waterton’s travels which began in 1812. Brodie and Waterton collaborated on a successful experiment in artificial respiration upon an affected she-ass; see Maltby, ‘Curare and a Canadian National Park’, p. 199-200 and Waterton, pp. 81-82.

<sup>38</sup> In *A Study in Scarlet*, Holmes experiments upon a dog (presumably Watson’s) with a sample of poison obtained from Jefferson Hope who brought it to England from America. Furthermore, Hope later states he obtained the poison from a “Professor” who had obtained the deadly “alkaloid” from “some South American arrow poison”, *The Penguin Complete Sherlock Holmes*, p. 49 and p. 80.

<sup>39</sup> The experiments on the bird, sloth and ox are described in Waterton, pp. 62-70; for the dog, p. 20.

<sup>40</sup> Waterton, p. 20. Klinger also notes the responses to exactly what it was that poisoned Carlo. These articles operate upon the principal that Holmes was a real historical figure. The range of possibilities includes a discussion on what other devilish poison may have been used, to speculation upon the dosage administered by Jack Ferguson, Klinger, II, pp. 1574-5.

<sup>41</sup> Maltby provides a useful summary categorising their use as criminal, recreational and therapeutic, ‘History of Medicine’, p. 58. For a complete list of the various drugs and poisons in the Sherlock Holmes stories, see: Rodin and Key, *Medical Casebook*, pp. 381-382.

in Doyle's fiction, particularly the stories of Sherlock Holmes, as the notion of further exploration is developed this time through medical experimentation.

### **Medical Experimentation: A Cold-Blooded Dedication to Science**

In *A Study in Scarlet* (1888), Watson is first introduced to Holmes by Stamford, a former colleague who had worked as a surgeon's assistant at Saint Bartholomew's Hospital Medical College. Stamford describes Holmes as a "first-class chemist", something Watson later agrees with describing the detective's knowledge of chemistry as "[p]rofound".<sup>42</sup> What prompts Stamford to caution Watson, however, is the purpose of Holmes's eclectic range of scientific expertise. Stamford describes Holmes as "a little too scientific for my tastes - it approaches to cold-bloodedness".<sup>43</sup> Despite Holmes's lack of medical qualifications, his cold-blooded dedication to science induces him to take unnecessary risks while performing his role as a consulting detective. In 'A Scandal in Bohemia' (1891), Watson notes Holmes's abilities as 'the most perfect reasoning and observing machine that the world has ever seen', elements that are located within Smith's notion of the development of a new nineteenth century methodology.<sup>44</sup> These are attributes vital to his science of deduction, yet invaluable in his experiments in chemistry as well. Stamford explains his reasons for describing Holmes as cold-blooded:

I could imagine his giving a friend a little pinch of the latest vegetable alkaloid, not out of malevolence, you understand, but simply out of a spirit of enquiry in order to have an accurate idea of the effects. To do him justice, I think that he would take it himself with the same

---

<sup>42</sup> *The Penguin Complete Sherlock Holmes*, p. 16 & 22.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 17.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 161. Jonathan Smith notes the development of a challenge to any assumption that observation is an unbiased, neutral activity in his examination of the relationship between objectivity, subjectivity and interpretation of evidence in nineteenth century scientific culture, Jonathan Smith, *Fact and Feeling: Baconian Science and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (London and Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin, 1994), p. 21.

readiness. He appears to have a passion for definite and exact knowledge.<sup>45</sup>

What causes some confusion for Stamford is his uncertainty as to the precise nature of Holmes's study. Holmes's hands are covered with plasters and 'discoloured with strong acids'.<sup>46</sup> Furthermore, he indicates his familiarity with toxins by claiming "I dabble with poisons a good deal", making it easy to understand Stamford's unease.<sup>47</sup> Stamford is unaware of Holmes's ability to link science with criminal investigation. In the extract above, Stamford highlights Holmes's willingness to engage in experimentation to further his 'spirit of enquiry' and to determine the effects of various poisons, something of undoubted value to his criminal investigations, evident in 'The Sussex Vampire'.

Holmes's experiments are not limited to the laboratory, such as in *A Study in Scarlet*. As we shall see, he also engages with fieldwork. This is not just limited to his early pioneering of forensic science; it is related to scientific investigations that have medical applications. Lawrence L Altman notes the eclectic field of study undertaken by Dr John Scott Haldane, whose studies of gasses decompression and the effects of heat exhaustion benefitted a range of employers from the Royal Navy to the mining industry: '[s]ome [scientists] consider the world itself a laboratory and experiment in virtually every sort of environment'.<sup>48</sup> Like Doyle, Haldane read medicine at Edinburgh University and Altman describes his 'uncanny powers of observation as well as a flair for creating imaginative experimental methodologies', reminiscent of Holmes's unorthodox, yet brilliant discoveries.<sup>49</sup> Engaging in experimentation, either on Holmes himself or on others is not necessarily evidence of cold-bloodedness. In *A Study in*

---

<sup>45</sup> *Complete Sherlock Holmes*, p. 17. Alkaloids occur naturally in plants. Morphine, cocaine and curare are a few examples of isolated alkaloids, a process begun early in the nineteenth century, see: Klinger, III, p. 19. The 'first substance isolated, in 1855, was called erythroxyton; most probably it was a mixture of alkaloids containing cocaine', Altman, p. 334.

<sup>46</sup> *The Penguin Complete Sherlock Holmes*, p. 18.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>48</sup> Altman, p.215.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p.215. For a biography of Haldane see, Altman, pp. 215-224 and

<<http://www.sciencemuseum.org.uk/broughttolife/people/johnscotthaldane.aspx>> [accessed 04/09/09].

*Scarlet* Watson, himself a practitioner of medicine, is not shocked by Stamford's description. Rather, his response is one of approval, "[v]ery right too".<sup>50</sup> It is easy to understand Stamford's confusion as to Holmes's professional identity in *A Study in Scarlet*. Once Watson takes up residence at Baker Street it is some time before he learns the reason for Holmes's eclectic range of knowledge. Holmes explains, "I have a trade of my own. I suppose I am the only one in the world. I'm a consulting detective, if you can understand what that is".<sup>51</sup> We have already seen in chapter three of this thesis how Holmes can be read as a specialist, an expert at synthesising various fields of scientific enquiry in order to theorise upon phenomena currently under investigation.

Even before Doyle embarked upon a career as a doctor he had already encountered at least one medical man who published an account of his self-experiments with the Calabar bean. Sir Robert Christison, Professor of Materia Medica and Therapeutics at the University of Edinburgh, was entering the final years of a long and distinguished career by the time Doyle enrolled at the university. Christison presents a template for Doyle's interest in utilising medicine to explore the limits of scientific knowledge in his fiction. The Calabar bean is a poisonous seed from Africa. Like the fictional Devil's-foot root, the Calabar bean had been used, along with a number of others, as an "ordeal poison by the medicine-men" in certain parts of "West Africa".<sup>52</sup> Lycett notes 'Christison's influence on the young student's [Doyle] ideas about drugs and poisons and on the gestation of the character Sherlock Holmes was significant', despite not being mentioned in Doyle's autobiography.<sup>53</sup> This influence is noted as being primarily related to Christison's work in forensic medicine. Most biographers draw a connection between Christison's assistance in securing a conviction in a case against two men,

---

<sup>50</sup> *The Penguin Complete Sherlock Holmes*, p. 17.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 24.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 969.

<sup>53</sup> Lycett, p. 48.

William Burke and William Hare who avoided detection in a murder case by suffocating their victim without appearing to visibly damage their victim's body.<sup>54</sup> Christison's experiment into the bruising of corpses was used as evidence against Burke after Hare turned king's evidence. Significantly, in *A Study in Scarlet* Stamford informs Watson that he has seen Holmes "beating the subjects in the dissecting-rooms with a stick" in order to "verify how far bruises may be produced after death".<sup>55</sup> I read Christison as embodying Doyle's interest in exploration as well as his spirit of medical romance when he engaged in self-experimentation, testing coca on himself as well as on a number of his students.<sup>56</sup> As we shall see, Christison's experiments with the Calabar bean are similar in some key points as Watson's experience with the Devil's-foot root.

In the second half of the nineteenth century, eserine, an extract from the Calabar bean would be used to assist in eye surgery, serving as a drug that could contract the pupil.<sup>57</sup> Christison experimented with the Calabar bean because of his 'curiosity to investigate its action and chemical constitution'.<sup>58</sup> He also expressed 'some doubts whether I had obtained the true ordeal-poison, as it tasted so like an eatable leguminous seed', leading him to conduct several self-experiments by ingesting the drug.<sup>59</sup> These life-threatening experiments, which read as incredible acts of recklessness to those uninitiated in the practice of self-experimentation in medicine and in toxicology, are reminiscent of Holmes's own reckless pursuit of precise knowledge in *A Study in*

---

<sup>54</sup> Burke and Hare are well documented. As well as Lycett, see: Rodin and Key, *Medical Casebook*, p. 16, Martin Booth, *The Doctor and the Detective: A Biography of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle* (New York: Thomas Dunne Books, 1997; repr. 2000), pp. 113-114; Russell Miller, *The Adventures of Arthur Conan Doyle* (London: Pimlico, 2009), pp. 52-53 and James G Ravin and Clive Migdal, 'Sir Arthur Conan Doyle: The Author was an Ophthalmologist', *Survey of Ophthalmology*, 40.3 (November-December 1995), 237-244 (p. 240).

<sup>55</sup> *The Penguin Complete Sherlock Holmes*, p. 17.

<sup>56</sup> See Robert Christison, 'Observations on the Effects of Cuca, or Coca, the Leaves of Erythroxyton Coca', *British Medical Journal*, 1.800 (29 April 1876), 527-531. Also, in 1860, Albert Neimann 'isolated the principal alkaloid from the leaves of Peruvian coca; he called his preparation cocaine, Altman, p. 335

<sup>57</sup> Altman, p. 336

<sup>58</sup> Christison, 'On the Properties of the Ordeal-Bean of Old Calabar, West Africa' *Monthly Journal of Medicine*, 20 (January 1855), 193-204 (p. 195) < <http://books.google.co.uk/> > [accessed 11 January 2012].

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid*, p. 201.

*Scarlet*. Christison confesses, ‘I felt no alarm where my friends saw some reason for it’ and that ‘I had got more than I had counted on’.<sup>60</sup> Christison’s reaction to the initial effects of the Calabar bean is dramatic. His first experiment of eating ‘the eighth part of a seed, or six grains’ caused nothing more than a ‘pleasant feeling of slight numbness of the limbs’, encouraging him to swallow ‘twice as much, viz., the fourth of a seed, which originally weighed forty-eight grains’ on the same day.<sup>61</sup> Christison described a ‘giddiness’ that rapidly increased culminating in a ‘peculiar indescribable torpidity over the whole [bodily] frame’, which he recognised as the action of a ‘very energetic poison’.<sup>62</sup> His life now being in the balance, he ‘took immediate means for getting quit of it. By swallowing the shaving water I had just been using’ as an emetic.<sup>63</sup> Nonetheless, he remained prostrate and feeble with an erratic heartbeat for the rest of the day while being attended by medical colleagues and his son.

Christison had experimented with laboratory animals noting the Calabar bean ‘seems to affect directly and violently the functions of the heart, and the exercise of volition over the muscles’ of affected animals.<sup>64</sup> However, he describes the ‘extreme difficulty’ in ‘rightly comprehending the facts’ when the subject is one of ‘the lower animals’ which are unable to ‘adequately express by external signs the varying influence of agents on sensation and the other cerebral functions’.<sup>65</sup> It is important to note his emphasis upon the poison’s influence, especially how it affects the subject’s cerebral functions, its consciousness including memory, thought and intellect. Because the poison swiftly paralyses an animal, it may ‘appear to die insensible and comatose. But that is not the case. So long as the power of expression remains, amidst the swiftly

---

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 202.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 201.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, p198.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 199.

advancing languor, signs of sensation may be elicited'.<sup>66</sup> The swift action of the poison makes it easy to overlook other effects. It may be that the animal dies insensible and comatose, but this is difficult to prove. While the scientist's attention is drawn by the signs of increasing paralysis, signs of sensation may be hidden or partially masked. The word 'sensation' is, in this instance, specifically referring to 'the result of messages from the body's sensory receptors registering in the brain as information about the environment', in short, consciousness.<sup>67</sup> Christison's self-experimentation with the Calabar bean was conclusive. He determined that:

The integrity of the mental faculties, during the prostration of that cerebral function which conduces to the operation of the will or muscular action, was most remarkable. The minute details I have given are chiefly intended to illustrate this point.<sup>68</sup>

Despite being unable to move his body through his own volition, his mental faculties remained intact, so that he was conscious of the world around him, something that observation of poisoned animals was not able to reveal.

### **Medical Self-Experimentation in the 'Devil's Foot'**

Christison is important when considering influences upon Doyle's Holmes stories. Apart from confirming the potency of his Calabar bean sample, this dangerous self-experiment shared at least one common aim with Holmes in the 'Devil's Foot'. This is the need to ascertain what effects the Devil's-foot root drug would have on a human. It should not be a surprise that Holmes seeks to test his theory of what caused the madness of the Tregennis brothers and the death of their sister in the 'Devil's Foot'. The reasoning employed by Holmes is of his usual standard. Mortimer Tregennis's

---

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., p. 199. Upon dissection of an animal subject, it was revealed that paralysis of the voluntary and respiratory muscles was not the cause of death, as might be concluded by observation of the weakness of the limbs, as was true in the case of Curare above. Instead the heart appeared to be paralysed, possibly causing the appearance of muscle paralysis. The giddiness and subsequent irregular heart rhythm experienced by Christison supports this theory, Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> *Oxford Concise Colour Medical Dictionary*, 4th edn. (Oxford: Oxford university Press, 2007).

<sup>68</sup> Christison, 'On the Properties of the Ordeal-Bean of Old Calabar, West Africa', p. 203.



explanation, that there was someone in the garden during the night, is discounted as improbable, leaving Holmes with the condition of those afflicted in the room. He notes that at both murder scenes ““there is combustion going on in the room”” and that the servant and the doctor attending the Tregennis family both passed out.<sup>69</sup> He theorises that ““there is evidence of a poisonous atmosphere””, itself a pun on the sour relationship between the family members.<sup>70</sup> These facts are suggestive of ““some connection between three things – the burning, the stuffy atmosphere, and, finally, the madness or death of those unfortunate people””.<sup>71</sup> Once Holmes examines the lamp at the scene of Mortimer Tregennis’s death, he removes a sample of ash, later proving it to be the Devil’s-foot root drug.

Holmes’s method of investigation and exploration is that of self-experimentation. There is one valid reason for Holmes to conduct his experiment upon a human subject, however. It is very difficult to determine the effects of hallucinatory drugs upon animals in the laboratory. It is Holmes’s questioning of a ‘conscious or unconscious human agency’ that provides an insight as to the necessity for self-experimentation. Within the context of this particular investigation, being conscious or unconscious of the natural human agency (as opposed to it being supernatural) that affected the Tregennis family is related to their awareness of what exactly happened. It is necessary to state this because in this case, Holmes is not referring to the conscious and unconscious division of the human mind stressed by, for example, psychoanalysis.<sup>72</sup> What Holmes is interested in discovering is whether the Tregennis knew what had stricken them and could do nothing to prevent it, or whether they had consciously initiated this event without being

---

<sup>69</sup> *The Penguin Complete Sherlock Holmes*, p. 964.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>72</sup> Jason Daniel Tougaw examines altered states of consciousness and its location within developing theories of the human mind in, Tougaw, Jason Daniel, *Strange Cases: The Medical Case History and the British Novel* (London: Routledge, 2006), pp. 139-175.

aware of the consequences of their actions. This latter possibility is the less likely of the two. Holmes also needs to determine, as is the case in this murder, if they were aware of another party being responsible for the attack. Like Christison noted above, this is impossible to establish by animal experimentation alone. Altman notes how during the process of developing new treatments and gaining a full understanding of the effects of a new drug, human experimentation is necessary. He argues, ‘[e]ven after thousands of animal tests, our biologic uniqueness requires human experiments’.<sup>73</sup> It is also important to take into account the complex human psychological response to the Devil’s-foot root drug, an element that might not be registered in the effects upon lower animals beyond a physiological response, such as dilated eyes for example, which can be monitored by further experimentation. Even with an established laboratory, something Holmes has neither access to nor time to use, cautious human experimentation would still be necessary.

The difficulties and dangers of self-experimentation can also be found in *The Parasite* (1894). In the story, Professor Gilroy’s narrative is structured as a diary, or a journal that records the times and outcomes of his experiments with Miss Penelosa. Gilroy’s friend and colleague Wilson, a fellow investigator of mesmerism, records the reasons for cancelling the experiments, directly illustrating the hazards associated with self-experimenting with other natural diseases and drugs. As discussed in chapter two, Miss Penelosa is described by Gilroy as possessing a “parasitic soul – yes, she is a parasite, a monstrous parasite” able to “project herself into my body and take command of it” at will.<sup>74</sup> Here, physical infection by tuberculosis is conflated with a psychical possession projected into a body by the figure of a parasitic mesmerist. Gilroy’s initial relationship with Miss Penelosa resembles that of a scientist engaged

---

<sup>73</sup> Altman, p. 9.

<sup>74</sup> Catherine Wynne, *The Parasite & The Watter’s Mou’* (Kansas MO: Valencourt, 2009), p. 25.

upon a course of self experimentation. Gilroy states why he would make a good subject for a series of mesmeric experiments:

To have the power of examining these phenomena from inside – to have an organism which will respond, and, at the same time, a brain which will appreciate and criticise – that is surely a unique advantage.<sup>75</sup>

In this quotation, Gilroy describes himself as both the test subject, the ‘organism’ and as a trained observer with relevant scientific or medical experience. This is similar to one of the justifications by Christison for self-experimentation discussed above. Despite not being directly engaged in mesmerising himself, Gilroy believes himself to be in charge of the experiments in the manner undertaken by a medical team experimenting with disease or with drugs. Gilroy proudly boasts of his scientific professionalism in a manner reminiscent of Holmes, ‘I have trained myself to deal only with fact and proof. Surmise and fancy have no place in my scheme of thought’.<sup>76</sup> At the beginning of the novella, this premise reveals his empiricism, ‘[s]how me what I can see with my microscope, cut with my scalpel, weigh in my balance, and I will devote a lifetime to its investigation’.<sup>77</sup> Even when Gilroy discovers Miss Penelosa intends to force him to murder his fiancée he is unable to escape her mesmeric influence. In desperation he turns to Wilson only to discover he is unable to escape the scientific discourse that surrounds his experiments. Wilson enquires, “[w]hat are your grounds for saying that it is a dangerous [experiment]? Please give your facts in a chronological order with approximate dates and names of reliable witnesses with their permanent addresses”.<sup>78</sup>

This is a comical moment in the story that also underlies the discipline rigorously

---

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., pp. 17-18.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., p. 5. This is a form of professionalism similar to that noted by Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison in their description of the development of a ‘scientific self’ at the expense of a ‘willful self’ in nineteenth century scientific practice, Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison, *Objectivity* (New York: Zone Books, 2010), p. 37.

<sup>77</sup> Wynne, *The Parasite & The Watter’s Mou’*, p. 5. On the same page of *The Parasite*, Gilroy states: “[n]o doubt I am a materialist”, underlying his desire for tangible evidence that can be studied under laboratory conditions.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., p. 33.

advocated in scientific practice to monitor the balance between objective and subjective interpretation of evidence. However, within the broader context of Doyle's writings it also highlights one of the unexpected dangers of investigating such unpredictable forces.

As we shall see, in the 'Devil's Foot' Holmes's self-experimentation proves to be reckless and it is made more so by the inclusion of Watson. His role is to support Holmes as they will both watch each other, ready to "bring the experiment to an end should the symptoms seem alarming".<sup>79</sup> The method of the experiment is simple. Holmes attempts to recreate the two crimes by using an identical gas lamp to the one present at Mortimer Tregennis's death. The lamp contains the Devil's-foot root drug ground as a powder that Holmes then lights and inhales with Watson. A second precaution is to ventilate the room by opening the window, something that was absent at both crime scenes. Any ethical problem at including Watson in such an experiment is offset by his agreement to take part, not only as a consenting adult, but one with a medical background. The problem is that Watson, as part of the experiment, will be just as affected as Holmes by the toxic Devil's-foot root. A sensible precaution would have included an observer outside of the room and ready to act should something dangerous happen. Holmes is swift to acknowledge his mistake after the experiment, calling it an "unjustifiable experiment even for oneself, and doubly so for a friend. I am really very sorry".<sup>80</sup> A rare apology to Watson, here, is an indication of Holmes's sincerity about his "wild" experiment, admitting that a "candid observer" would declare them "mad" to undertake such a reckless approach.<sup>81</sup> Watson explains how swiftly the toxin

---

<sup>79</sup> *The Penguin Complete Sherlock Holmes*, p. 965.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 966.

takes effect, '[a]t the very first whiff of it my brain and my imagination were beyond all control', strongly suggesting its hallucinogenic properties.<sup>82</sup>

We have seen above how Christison's forensic methods influenced the general characteristics of Holmes's investigative practices. He may have had a more direct influence upon the 'Devil's Foot'. 'Undoubtedly', James G Ravin and Clive Migdal argue, 'Doyle based his description on the extract derived from the Calabar bean', noting Doyle's brief visit to Calabar while serving as a ship's doctor upon a trading vessel that plied the west coast of Africa.<sup>83</sup> Ravin notes Christison's nausea, giddiness and weakness, comparing this to the latter effects of the Devil's-foot root which Watson describes as a sensation of 'freezing horror' and the 'turmoil within my brain'.<sup>84</sup> Ravin does not make reference to the terrifying hallucinations described by Watson, something that was not apparent in Christison's account either. However, it is not necessary to 'unmask' and identify the true source for the Devil's-foot root to recognise the influence of Christison to the development of the 'Devil's Foot'. Rather than using Christison's account to identify the source of the Devil's-foot root, it is of more use to note the similarity of methods, especially self-experimentation, employed by Christison and Holmes in order to determine the properties of two separate toxins. Watson's swift and desperate actions to save his and Holmes's life are as dramatic as Christison's reaction to the initial effects of the Calabar bean. Unlike Holmes's experiment that proved how short exposure to the Devil's-foot root caused hallucination followed by madness and death, Christison reported 'the mental faculties unimpaired' during his exposure.<sup>85</sup> In

---

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., p. 965. It may be tempting to think of LSD-25 (lysergic acid diethylamide) when considering the extreme hallucinatory effect of the fumes of the Devil's foot-root. LSD was the twenty-fifth in a series of synthesized derivatives from lysergic acid. In 1936, Dr Albert Hofmann was the first to synthesize and one of the first to self-experiment with LSD-25, with results similar to Holmes's 'wild' experiment. 'The Devil's Foot', of course, predates these discoveries by twenty-six years, see: Altman, p. 208 and Klinger, II, pp. 1419-1420.

<sup>83</sup> James G Ravin and Clive Migdal, p. 240 and Doyle, *Memories and Adventures* pp. 53.

<sup>84</sup> James G Ravin and Clive Migdal, p. 240; and *The Penguin Complete Sherlock Holmes*, p. 965.

<sup>85</sup> Christison, 'On the Properties of the Ordeal-Bean of Old Calabar, West Africa', p. 202.

the ‘Devil’s Foot’ Watson’s successful attempt to break free from the drug illustrates its dangers in graphic detail, ‘I felt that my hair was rising, that my eyes were protruding, that my mouth was opened, and my tongue like leather’.<sup>86</sup> Throughout this experience, Watson becomes aware that the only escape was to exit the room. Holmes, whose face was ‘white, rigid, and drawn with horror – the very look which I have seen upon the features of the dead’, is helpless under the influence of the deadly drug.<sup>87</sup> Watson’s admits that as a consequence of the psychological trauma ‘something must surely snap’.<sup>88</sup> It is this horrific experience that caused the minds of the Tregennis brothers to snap and the death of their sister.<sup>89</sup> Owen Dudley Edwards notes the ‘obvious relevance’ of Christison’s self-experiment to the ‘Devil’s Foot’ and decides it needs ‘no elaboration’.<sup>90</sup> However, what is in need of elaboration is how Christison’s self-experimentation, like Holmes’s, is portrayed as another way to explore and investigate unusual phenomena. Importantly, the consequence of Holmes’s experiment is Watson’s experience while under the influence of the Devil’s-foot root drug and how it assists in broadening a reading of Sherlock Holmes within the context of Doyle’s writings.

### **The Dweller Upon the Threshold**

The ‘Devil’s Foot’ is influenced by historical accounts of self-experimentation with drugs while simultaneously presenting transcendental qualities that raise the prospect of an individual experiencing unusual phenomena. It is worth quoting Watson’s experience of the drug at length because the threat of madness leads to a heightening of Watson’s senses:

---

<sup>86</sup> *The Penguin Complete Sherlock Holmes*, p. 965.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>89</sup> Holmes assumes that ‘the woman, who had presumably the more sensitive organism, was killed, the others exhibiting that temporary or permanent lunacy which is evidently the first effect of the drug’, the second being death, *ibid.*, p. 964.

<sup>90</sup> Owen Dudley Edwards, *The Quest for Sherlock Holmes* (London: Penguin, 1984), p. 194.

A thick, black cloud swirled before my eyes, and my mind told me that in this cloud, unseen as yet, but about to spring out upon my appalled senses, lurked all that was vaguely horrible, all that was monstrous and inconceivably wicked in the universe. Vague shapes swirled and swam amid the dark cloud-bank, each a menace and a warning of something coming, the advent of some unspeakable dweller upon the threshold, whose very shadow would blast my soul.<sup>91</sup>

The threat of madness felt under the influence of the Devil's-foot root reveals gothic themes within this story.<sup>92</sup> Doyle was possibly influenced by Edgar Allan Poe's short-story, 'The Imp of the Perverse' (1845), in which the narrator murders a man for his inheritance with a poisoned candle, only to be driven mad by the perverse desire to confess his crime. Certainly, the gothic and horror genres are skilfully evoked by Doyle as Watson breaks 'through that cloud of despair', while trying to 'scream, and was vaguely aware of some hoarse croak, which was my own voice, but distanced and detached from myself'.<sup>93</sup> However, it is Watson's encounter with a potential spirit-entity, described above as 'the dweller upon the threshold' that is of interest here. Once read within the broader context of Doyle's medical writings, Watson's encounter in the 'Devil's Foot' reveals how real-life medical self-experimentation may lead to an expansion of the known limits of natural law.<sup>94</sup>

In Doyle's 'The Romance of Medicine' he likens medical skills and experience to 'a little private lantern which throws a light of its own', which 'illuminates many an incident which is dark to the layman'.<sup>95</sup> This quotation, extracted from an address Doyle

---

<sup>91</sup> *The Penguin Complete Sherlock Holmes*, p. 965.

<sup>92</sup> Meegan Kennedy notes the emergence of gothic themes in medical case notes in, 'The Ghost in the Clinic: Gothic Medicine and Curious Fiction in Samuel Warren's *Diary of a Late Physician*', *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 32. 2 (2004), 327-351 (p. 327).

<sup>93</sup> *The Penguin Complete Sherlock Holmes*, p. 965.

<sup>94</sup> Tougaw notes how stories such as *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886) 'fuse the conventions of sensation and gothic' is indicative of how such stories, as well as 'The Devil's Foot', document 'scientific experiment' revealing the development of nineteenth century theories of the human mind, Tougaw, pp. 140-141.

<sup>95</sup> Darby, pp. 309-10.

gave to an audience of medical students, illustrates his belief in the broader application of medical science in illuminating the unknown. In addition, Doyle also warns his audience against ‘an undue Materialism’ that ignores ‘psychical research, scientific hypnotism, telepathy and other such agencies [that] emphasised the possibilities which lie outside the things that we can see, handle, and explain’.<sup>96</sup> The dangers of an ‘undue Materialism’ are the subject of my next chapter, but it is important, here, to note Doyle’s insistence that certain phenomena emphasise experiences beyond the easy explanation of science. Doyle’s point is that the illumination provided by the lamp of medical knowledge, combined with the desire to explore the frontiers of medical science, can lead to broadening the horizons of the natural world. This scientific exploration is analogous to the experiments of Waterton, Christison and Holmes examined above. In discussing this new frontier in ‘The Romance of Medicine’ Doyle briefly recounts how medical progress was made by individuals, such as the physician Sir Ronald Ross who discovered how Malaria was transferred by the anopheles mosquito.<sup>97</sup> Doyle describes this as one of the many ‘romances of science which have in recent times cleared some pathways in what used to be one confused jungle’.<sup>98</sup> Doyle was encouraging his audience to maintain an open mind when undertaking scientific research. Doyle argued that the origin of many discoveries that are now taken for granted were once regarded as fantastical if not impossible, a point he notes as something that ‘transcends romance and seems rather to approach the fairyland of science’.<sup>99</sup> As with Doyle’s tales of medical realism, here, scientific discovery in the

---

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., p. 307.

<sup>97</sup> For information on Ross see: <<http://www.cdc.gov/malaria/about/history/ross.html>> [accessed 27/10/08]. See: <<http://www.cdc.gov/malaria/biology/mosquito/>> [accessed 27/10/08] for general information on mosquitoes and Malaria from a modern perspective. A ‘genus’ consists ‘of several closely related and similar species’. *Oxford Concise Colour Medical Dictionary*.

<sup>98</sup> Doyle, ‘The Romance of Medicine’, *St Mary’s Hospital Gazette*, 16 (1910) 100-6 (repr. in Darby pp. 306-320), p. 318.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.



real world retains a transcendental quality resembling a 'fairyland' of new possibilities and horizons.

In the 'Devil's Foot' while under the influence of the Devil's-foot root Watson experiences a sensory and psychological trauma that can be read as the deadly hallucinatory effects of the toxin. A closer reading of his experience within the wider context of Doyle's writings reveals another possibility. In the story, Doyle never refers to the Devil's-foot root drug as a hallucinogen. Instead, I argue the use of the drug can be read as a means of a transcendental exploration into the existence of other worlds that exist upon the borders of our own. The heightened perceptions Watson experiences in the story are similar to that experienced in 'The Silver Mirror' and discussed in chapter one. As Watson's expresses in the quotation above, his visions of a 'thick black cloud' swirling before his eyes introduces the possibility of spirit contact. It is worth repeating this extract to note how the confused syntax here assists in conveying the sense of a mind reeling in shock. His 'appalled senses' reel at what this darkness hid from view, 'unseen as yet, but about to spring out upon my appalled senses, lurked all that was vaguely horrible, all that was monstrous and inconceivably wicked in the universe'. Exactly what is concealed in this darkness is left open to interpretation. Watson's expression 'the dweller upon the threshold' invites speculation as to the nature of the boundary he may be about to cross. Within the context of the 'Devil's Foot', a threshold refers to a border or limit of a figurative state or region. The possibility that Watson experienced a transcendental vision precipitated by the mysterious Devil's-foot root is not as far-fetched as it may initially sound. In Doyle's fiction Holmes famously relied upon a seven percent solution of cocaine to relieve the

tedium of his life between solving cases.<sup>100</sup> In *The Sign of Four* (1890) Watson admonishes Holmes for his persistent use of cocaine. Holmes responds by claiming “‘I suppose that its influence is physically a bad one. I find it, however, so transcendently stimulating and clarifying to the mind that its secondary action is a matter of small moment’”.<sup>101</sup> This comment refers to Holmes’s sense of exhilaration that the drug induces as a replacement for the stimulation provided by an investigation. It is also indicative of the transcendental quality of experiences beyond the ordinary, which might include unusual phenomena. Holmes’s deliberate use of a ‘transcendently stimulating’ dose of cocaine is akin to Watson’s accidental discovery of the same transcendental effects of the Devil’s-foot root. The ‘Devil’s Foot’ raises the possibility that, while under the influence of a deadly narcotic, Watson is poised at the threshold of scientific knowledge and its border with unknown laws of nature. It is not necessary to state Doyle intended Watson to encounter a spirit phenomenon in a Sherlock Holmes story. Rather, it is correct to note an infringement of Doyle’s wider interests of scientific exploration that further enables his Sherlock Holmes stories to be read as being in a dialogue with his spiritualist writings.

### **Mystical Knowledge and the Modern Practitioners of Medicine and Science**

As we have seen in chapter three, Doyle utilises Sherlock Holmes as an investigative tool that can establish how unusual phenomena could be investigated. In the ‘Devil’s Foot’, Holmes, with his unconventional manner and unusual skills, can be read as occupying another role that cuts across a traditional reading of Doyle’s detective fiction. This is important to the process of reading the Sherlock Holmes stories within the wider context Doyle’s interests and writings. Jesse Oak Taylor-Ide reads Holmes’s

---

<sup>100</sup> Rodin and Key note the presence of cocaine in seven Holmes stories, *A Study in Scarlet*, ‘A Scandal in Bohemia’, ‘The Man with the Twisted Lip’, ‘The Man with the Yellow Face’, *The Sign of Four*, ‘The Missing Three Quarter’ and ‘The Five Pips’, *Medical Casebook*, p. 385.

<sup>101</sup> *The Penguin Complete Sherlock Holmes*, p. 89.

cocaine use in *The Sign of Four*, especially the ‘transcendentally stimulating’ extract above, as being distinguished from a typical addict’s use of narcotics. Taylor-Ide argues Holmes ‘is not seeking oblivion [...]. The drug here is more than a stimulant; it is the catalyst for ritual transformation’.<sup>102</sup> Taylor-Ide concludes that Holmes is able to undergo ‘Doyle’s version of a shamanistic trance’.<sup>103</sup> While not agreeing with Taylor-Ide’s claim of a ritual transformation, an understanding of his argument that Holmes possesses supernatural abilities locates the detective within an earlier tradition of mystical knowledge that provide a common heritage with modern practitioners of medicine and science. Taylor-Ide’s argument is based upon the notion that Holmes served as a ‘mediator between late-Victorian British society and the irrational, supernatural, and foreign elements threatening it’.<sup>104</sup> By primarily focussing upon the threat posed by Stapleton in *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, Taylor-Ide argues ‘characters are transformed through time spent abroad and endowed with ‘other-worldly’ knowledge that can be put to nefarious purposes’.<sup>105</sup> Thus foreign lands, equated with ‘prior stages of evolution’, are connected to the supernatural posing a threat that is not easily countered by an unprepared civilised western culture.<sup>106</sup> Taylor-Ide argues in *The Hound* Holmes’s ‘passage between the world of society and the dark, polluting world outside of it through ritual transformation is in fact the central theme that enables the solving of the mystery’.<sup>107</sup> The nature of this ritual transformation is not entirely dependent upon the use of cocaine. Taylor-Ide reads Holmes as being equally reliant

---

<sup>102</sup> Jesse Oak Taylor-Ide, ‘Ritual and the Liminality of Sherlock Holmes in *The Sign of Four* and *The Hound of the Baskervilles*’, *English Literature in Transition, 1880-1920*, 48.1 (2005), 55-70, p. 58.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., p.60.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., p. 55.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., p. 56.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid. Novels such as *Dracula* and Ian Marsh’s *The Beetle* (1897) follow a similar pattern. It is interesting to note Holmes’s travels after his staged death in ‘The Final Problem’ includes a visit to a Tibetan spiritual leader, the “‘head Lama”” a passing trip through to Persia and a brief visit to see “‘the Khalifa at Khatoum”” in ‘The Adventure of the Empty House’ (1903), *The penguin Complete Sherlock Holmes*, p. 488. See Klinger, II, pp795-796 for a discussion of the historical and political problems with Holmes’s claim.

<sup>107</sup> Taylor-Ide, p. 57.

upon ‘huge quantities of caffeine and strong tobacco’.<sup>108</sup> In particular, Taylor-Ide focuses upon Watson’s description of Holmes upon the doctor’s return to Baker Street, ‘Holmes is barely visible “a vague vision [...] coiled up in an armchair with his pipe between his lips”’.<sup>109</sup> Taylor-Ide argues Holmes’s appearance suggests that the detective ‘seems to have undergone a ritual transformation’ during which his ‘spirit’ ‘hovers’ over Dartmoor during Watson’s absence.<sup>110</sup> This argument, as Taylor-Ide acknowledges, is dependent on Holmes being literal in his use of ‘spirit’ as meaning ‘the soul, essence, or immaterial part of a corporeal being’ instead of solely referring to ‘the mind or mental activity’.<sup>111</sup> Thus it is not the ritual transformation Taylor-Ide argues that is relevant to the refiguring of Holmes, it is the detective’s cultural association with mysticism, a feature of Doyle’s early non-Holmesian novel *The Mystery of Cloomber* (1889).

In this novel, three travelling Buddhist monks, Lal Hoomi, Mowdar Khan and Ram Singh, use their occult powers to take vengeance upon Major General Heatherstone. This novel has more than a passing resemblance to Wilkie Collins’s *The Moonstone* (1868) though it also engages with Doyle’s early interest in the occult, including theosophy.<sup>112</sup> This is apparent in *The Mystery of Cloomber* when James Hunter West, a ‘well-known Oriental and Sanskrit scholar’ contends “[i]t is unquestionable” the

---

<sup>108</sup> Ibid., p. 60. Taylor-Ide also notes Holmes’s preference in *The Hound* for the strongest ‘shag’ tobacco, arguing ‘even for a heavy smoker such as Holmes, consuming such an immense quantity of strong pipe tobacco, could induce a trance of some kind, especially when a pot or two of strong coffee is added to the mix’, p. 69.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid., p. 59 and *The Complete Sherlock Holmes*, p. 683.

<sup>110</sup> Taylor-Ide, p. 59 and p. 60. Smajić reads this scene as Holmes engaging in ‘what spiritualists call *travelling clairvoyance*’ [Smajić’s italics], arguing that this suggests that Holmes has ‘always been a medium of sorts, though it is not until *The Hound* that the medium comes out of the closet’. Consequently, this apparent anti-materialism is indicative of a wider theme in late nineteenth-century, that of detective fiction’s ‘return to its occult origins, its repressed family resemblance with ghost-fiction’, Srdjan Smajić, *Ghost-Seers, Detectives, and Spiritualists: Theories of Victorian Literature and Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 133, p. 134 and p. 136.

<sup>111</sup> Taylor-Ide, p. 60.

<sup>112</sup> Green and Gibson note, ‘[t]he subject owed a lot to sensational literature of the time, especially to Wilkie Collins, though it also reflects some of the author’s interests at Southsea’, Richard Lancelyn Green and John Michael Gibson, *A Bibliography of A. Conan Doyle* (Boston: Hudson House, 1983; repr. 2000), p. 14.

Buddhist travellers ““have in the past known many of Nature’s secrets which are lost to us””.<sup>113</sup> Doyle had become disillusioned with theosophy after it had become discredited in the years before the publication of *The Mystery of Cloomber*, although the possibility that the source of the Buddhists’ power may well be natural laws that have been forgotten or discredited by western science is noteworthy.<sup>114</sup> Couched within *The Mystery of Cloomber* is the dichotomy of western science and the validity of eastern, oriental beliefs. The novel’s narrator, John Fothergill West, cautions against an unquestioning adherence to western scientific tradition, arguing ‘[f]or what is science? Science is the consensus of opinion of scientific men, and history as shown that it is slow to accept a truth’.<sup>115</sup> Here is another early example of how Doyle, as well as writers such as Catherine Crowe and Herbert Mayo from earlier in the century, portrayed scientific orthodoxy as being incapable (and unwilling) of expanding the boundaries of its knowledge. However, it is this notion, that ‘an unquestioning adherence’ to the ‘consensus’ of opinion of ‘scientific men’ that is of interest. It is indicative of an ideology that prioritises a broadly European and North American tradition of practicing medical science that is in danger of ignoring its own historical roots. This allows a reading of Holmes as a mediator between mysticism and the boundaries of science. His association with mystic traditions and their implicit notion of forgotten natural laws figures him as a potential negotiator of eastern, oriental beliefs capable of expanding scientific knowledge. This idea finds expression through Doyle’s portrayal of Watson’s relationship with Sherlock Holmes and the dichotomy between western scientific tradition and eastern mysticism.

It is possible to read the ‘Devil’s Foot’ within a historical medical context that does not prioritise a western medical tradition that is unconscious of its own mystical roots.

---

<sup>113</sup> Doyle, *The Mystery of Cloomber* (London: Hesperus Press, 2004) p. 4 and p. 89.

<sup>114</sup> Lycett, p. 127.

<sup>115</sup> Doyle, *The Mystery of Cloomber*, p. 126.

In his history of medicine, Roy Porter cautions against a simplistic division of scientific and supernatural approaches to medicine. He argues

We must thus avoid taking for granted the antagonistic presence of two traditions: the scientific and the superstitious, the right and the wrong. In all complex societies there have been various ways of thinking about the body, health and disease.<sup>116</sup>

The western, or European and north-American tradition of medicine, which during the nineteenth and twentieth century had become ‘uniquely powerful and [...] uniquely global’ in its influence and prestige, shared its heritage with an earlier healing tradition that incorporated spiritual, magical and religious beliefs.<sup>117</sup> While ‘[m]edical magic’, involving ritual, trances and transference of disease into animate or inanimate subjects ‘was accepted by the unlettered and the elite alike until at least the seventeenth century’ it came to be regarded contemptuously and contested by more assertive exponents of western medical tradition.<sup>118</sup> By the nineteenth century encounters between medical magic and western medicine typically took place in non-European and therefore foreign lands, the territory Taylor-Ide argues is associated with Holmes’s ‘apparently supernatural’ cases.<sup>119</sup> These lands are also the territories that inspired Doyle’s interest in exploration as well as imperial and medical romance. This type of encounter is associated with nineteenth century ethnography and anthropology that sought to catalogue and explain racial difference. Porter presents an example of contact between European medical men and their foreign counterparts. In 1763 John Bell, a Scottish surgeon, encountered a ‘charming session’ in southern Siberia. This ritual involved a shaman distorting “his body into many different postures, till, at last, he wrought

---

<sup>116</sup> Roy Porter, *The Greatest Benefit to Mankind: A Medical History of Humanity from Antiquity to the Present* (London: Harper Collins, 1997; repr. 1999), p. 40.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6. Porter links this growth to economic, imperial and political expansion during this period, noting the dangers of accepting a simplistic definition of ‘western’ medicine, which in turn has its roots in several continents.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, p.41.

<sup>119</sup> Taylor-Ide, p. 56.

himself up to such a degree of fury that he foamed at the mouth, and his eyes looked red and staring”<sup>120</sup>. Bell’s reaction to this is revealing, ““these unnatural motions were, by the vulgar, attributed to the operations of a divinity””, leading him to conclude that ““nothing is more evident than that these shamans are a parcel of jugglers, who impose on the ignorant and the credulous vulgar””.<sup>121</sup> Bell’s distaste reveals not just an assumption of fraud based upon cultural misunderstanding. For Porter, it illustrates an ‘arrogantly ethnocentric’ European bias.<sup>122</sup>

At times it seems that Holmes and Watson represent the two aspects of this cultural divide. Taylor-Ide argues that the manner in which Holmes injects cocaine in *The Sign of Four* is ritualistic and closely related to his transcendental experiences with shag tobacco in *The Hound*. Watson, however, ‘is not a participant [to drug taking]; he looks on chronicling the progression of the ritual like an ethnographer watching a tribal dance – simultaneously enticed, repulsed, and yet thoroughly captivated’.<sup>123</sup> Watson, who is both enthralled and repulsed by such activity, enforces his professional medical opinion that it can only lead to self-destruction. Like Bell above, Watson is representative of a western medical tradition. In such a tradition, an argument claiming that cocaine possesses a transcendental quality akin to Watson’s experience with the Devil’s-foot root, would exemplify the language of an addict’s self-delusion, or the superstitions of a foreign trickster. However, Watson, while endorsing such traditional values, simultaneously records Holmes’s adventures in highly impressionistic accounts of unusual events that tend towards superstition and the gothic. Under Holmes’s influence Watson registers the infringement into the Sherlock Holmes stories of Doyle’s wider spiritual interests at what is possible at the limits of natural law. What is striking in the

---

<sup>120</sup> Porter, *The Greatest Benefit to Mankind*, p.31.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.31-32.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 32.

<sup>123</sup> Taylor-Ide, p. 57

‘Devil’s Foot’ is that it is Watson who saves the day and manages to mediate between the ordinary and extra-ordinary laws of nature during their self-experiment. We never learn what Holmes experienced during his exposure to the drug, just the look of horror on his face as he sits helpless in its thrall. However, Watson’s western medical tradition is exposed to Holmes’s willingness to experiment and explore without prejudice or being bound to scientific orthodoxy. Watson’s experience under the influence of the Devil’s-foot root consequently occupies the fertile ground that Doyle argued was a necessity for an imaginative use of scientific investigation.

### **Playing with Fire: The Border between Two Worlds**

Having established Doyle’s advocacy of a need to broaden scientific investigation that was rooted in the romance of medicine and exploration, as evidenced by Holmes’s self-experimentation and his association with mysticism, I now turn to how these boundaries incorporate other worlds that border our own. In the ‘Devil’s Foot’, Doyle’s expansion of scientific boundaries evokes the domestic séance and consequently his spiritualist interests. In the initial assault upon the Tregennis siblings, the family are gathered around a table within the family’s domestic sphere. To an extent this scene is replicated by Holmes and Watson within their own rented holiday cottage during their self-experimentation. Their exposure to the Devil’s-foot root evokes the sense of risk evident in Doyle’s spiritualist short-story ‘Playing with Fire’ (1900), in which, as we shall see, the dangers of experimenting with potentially supernatural forces are revealed when a spiritualist séance threatens the domestic sphere of a Victorian living room. In ‘Playing with Fire’ a séance takes place at the home of Harvey Deacon, attended by four friends and an invited student of the occult, Paul le Duc. In both stories there is a terrifying encounter with potentially unexplained phenomena, although this is more muted in the ‘Devil’s Foot’. Markham, the narrator of ‘Playing with Fire’ muses over



the forthcoming séance, speculating, '[w]hat a gap we were bridging, the half raised veil of the eternal on the one side and the cabs of London on the other'.<sup>124</sup> As with the 'Devil's Foot' and other fiction, Doyle posits spiritualism with the ordinary everyday world around us. In 'Playing with Fire' this is evident in the everyday worldly noises heard by those attending the séance as they await contact with the spirits. Those attending the séance 'heard the creak and grate of a cab pulling up next door. There was an argument about the fare, and the cabman grumbled hoarsely down the street'.<sup>125</sup> During the séance, Le Duc stresses their experience with such unexplained phenomena should be investigated through experimentation. He states, "I should weesh [sic] to try some experiment with all this force which is given to us".<sup>126</sup> In this story, Doyle explores the notion that experimentation with spiritualist phenomena, in this case the potential "psychic force" generated by the spirits present, could be directed by a powerful medium to test the limits of what is possible. The comedic consequence of Le Duc's experiment is his creation of a spirit unicorn, formed from the psychic energy created during the séance. This swiftly changes to terror when the creature rampages through the house before its psychic energy dissipates. The danger posed to those undertaking psychic experiments with frivolous intent underlie the more serious theme indicated by the story's title. Unlike the 'dweller upon the threshold' hinted at by Watson in the 'Devil's Foot', in 'Playing with Fire' a mythical creature is summoned and crosses the border of another world. As we shall see in chapter five, Doyle speculated as to the existence of numerous worlds separated from our own that were not supernatural, but originated in natural law. If the potential for these new worlds occurs in the 'Devil's Foot' their existence is confirmed in a wider reading of Doyle's fiction.

---

<sup>124</sup> *The Conan Doyle Stories* (London: John Murray, 1929; repr. 1960), p. 774.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 775.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 778.

In ‘The Horror of the Heights’ (1913) Joyce-Armstrong, a pilot, discovers an ‘air-jungle’ populated with creatures that dwell thirty-thousand feet above Wiltshire. The story’s narrator notes how ‘[t]his world of ours appears to be separated by a slight and precarious margin of safety from a most singular and unexpected danger’.<sup>127</sup> In ‘The Terror of Blue John Gap’ (1910), when Dr James Hardcastle, whose diary forms the main narrative, asks ‘[c]ould it indeed be possible that some nameless thing, some dreadful presence was lurking’ beyond the Blue John gap, the answer is a resounding “yes”.<sup>128</sup> As with Watson in the ‘Devil’s Foot’, Joyce-Armstrong and Hardcastle are poised at the threshold of a world containing creatures that are terrifying and monstrous because they are not understood and do not live within the vision of the unimaginative. Hardcastle speculates, ‘I think of the old-world legends of dragons and of other monsters. Were they, perhaps, not such fairy tales as we have thought?’<sup>129</sup> This question is caused by his encounter with a giant cave-bear, an example of a species that evolved in a vast lost world, an underground labyrinth that has been cut off from above.<sup>130</sup> When his theory is met with derision, Hardcastle curses those ‘unimaginative pedants who cannot conceive that there may be things in creation which have never yet chanced to come across their mole’s vision’.<sup>131</sup> As with ‘Lot No. 249’ and the other stories described above, the assumption that the natural world is completely understood and defined by specialists and laymen alike is challenged. Whether that danger stems from the air in ‘The Horror of the Heights’ or underground in ‘The Terror of Blue John Gap’, encounters with such natural terrors are initially perceived as supernatural by those who are unfortunate to experience them. In ‘The Terror of Blue John Gap’ Hardcastle,

---

<sup>127</sup> Ibid., p.447.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid., p. 511.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid., p. 518.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid., pp. 524-525.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid., p.517. This complaint is evocative of the type of imagination, noted by Lorraine Daston and Katharine Park and discussed in my introduction, that informed a much earlier period’s cultural perception of the existence of wonderful creatures at the edge of the known world, Lorraine Daston and Katherine Park, *Wonders and the Order of Nature 1150-1750* (New York: Zone Books, 1998).

himself a medical doctor, initially doubts the existence of the giant cave-bear stating, ‘I was almost ready to persuade myself that this experience had been part of some evil dream and that my abnormal condition might have conjured up an hallucination’.<sup>132</sup> Hardcastle’s ‘abnormal condition’ is his tuberculosis, something that made him seek the fresher air of the country. An ‘unimaginative’ and critical account of Hardcastle’s experience, recorded by a local newspaper explains how his ‘impaired health’ and ‘the possibility of cerebral lesions of tubercular origin’ may give ‘rise to strange hallucinations’.<sup>133</sup> This critical account is written to dismiss Hardcastle’s testimony and ascribe his experience as a symptom of his illness. However, his open mind and lack of prejudice regarding his experience, regardless whether it has been caused by his imagination or an actual encounter with a creature from a lost world, allow him to consider the validity of an unusual phenomenon. Importantly, Hardcastle is a similar character to Harvey Deacon who, in ‘Playing with Fire’, is described as being:

a man with remarkably clear and logical brain [...] he represented in our small circle the critical element, the man who has no prejudices, is prepared to follow facts as far as he can see them.<sup>134</sup>

This description, worthy of Holmes himself, strengthens Doyle’s advocacy of a need to broaden an understanding of the natural world.

Doyle’s lifelong interest in exploration, whether it is geographical, medical or spiritual, finds expression in stories that chart the boundaries of natural law. In the ‘Devil’s Foot’ Holmes combines his profound knowledge of chemistry with his experience with poisons and his passion for definite and exact knowledge to devise a characteristically reckless experiment to test and explore his theory about the properties

---

<sup>132</sup> *The Conan Doyle Stories* (London: John Murray, 1929; repr. 1960), p. 516.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*, p.524.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 769. In ‘The Terror of Blue John Gap’, Hardcastle is described as ‘a man of a sober and scientific turn of mind, absolutely devoid of imagination, and most unlikely to invent any abnormal series of events’, *ibid.*, p. 506.

of the Devil's-foot root. Like those historical adventurers such as Waterton or the fictional such as Sterndale, Holmes embodies Doyle's passion for adventure and romance. While Holmes does not embark upon geographical exploration in the precise manner of these characters, his unorthodox application of the imaginative spirit of Doyle's romance of medicine nonetheless make him an explorer of uncharted territory. His use of self-experimentation with a deadly drug brought to England by an explorer of Africa, articulates Doyle's idea that such activity retains the potential to expand our understanding of the natural world. Watson's potential spirit-contact within the 'Devil's Foot' is indicative of a heightening of human senses while under the influence of a drug that can act as a means of a transcendental exploration that challenges the limits of natural law. In the fifth and final chapter of this thesis, this exploration into the unknown aspects of the natural world continues in an examination of Doyle's science fiction and spiritualist writings. I consider how these writings allow Doyle to examine the validity of reliable evidence as well as how he attempted to modify his views on science that could include his ideas of spiritual salvation.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### **The Unanswerable Argument and the Spiritualist Revelation**

In the previous chapter I discussed how Doyle's interest in imperial fiction and exploration merge with medical self-experimentation and the effects of exotic toxins. Watson's exposure to a deadly drug in 'The Adventure of the Devil's Foot' (1910) results in a transcendental experience that potentially heightens the mind's perception in a manner that is concordant with the effects of addiction and psychological strain as discussed in my first two chapters. Such heightened perceptions are capable of revealing glimpses of the boundaries between worlds that originate within unexplained or unknown laws of nature. Doyle argued that an expansion of science was capable of accommodating and investigating such phenomena, as described in chapters three and four. In this chapter I examine how Doyle sought to redefine the parameters of what constituted scientific evidence when investigating the limits of natural law. As a medical practitioner, Doyle would have been conscious of the uncertainties revolving around notions of absolute proof in clinical diagnostics and this would have had some influence on his ideas on the fallibility of material evidence discussed in this chapter. Jason Daniel Tougaw notes how medical diagnosis is 'always an experimental practice, based on hypothesis, not certainty', although he reads such uncertainty as being resolved in the literary conventions associated with literary realism.<sup>1</sup> Tougaw argues that the uncertainty associated with uncertain clinical prognoses 'represents epistemological questions, but it does not necessarily provide answers'.<sup>2</sup> For Doyle, such epistemological questioning was located within the broader nineteenth century context of medical science. Roy Porter notes how medical science contributed to a 'new confidence in man's capacity to master his environment' as part of a post-enlightenment

---

<sup>1</sup> Jason Daniel Tougaw, *Strange Cases: The Medical Case History and the British Novel* (London: Routledge, 2006), p. 10.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 36.

movement towards scientific methodology.<sup>3</sup> Medicine and science were inextricably linked, although its methods were not universally held to be the ‘incomparable engine of analysis’ defined by Porter.<sup>4</sup> As Tougaw notes, the underlying uncertainty surrounding medical science raised epistemological questions about the interpretation of evidence. As we have seen, for Doyle, such uncertainty informed his interest in arguing unusual phenomena originated in hitherto unknown natural laws.

I read Doyle’s novel *The Lost World* (1912) as engaging with an uncertain interpretation of material evidence. It is a response to the science community’s refusal to accept material proof of the existence of an undiscovered realm populated by fantastic creatures amidst our own natural world. The novel’s insistence upon other forms of evidence, notably witness testimony from men of good character, shares Doyle’s concerns about evidence expressed in *The Coming of the Fairies* (1922) and the *The New Revelation* (1918). These texts are united by Doyle’s frustration at the narrow vision of scientific enquiry that refuses to consider the possibility of the existence of worlds and creatures that would expand the limits of natural law. What is of interest to me in this chapter is Doyle’s response to this, namely his attempt to include eye witness accounts of phenomena such as spirit encounters and the existence of fairies as valid scientific evidence. As with investigators such as Catherine Crowe and Harbert Mayo, Doyle did not abandon his earlier belief in the ability of science to explain such phenomena. I explore Doyle’s response to this seeming obstinacy, namely how he attempted to broaden the definition of acceptable evidence to justify his belief that phenomena misinterpreted as supernatural, that can also include spiritualism, did in fact originate in the natural world. Doyle’s science fiction novels examined in this chapter

---

<sup>3</sup> Roy Porter, *The Greatest Benefit to Mankind: A Medical History of Humanity from Antiquity to the Present* (London: Harper Collins, 1997; repr. 1999), p. 302.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

were written prior to and after his public advocacy of spiritualism. However, by time *The Lost World* was published, Doyle had privately arrived at a belief in spiritualism. Importantly, Doyle's serious spiritualist writings and other later fiction go further than merely questioning and critiquing scientific orthodoxy. His science-fiction novels, *The Poison Belt* (1913), *The Land of Mist* (1926) and *The Maracot Deep* (1929) question the spiritual consequences of a too strict adherence to a love of materialism. M H Abrams provides a definition of how the science-fiction genre can be applied to certain narratives. He notes how an:

explicit attempt is made to render plausible the fictional world by reference to known or imagined scientific principles, or to a projected advance in technology, or to a drastic change in the organization of society.<sup>5</sup>

Consequently, some of Doyle's later writings operate within this mode. However, as with much of Doyle's fiction, spirituality emerges as the stronger influence that moderates, without replacing, an adherence to science. I argue that this moderation of science is the primary function of the texts examined in this chapter. I explore Doyle's belief that a cataclysmic threat to the natural order of the world is the stimulus for a new found spirituality based on *The New Revelation*. I conclude my discussion in this chapter by considering how confirmed materialists such as Lord John Roxton and Maracot embrace the possibility of spiritualism, not so much as a conversion, but as a realisation that it is ultimately a new expression of the wonders of the natural world that matches Doyle's personal position on the subject.

---

<sup>5</sup> M. H. Abrams, *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, 7th edn (Fort Worth TX: Harcourt Brace College, 1999), p. 279.

## Doyle's Imperial Romance and Science Fiction: the Geographical Extremities of the Natural World

In *The Lost World*, written four years before his public advocacy of spiritualism, the discovery of a prehistoric land that infringes upon our own world is rooted in Doyle's love of imperial fiction. The narrative positions fantastic creatures and landscapes within our own natural world. For Doyle, if the existence of fantastic creatures and hitherto undiscovered realms could be proved it would encourage scientists to explore other possibilities and extend the limits of an understanding of natural law. Robert Fraser notes a Victorian 'vogue for adventure romance', which *The Lost World* nostalgically refers back to.<sup>6</sup> As we have seen in chapter four, the figure of the imperial adventurer appeared in Doyle's Sherlock Holmes stories. Leon Sterndale, lion hunter and explorer from the 'Devil's Foot', is described by Leslie S Klinger as 'something of an anomaly'. This is because '[t]he exploration of Africa', which had 'captured the public imagination in the mid-nineteenth century' was 'no longer considered terra incognita by 1897'.<sup>7</sup> This point is made clear to the narrator of *The Lost World*, the journalist Edward Malone, who asks his editor, McArdle, to be sent on a "mission" for his newspaper, the *Daily Gazette*.<sup>8</sup> Malone is informed that "the day for this sort of thing is rather past".<sup>9</sup> Importantly, the title of this novel may, in part, be referring to a lost world of quest romance, a further acknowledgement of its late arrival to this genre. In the novel, Malone's editor confirms this point, stating the "big blank spaces in the map are all being filled in, and there's no room for romance anywhere".<sup>10</sup> In this novel the past, or pre-history, takes on substance as an isolated land that can be

---

<sup>6</sup> Robert Fraser, *Victorian Quest Romance: Stevenson, Haggard, Kipling and Conan Doyle* (Plymouth: Northcote House, 1998), p. 3.

<sup>7</sup> Doyle, *The New Annotated Sherlock Holmes*, ed. by Leslie S. Klinger, 3 vols (New York: W.W. Norton, 2005), II, p. 1392.

<sup>8</sup> Doyle, *The Lost World*, ed. by Ian Duncan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 9.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10.



visited, explored and conquered. However, as with Doyle's interest in self-experimentation, *The Lost World's* engagement with imperial fiction is also integrated with science fiction through his wider concerns about the limits of scientific knowledge in the natural world.

The prehistoric lost world of Maple White Land visited by Challenger and Summerlee's expedition is at once familiar and alien to both fictional explorer and reader alike. This is due to a combination of Doyle's love of imperial romance but also his use of science fiction to present other worldly environments. In *The Lost World*, Challenger estimates the size of the prehistoric landscape to be "[a]n area, as large perhaps as Sussex", closely associating it with Doyle's home county.<sup>11</sup> Challenger repeats this later in the novel when he states "[w]e know roughly that this plateau is not larger than an average English county".<sup>12</sup> Ian Duncan notes in his introduction to the novel how Sussex 'had been a rich source of fossil evidence for Victorian palaeontology' and that '[m]ost of the dinosaurs encountered in *The Lost World* are British species'.<sup>13</sup> According to Duncan, this association is stronger than analogy or metaphor. He notes 'Maple White Land is prehistoric Sussex, Doyle's own neighbourhood miraculously preserved in the New World'.<sup>14</sup> Duncan considers how Maple White Land exhibits a 'reassuring, domestic and pastoral vein' in which the explorers 'are continually being reminded of home'.<sup>15</sup> Malone is himself conscious of this when he admits to being comforted by the presence of the 'homely English bee' that 'buzzed everywhere around us'.<sup>16</sup> This familiarity is soon countered by the extraordinary landscapes and creatures that they soon discover. It is not long after

---

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 35.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 112.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 193.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid. Maple White Land is the name Challenger gives to the isolated plateau in South America's lost world, named after the first explorer to discover it.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. xii.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 113.

Challenger's expedition penetrates the interior of the South American jungle when a sense of wonder is engendered in Malone. He records how no one 'could possibly have [...] dreamed of the fairyland beyond. For a fairyland it was – the most wonderful that the imagination of man could conceive'.<sup>17</sup> Malone's description is partly intended to represent the expanding horizons of a young man engaged upon the bildungsroman familiar with this type of quest romance. To Malone all of the South American rain forest is fantastic, because it is a new experience. It is at this place, on the edge of the unknown, where the environment takes on the aspect of 'fairyland' beyond the conception of man's 'imagination'. This is evocative of Lorraine Daston and Katharine Park's notation of an earlier belief that wonders cluster at the edge of the known world, although for Doyle such marvels are utilised in his later fiction to encourage investigation into unusual phenomena.<sup>18</sup> At this point in the story, the expedition passes through a 'wilderness of swampy forest, where no white man has ever been'.<sup>19</sup> Malone's colleague Roxton observes how the 'unknown is up against us on every side'.<sup>20</sup> Their approach to the lost world echoes Doyle's belief of how the unknown can be explored. It is appropriate when Roxton exclaims '[o]utside the narrow lines of the rivers what does anyone know? Who will say what is possible in such a country?'<sup>21</sup> Roxton, a seasoned explorer and adventurer, possesses a 'peculiar mixture of accurate knowledge and racy imagination' that goes beyond a desire merely to explore the known world.<sup>22</sup> In this statement Roxton challenges the limits of human knowledge as portrayed by maps with their 'narrow lines' defining the boundaries of 'rivers' and other geography. Malone's 'fairyland' combined with Roxton's questioning of the boundaries

---

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 70.

<sup>18</sup> Lorraine Daston and Katharine Park, *Wonders and the Order of Nature 1150 -1750* (New York: Zone Books, 1998).

<sup>19</sup> Doyle, *The Lost World*, p. 59.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid. Malone describes Roxton as 'a South Americomaniac' who could not help speaking of the country with an 'ardour' Malone finds 'infectious', p. 58.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p. 58.

of human knowledge create a sense of a world of new possibilities which is simultaneously apart from, and a part of, the natural world. It reinforces Doyle's belief that there are undetected or unexplored lost or other worlds existing alongside the perceived material and natural world. In *The Lost World*, Doyle presents the reader with such new and undetected possibilities. At the geographical extremity of the lost world Challenger discovers a primeval wilderness that exists in his modern world. In this wilderness they discover a territory of unknown natural wonders including dinosaurs and ape men. For Doyle, one of the central themes of *The Lost World* is Challenger's consequent struggle to prove his fantastic and unusual experiences to a gathering of scientists and other interested academics. Doyle's preoccupation with determining what might constitute adequate evidence, as well as the difficulties in providing it, feature prominently in *The Lost World* and are central to the author's advancement of scientific thought.

### **Reliable Evidence in *The Lost World***

Doyle utilised *The Lost World* to discuss what constituted reliable evidence in defining a new scientific understanding of the limits of natural law. If primeval species such as dinosaurs and ape men can exist beyond our everyday perception in the modern world, then a new understanding of the laws of nature would need to accommodate such phenomena. However, before this could be accomplished a sceptical audience would have to be convinced. The purpose of Challenger's second expedition to the lost world was to bring back adequate proof, something that he did not achieve in an earlier aborted mission. Challenger's original evidence from the aborted mission was primarily his own testimony and a sketch found on the body of a previous explorer named Maple White. Such evidence was not enough to overturn established scientific thought. Malone summarises Challenger's problem during his first meeting with the professor:

“surely the whole experience of the human race is not to be set aside on account of a single sketch [...]. You can’t, as a man of science, defend such a position as that”<sup>23</sup> Challenger’s word of honour, despite his good character and reputation, is not enough to sway scientific opinion. In order to provide valid evidence, Challenger returns from his second mission with a captured pterodactyl and photographic proof. Before revealing this pterodactyl as a theatrical piece-de-résistance in London at the Queen’s Hall, Challenger’s photographic evidence of the lost world is ridiculed. His main opponent, Dr James Illingworth, argues the photographs may be forgeries. Doyle utilises Illingworth as a focal point for the type of opposition and prejudice he faced when advocating the need to expand the field of scientific enquiry into the spiritual and the unknown.<sup>24</sup> Doyle argued in ‘The Psychic Question as I see it’ (1927) that the ‘prejudice against the question was so strong that an Academic Career might even now be seriously affected by acquiescence in psychic truth’.<sup>25</sup> In *The Lost World*, Illingworth concedes that Challenger and Roxton ‘were men of character’.<sup>26</sup> However, Illingworth argues ‘[e]ven Professors might be misled by the desire for notoriety’.<sup>27</sup> Illingworth asks, “was it possible that in this age of ingenious manipulation photographs could be accepted as evidence?”<sup>28</sup> As we shall see later in this chapter, his question is evocative of Doyle’s desire to endorse his personal spiritual beliefs, in particular his campaign to prove the existence of fairies by promoting photographs of the Cottingley fairies. In *The Lost World* Challenger responds to Illingworth’s question

---

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p. 30.

<sup>24</sup> Doyle faced opposition from a wide cross-section that included popular media, religious and even the Magic Circle, see Andrew Lycett, *Conan Doyle: The Man Who Created Sherlock Holmes* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2007), p.378 for a summary of this.

<sup>25</sup> Doyle, ‘The Psychic Question as I see it’, in Oliver Lodge et al, *The Case for and Against Psychical Belief*, ed. by Carl Murchison (Worcester MA: Clark University, 1927), pp. 15-24 (p.20).

<sup>26</sup> Doyle, *The Lost World*, p. 181.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

by stating that the “negatives were open to the inspection of experts”.<sup>29</sup> However, Challenger’s photographic evidence is not enough to sway his audience who remain unconvinced. Roxton epitomises this sentiment when he angrily asks, “[i]s this fellow calling me a liar?”<sup>30</sup> Challenger and Roxton’s position mirrors Doyle’s, in that a witness’s good character and perhaps more importantly, his word, was not enough to convince a sceptical audience, even when the witness had nothing to gain and much to lose by supporting such causes.

For Challenger, if photographs can be forged and a person’s word of honour can be ignored then surely a presentation of a live pterodactyl must represent an ‘unanswerable argument’ as it is irrefutable proof of the existence of a lost world.<sup>31</sup> The pterodactyl is described as ‘the wildest gargoyle that the imagination of a mad medieval builder could have conceived [...]. It was the devil of our childhood’.<sup>32</sup> In an earlier age, such a creature would have been the product of an imagination that provided inspiration for phenomena that resisted all other explanations.<sup>33</sup> Although the tone in *The Lost World* is reminiscent of Malone’s response to Maple White’s drawing of a stegosaurus. Malone notes ‘[i]t was the wild dream of an opium smoker, a vision of delirium’.<sup>34</sup> Both descriptions are similar to Watson’s recollection of the hound of the Baskervilles, as well as his experience with the Devil’s-foot root. Both these experiences reveal the possibility, as well as the proximity, of other worlds and creatures. In *The Lost World*, as evidence for the existence of a lost world, a living, breathing dinosaur seems irrefutable. However, the pterodactyl, startled by the audience’s horror at its appearance, takes to the air and escapes through a window soaring above the streets of London.

---

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 183.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p. 181.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., p. 186.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., p. 184.

<sup>33</sup> Daston and Park, p. 341.

<sup>34</sup> Doyle, *The Lost World*, p. 29.

Once the audience recover their composure they hail Challenger and his companions as heroes, carrying them on their shoulders down Regent Street. Even though the pterodactyl is sighted by several other witnesses as it flies steadily homewards to the lost world, the novel still ends without substantial material proof. The creature has escaped and only the eyewitness reports remain, something that *The Lost World* and Doyle consistently maintain is not suitable evidence to quell scientific scepticism. In fact, there is an odd circular motion to *The Lost World's* conclusion. At the beginning of the novel, a committee is established to investigate Challenger's claims from the first expedition. After the second expedition returns but before the presentation of the pterodactyl, Illingworth moves for a motion to declare the expedition as “non-proven”. He also recommends “that it shall be referred back to a larger, and possibly more reliable Committee of Investigation”.<sup>35</sup> At the end of the novel, after the pterodactyl escapes and with only eye witness testimony and no material corroboration of Challenger's dinosaur, the committee would be back where they started. Unable to move on from their scepticism, they would still have to declare the expedition “non-proven”. It is curious then that Challenger's pterodactyl, his ‘unanswerable argument’, flies away undermining his case and leaving the matter tantalisingly open to future claims of an elaborate deception. It seems deliberate that Doyle made the evidence of the pterodactyl so elusive. *The Lost World* exposes how scientific enquiry is too dependent on material evidence. But in certain marginal cases such evidence would not be easy to gather. Doyle's background in medical science would support this notion due to the uncertainty of medical prognosis based on hypothesis and experiment. This offers another meaning to Doyle's term of an ‘unanswerable argument’. In some cases, when exposing the existence of other worlds, fairies or spiritualism, Doyle felt there never

---

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p. 181.

could be the type of evidence that could be completely irrefutable. For Doyle, the material evidence needed to prove such phenomena is as elusive as the pterodactyl. If appropriate evidence could not be found or there was an unwillingness to do so then this obstinacy would render the psychic question almost unanswerable. To counter this, Doyle argues that where there is an absence of material evidence, the collected testimony of people judged as reliable witnesses should make up this deficit.

This point foreshadows Doyle's account of spiritualism in *The New Revelation*, published six years after *The Lost World*. Here, Doyle argues that the accounts of spiritualist experience, (such as séances, apparitions and automatic writing) present a chain of related evidence. Doyle's emphasis is upon the cumulative effect of many separate accounts pointing to the same conclusion. He claims that an individual's testimony unsupported by other accounts is worthless on its own. Doyle argues:

If a person comes to me with an account of life in some further world, and has no credentials save his own assertion, I would rather have it in my waste-paperbasket.<sup>36</sup>

For Doyle, it was enough that many people he regarded as credible recorded their spiritualist experiences. As Doyle illustrates with the conclusion to *The Lost World*, even when a reliable character's testimony, such as Roxton, is supported by other credible witnesses, like Challenger, it is not enough to sway a sceptical audience. In *The New Revelation* Doyle argues that in spiritualism 'the whole of this system, from the lowest physical phenomenon of a table-rap up to the most inspired utterance of a prophet, is one complete whole'.<sup>37</sup> Doyle refers to the accounts of three witnesses of Daniel Dunglas Home's levitation outside a window at the height of seventy feet. Doyle argues that 'Lord Dunraven, Lord Lindsay and Captain Wynne, all men of honour and

---

<sup>36</sup> Doyle, *The New Revelation* (New York: Cosimo, 2007), p. 33.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 34.

repute' were 'willing afterwards to take their oath upon it'.<sup>38</sup> Doyle argues, as did Crowe and Mayo, that 'the agreement of the witnesses does, as in all cases of evidence, constitute some argument for their truth'.<sup>39</sup> For Doyle, the oath of several reputable witnesses such as these represents a credible chain of reliable evidence. For those sceptics that will not even consider examining such evidence, Doyle dismissed them as narrow minded because this new subject of enquiry, at the borderland of scientific knowledge, 'would not fit in with their preconceived ideas'.<sup>40</sup> One common characteristic shared by sceptics in Doyle's fiction and non-fiction is their unwillingness to consider new ideas or scientific breakthroughs. In *The Coming of the Fairies* he condemns those who 'waive aside the evidence of such people on the ground that it does not correspond with our own experience is an act of mental arrogance'.<sup>41</sup> This arrogance leads to an ignorance of "anything which extends man's mental horizon, and proves to him that matter as we have known it is not really the limit of our universe"; a factor Doyle suggests will eventually succeed in 'breaking down materialism and leading human thought to a broader and more spiritual level'.<sup>42</sup> For Doyle, an extension of mankind's mental horizons as a challenge to the known limits of natural laws was the foundation for an eventual acceptance of spiritualism. The scepticism of the public could not easily be countered by argument alone. However, if it could be proved that

---

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., p.17.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., p.20. This process does, of course, resemble Sherlock Holmes's method of utilising circumstantial evidence in an investigation. Also, in 'The Law of the Ghost' (1919) Doyle discusses an investigation of such authenticated spiritualist cases, 'to compare these authentic cases together and see what common characteristics they possess, shirking nothing and following the facts wherever they lead without any preliminary prejudice', *The Edge of the Unknown* (London: John Murray, 1930; repr. Teddington: The Echo Library, 2006), pp. 50-59 (p. 50).

<sup>40</sup> Ibid. This is a point Catherine Crowe expressed when she states: '[t]o minds which can admit nothing but what can be explained and demonstrated, an investigation [...] must appear perfectly idle', Crowe, *The Night Side of Nature: or Ghosts and Ghost Seers*, ed. by Gillian Bennett (London: Wordsworth, 2000), P. 16.

<sup>41</sup> Doyle, *The Coming of the Fairies* (London: Pavilion Books, 1997), p. 82.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., p. 56.



other creatures, such as fairies, inhabited the natural world yet existed in a realm beyond our senses, then it would be a step in the direction of accomplishing his ultimate goal.

### **The Coming of the Fairies**

In *The Coming of the Fairies* Doyle argues that our world is ‘very much more complex than we had imagined, and that there may be upon its surface some very strange neighbours who will open up inconceivable lines of science for our posterity’.<sup>43</sup> While this evokes the fictional narrative of *The Lost World*, it does in fact refer to a non-fictional account concerning the existence of fairies. In *The Coming of the Fairies* Doyle describes how in 1917 two young cousins named Elsie Wright and Frances Griffith, in Cottingley, Yorkshire, took photographs of what they claimed to be fairies.<sup>44</sup> Advocating these photographs as evidence, Doyle argued the girls had discovered a new form of life that had been undetected. In *The Coming of the Fairies* Doyle states, ‘[t]his narrative [...] is simply a collection of facts the inferences from which may be accepted or rejected as the reader may think fit’.<sup>45</sup> However, Doyle’s attempt to appear as an impartial investigator appealing to the objectivity of the general reader is disingenuous. Doyle exhibited the characteristics of an investigator blinded by his subjective reasoning based on his preconceived ideas detailed by Jonathan Smith, Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison noted in my introduction. As Russell Miller observes, when arguing for the existence of fairies in *The Coming of the Fairies*, Doyle was ‘[c]ompletely blind to any evidence the pictures might not be genuine’.<sup>46</sup> Doyle relied upon the fact that the fairy photographs were genuine in that the negatives had not been tampered with,

---

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., p. 75.

<sup>44</sup> Doyle originally presented his evidence for the existence of fairies in *The Strand Magazine* in 1920, 1921 and 1923. *The Coming of the Fairies* is a compilation of these articles and letter with further evidence and commentary.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., p. 3.

<sup>46</sup> Russell Miller, *The Adventures of Arthur Conan Doyle* (London: Pimlico, 2009), p. 407.

neither had there been any use of false scenic backgrounds.<sup>47</sup> Doyle, as Jon Lellenberg, Daniel Stashower and Charlse Foley state, ‘could not bring himself to believe that the two young girls had perpetrated such an elaborate deception’, a judgement based partly on his own desire to believe in the existence of fairies and an assessment of the two girls’ background.<sup>48</sup> Doyle argued:

Elsie could only have done it by cut-out images, which must have been of exquisite beauty, [...] fashioned and kept without the knowledge of her parents, and capable of giving the impression of motion when carefully examined by an expert. Surely this is a large order!<sup>49</sup>

As with the conclusion to *The Lost World*, Doyle based the validity of a witness upon his judgement of their integrity. This is evident in *The Coming of the Fairies* when he argues, ‘[t]he evidence was so complete and detailed, with such good names attached to it, that it was difficult to believe that it was false.’<sup>50</sup> Doyle also includes two chapters of what he called ‘Independent Evidence for Fairies’ and ‘Some Subsequent Cases’ in *The Coming of the Fairies* that comprised of accounts of witnesses of fairy activity.<sup>51</sup> However, in Chapter VII Doyle states, ‘I have convinced myself that there is overwhelming evidence for the fairies’ indicating he was not as objective as earlier comments in his book suggests.<sup>52</sup> *The Coming of the Fairies* demonstrates the intransigence of one who is certain of his facts and will not entertain contrary points of view.

---

<sup>47</sup> For a discussion on Doyle, the Cottingley fairy photographs, Sherlock Holmes and spiritualism, see Catherine Wynne, ‘Arthur Conan Doyle and Psychic Photographs’ *History of Photography*, 22:4 (1998), pp. 385-392.

<sup>48</sup> *Arthur Conan Doyle: A Life in Letters*, ed. by Jon Lellenberg, Daniel Stashower and Charles Foley (London: Harper Collins, 2007), p. 668. Doyle’s interest in the Cottingley fairies is well documented in almost every biography of the author.

<sup>49</sup> Doyle, *The Coming of the Fairies*, p.41.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 22.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 74-87 and 88-98.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 92.

Despite Doyle's belief in the existence of such unusual neighbours, he acknowledged that evidence must be repeated many times before the public accepted the existence of fairies. However, as Barbara Maria Stafford argues, such a 'subjective vision' must be 'disciplined by logic and corroborated by the testimony of the other senses'.<sup>53</sup> In a letter to his confidante and fellow investigator Edward L Gardner, Doyle argued evidence would need to be 'repeated again and yet again' before people realise 'that this new order of life is really established and has to be taken into serious account, just as the pigmies of Central Africa'.<sup>54</sup> This parallel between the discovery of fairies and a previously unknown indigenous African tribe is evocative of the discovery of primitive races Challenger encounters in *The Lost World* and the geography that Malone describes as 'fairyland'. Doyle continues to suggest how the existence of fairies could be compared to the discovery of new species. He presents an analogy of a rare amphibious creature. Doyle argues that if such a creature had never been seen on land, then it would be difficult to prove its existence to someone who had never observed one. In *The Coming of the Fairies* Doyle contends sceptics would say that only land creatures live on land and ask for a demonstration of what had been seen. He argues '[f]aced by so reasonable an opposition' witnesses 'could only mutter that they had seen them with their own eyes, but that they could not command their movements'.<sup>55</sup> Doyle concludes, 'The sceptics would hold the field'.<sup>56</sup> It may well be possible to detect some of the frustration Doyle felt at not having what he regarded as valid circumstantial evidence in his attempts to develop what he felt was a sound scientific argument for the existence of fairies and other new species.

---

<sup>53</sup> Barbara Maria Stafford, *Artful Science: Enlightenment Entertainment and the Eclipse of Visual Education* (Cambridge MA: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1999), p. 153.

<sup>54</sup> Doyle, *The Coming of the Fairies*, p.56.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 74-5.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

The importance of discovering other species integrated with our own world, yet undetectable to our everyday senses is not just that it would open up new scientific fields to explore. Doyle argues in *The Coming of the Fairies* that ‘once fairies are admitted other psychic phenomena will find a more ready acceptance’.<sup>57</sup> The recognised existence of fairies, Doyle suggested, ‘will jolt the material twentieth-century mind out of its heavy ruts in the mud, and will make it admit that there is a glamour and a mystery to life’.<sup>58</sup> It is important to consider how fairies represent a transitional phase in Doyle’s wider spiritual beliefs. Although Doyle argues that ‘this whole subject of the objective existence of a subhuman form of life has nothing to do with the larger and far more vital question of spiritualism’, it is clear that he could not resist incorporating a spiritualist message.<sup>59</sup> Doyle’s adds that ‘[h]aving discovered this [the existence of fairies], the world will not find it so difficult to accept that spiritual message supported by physical facts which has already been so convincingly put before it’.<sup>60</sup> This contradictory nature is evident of Doyle’s attempt to appear objective, but it demonstrates that his subjective spiritualist aims could not be suppressed. It evidences some of the tension described by Daston and Galison in the dichotomy between a scientist’s ‘willful’ and ‘scientific self’ that contributed to the formulation of a new nineteenth century scientific methodology.<sup>61</sup> However, for Doyle, if the existence of fairies could be proved, it would have offered the potential to jolt and redirect society’s materialist gaze. This would have the effect of altering the notion that material possessions and physical comfort were more desirable than an interest in their spiritual development. Consequently, this would reveal ‘a glamour’ and ‘a mystery to life’, providing the possibility of a world full of further unknown wonders.

---

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., p. 57.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., p. 32.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., p. 3.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., p. 32.

<sup>61</sup> Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison, *Objectivity* (New York: Zone Books, 2010), p. 38.

### **Death then Rebirth: Spirituality in *The Poison Belt***

In Doyle's science-fiction novel *The Poison Belt* spiritual revelation occurs after the Earth's population experience the effects of an interstellar poisonous cloud that temporarily covers the planet. *The Poison Belt* is in dialogue with Doyle's spiritualist writings such as *Pheneas Speaks* (1927). This text details Doyle's personal correspondence with his spiritualist guide Pheneas from 1921 - 1926. These messages were received in Doyle's family spiritualist circle in which his second wife Jean acted as medium. Doyle presented Pheneas's messages as an advance warning of a future calamity that threatened the globe. *Pheneas Speaks* and *The Poison Belt* are both concerned with a love of material pleasures at the expense of a heightened spirituality. They also portray the humility brought on due to the new found appreciation of the fragility of humanity surrounded by the unknown. In *The Poison Belt* the world's population endures a temporary comatose state that is initially believed to be fatal. The novel concludes with the world awakening from a near fatal slumber, leaving the survivors sombre and contemplative of a second chance for the human race. This death then rebirth in *The Poison Belt* offers the potential for spiritual awakening that is very much the focus of Doyle's later spiritualist writings.

In *The Poison Belt* Doyle revives his interest in poisoning and altered states of consciousness exhibited in the 'Devil's Foot' that I examined in chapter four. In the novel Challenger and Summerlee are reunited with Malone and Lord John Roxton to mark the third anniversary of their adventure in South America in *The Lost World*. In *The Poison Belt* these four companions, accompanied by Challenger's wife, believe that they are the only survivors of a catastrophic interstellar accident. Challenger describes the event accordingly, "it may interest you to know that the world has swum through

the poisonous current which swirls like the Gulf Stream through the ocean of ether”<sup>62</sup>. Challenger’s reference to ether in this novel is related to scientific thought at the end of the nineteenth century. The existence of ether as a substance ‘believed to permeate the whole of planetary and stellar space’, functioning as a ‘medium through which the waves of light are propagated’, was eventually ‘discarded in scientific thought’ in the years following the publication of *The Poison Belt*.<sup>63</sup> Doyle uses a reference to ether to describe how the Earth and the human race have passed through a poisonous cloud in outer space. Lycett accurately describes this novel as a ‘light science based fantasy’ rather than a serious attempt at science writing.<sup>64</sup>

In *The Poison Belt* Challenger and his group experience the horror of passing through the poison belt only to find that all life has apparently been extinguished by the cloud. Malone declares “[w]e are all poisoned”, prior to a discussion undertaken by Challenger and Summerlee as to the type of toxin that has affected their respiratory system.<sup>65</sup> This is evocative of Holmes’s attempts to analyse the toxin in the ‘Devil’s Foot’. In *The Poison Belt* Challenger speculates “I fancy, so far as my toxicology carries me, that there are some vegetable nerve poisons -”, before Summerlee suggests “Datura”.<sup>66</sup> Datura is a ‘shrubby annual plant’ that is native to the Southern parts of North America. It contains ‘toxic or narcotic alkaloids’ and the plant genus has been used as ‘hallucinogens by some American Indian peoples’, properties that are also shared by the Devil’s-foot root.<sup>67</sup> Challenger argues it would make ‘scientific precision if we named our toxic agent. Let it be daturon’ or the ‘universal destroyer’.<sup>68</sup> The

---

<sup>62</sup> Doyle, *The Lost World and Other Stories* (London: Wordsworth, 1995), p. 237.

<sup>63</sup> ‘Ether’, *Oxford English Dictionary Online*.

<sup>64</sup> Lycett, p.338.

<sup>65</sup> Doyle, *The Lost World and Other Stories*, p. 190.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 193-194.

<sup>67</sup> ‘Datura’ *The Oxford Dictionary of English*, ed. by Catherine Soanes and Angus Stevenson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005) <<http://www.oxfordreference.com/>> [accessed 20 June 2009].

<sup>68</sup> Doyle, *The Lost World and Other Stories*, p 194.

physiological effects of this rather inaccurately named toxin are similar to those of the fictional Devil's-foot root. Malone describes a 'great tightness, within my head, a loud singing in my ears, and bright flashes before my eyes'.<sup>69</sup> He also reports a sensation of his throat being constricted and pressure on his chest, '[a]n invisible hand seemed to have quietly closed round my throat and to be gently pressing the life from me'.<sup>70</sup> Similar to Holmes and Watson in the 'Devil's Foot', Malone and Challenger flee from the poison into clearer air, although in the latter case it is into a sealed room supplied with a higher concentration of oxygen. Challenger's face was 'a terrible vision, with red-purple face, engorged eyes, and bristling hair' a description closely resembling Holmes's experience under the Devil's-foot root.<sup>71</sup> Doyle's use of toxins in the 'Devil's Foot' and *The Poison Belt* expand notions of spirituality. However, in *The Poison Belt* toxins do not heighten perceptions, but they are analogous to a temporary death. Challenger and his companions incorrectly suppose that death follows shortly after lapsing into a coma. This is an excusable error because the bodies encountered closely resemble death. Roxton could be excused his incredulity when he exclaims "[b]ut they could not have been asleep! [...] you don't mean to believe that those folk were asleep with their staring eyes and stiff limbs, and that awful death-grin on their faces!"<sup>72</sup> A puzzled Challenger diagnoses the condition as "catalepsy [...] a rare phenomenon" that he claims "has commonly been mistaken for death" in the past.<sup>73</sup> What is interesting is Summerlee's account of the poison cloud's effects, "[t]he most we can say is that the vitiated ether has produced a temporary death" in those subject to its complete influence.<sup>74</sup> Doyle's use of drugs in *The Poison Belt* provide him with an opportunity to

---

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., p. 201.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., pp. 233-4.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., p. 234.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

stress his spiritual message located in the temporary death of millions of people, who upon their awakening, are provided with a second chance.

The primary theme of *The Poison Belt* is Doyle's attempt to revive an interest in spirituality at the expense of an undue focus upon worldly material goods and pleasures. Doyle's text seemingly fits within a conventional science fiction paradigm. It is possible to read *The Poison Belt*, with its images of London full of apparently dead corpses, as a response to the threat of a major European war. Miller argues 'some viewed *The Poison Belt* as a metaphor for Conan Doyle's fears about European political events and the increasing threat from Germany'.<sup>75</sup> Parts of Doyle's novel are particularly chilling, strongly associating it with this blend of horror and science-fiction. One account immediately prior to contamination states "[w]e are threatened with utter extermination. Cathedrals and churches full to overflowing. The dead outnumber the living".<sup>76</sup> This cataclysmic rhetoric accurately locates *The Poison Belt* within a complicated nexus of *fin-de-siècle* tensions and anxieties. Summerlee's comment that the majority of the world's population suffered 'a temporary death' is an adequate metaphor for expanding the spiritual implications for those who survived. However, Doyle's focus in *The Poison Belt* was not in describing futuristic warfare. Neither did it aim to warn or predict the nature of future conflicts with Germany. Instead Doyle strove for what Lycett describes as a 'wider significance', which includes the limitless possibilities of the universe.<sup>77</sup>

---

<sup>75</sup> Miller, p. 308.

<sup>76</sup> Doyle, *The lost World and Other Stories*, p. 194. Such descriptions are evocative of H G Wells's account of the collapse of social order in London during an invasion in his *The War of the Worlds* (1898). Brian Aldiss notes how Doyle, Wyndham and others followed in the footsteps of Wells, where 'the world, or England at least, is laid waste', H G Wells, *The War of the Worlds* ed. by Patrick Parrinder (London: Penguin, 2005), p. xxii.

<sup>77</sup> Lycett, p. 338.



*The Poison Belt* concludes with an extract from *The Times* that attempts to contextualise the trauma suffered by millions of people. *The Times* states: ‘our human race are a feeble folk before the infinite latent forces which surround us’, highlighting a new apprehension at the possibility of future calamity. ‘[s]olemnity and humility are at the base of our emotions today’.<sup>78</sup> However, there are also positive consequences for humanity, ‘this revelation of the possibilities of the universe, this destruction of our ignorant self-complacency’.<sup>79</sup> The opportunity for spiritual growth, to leave behind the daily conflicts and concerns made obsolete by the poison belt, is implied by ‘revelation’ in this statement. In this case, revelation, or the ‘disclosure or communication of knowledge’ by ‘divine or supernatural means’ is implied by the newspaper’s reference to prophetic warnings.<sup>80</sup> *The Times* argues ‘[f]rom the prophets of old and from the philosophers of our own time the same message and warning have reached us’, which has been ignored or misunderstood, until a ‘lesson, an actual experience, was needed to bring it home’.<sup>81</sup> The word ‘revelation’ was to be utilised again by Doyle in his spiritualist memoir *The New Revelation* (1918) which argues, in what Miller describes as ‘apocalyptic prose’, how spiritualism was to be the herald of humanity’s greatest development in the twentieth century.<sup>82</sup>

Not content with just portraying a spiritualist message or salvation, Doyle also concludes *The Poison Belt* with a sentiment that resembles a theme evident in his medical, detective and finally his science fiction stories. Doyle argues again that there is an over-reliance upon scientific thought and process that overlooks various forms of spirituality. This is indicated by *The Times*, which argues the poison belt represents a

---

<sup>78</sup> Doyle, *The Lost World and Other Stories*, p. 238.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> *Oxford English Dictionary Online*.

<sup>81</sup> Doyle, *The Lost World and Other Stories*, p. 238.

<sup>82</sup> Miller, p. 373.

‘demonstration of how narrow is the path of our material existence, and what abysses may lie upon either side of it’.<sup>83</sup> *The Times* article’s use of the ‘narrow [...] path’ of our ‘material existence’ and the ‘abysses’ that ‘lies upon either side of it’ is almost identical to Doyle’s metaphor of the path of nature, only dimly lit by the lamps of science, being girded round by forces that are beyond scientific comprehension in ‘Lot No. 249’ (1894). In *The Poison Belt*, it is ‘our material existence’ that is threatened by ‘abysses’ lying upon either side of a metaphorical path of nature, or in this case humanity’s material existence. *The Poison Belt* and ‘Lot No. 249’ both express Doyle’s belief that the natural world is filled with a wide range of phenomena beyond current understanding. It is this notion that unites the apparently disparate range of Doyle’s writings because they are all expressions of his sense of wonder at the potential of the universe if open-minded and imaginative people attempted to explore it.<sup>84</sup>

### ***The Maracot Deep: Spiritualism in the Natural World***

At the beginning of Doyle’s essay ‘Dwellers on the Border’ (1921), published in *The Edge of the Unknown* (1930), he states his objective is to ‘discuss the evidence for the existence of elemental forms of life, invisible to the normal eye, which inhabit the same planet as ourselves’.<sup>85</sup> We can recognise a shared semantic field encompassing Watson’s dim perception of entities beyond the threshold of everyday experience in the ‘Devil’s Foot’ with Doyle’s dwellers on the border of the unknown. These entities, regardless whether they are fairies or spirits, are detectable via an individual’s heightened senses. Their existence within the natural world stresses the importance of expanding scientific horizons in a manner that encompassed Doyle’s advocacy of the need to embrace a new spirituality. This notion increases in importance towards the end

---

<sup>83</sup> Doyle, *The Lost World and Other Stories*, p. 238.

<sup>84</sup> Daston and Park note the ‘double role’ played by ‘the fantastic imagination’, which aids an explanation of unknown phenomena while simultaneously risking ‘prejudiced observation’ leading to intellectual inaccuracy and fantasy, Daston and Park, pp. 342-343.

<sup>85</sup> Doyle, *The Edge of the Unknown*, p. 76.

of his career when he sought to define spiritualism as originating within the natural world and as a subject capable of sustaining scientific examination. In ‘Dwellers on the Border’, Doyle comments upon the broad effect of Victorian science. He argues ‘Victorian science would have left the world hard and clean and bare, like a landscape in the moon’.<sup>86</sup> Doyle argues that there is a danger of neglecting the potential of imagination and romance as an influence upon expanding scientific horizons. In ‘Dwellers on the Border’, Doyle repeats an idea that is evident throughout his fiction. He argues:

this science is in truth but a little light in the darkness, and outside that limited circle of definite knowledge we see the loom and shadow of gigantic and fantastic possibilities around us, throwing themselves continually across our consciousness in such ways it is difficult to ignore them.<sup>87</sup>

This quotation repeats the idea of a path of nature, dimly lit by the lamps of science as evidenced in ‘Lot No. 249’. Despite these similarities it is possible to detect a change in Doyle’s tone in this quotation. Rather than Doyle’s metaphor in ‘Lot No. 249’ that describes a crooked path of nature lit by lamps of science that are challenged to expand by the surrounding darkness of the unknown, here science is capable only of illuminating a ‘limited circle of definite knowledge’. As we have seen, Doyle argued throughout his writings that science was capable of expanding these metaphoric boundaries, influenced partly by the epistemological uncertainty surrounding clinical practice. However, his use of ‘limited’ in ‘Dwellers on the Border’ suggests that towards the end of his life, he had finally accepted the notion that scientific thought would remain obstinate in refusing to consider Doyle’s wider definition of what constituted scientific evidence. In response, Doyle argues in ‘Dwellers on the Border’ that regardless of scientific intransigency the natural world was still full of the ‘fantastic

---

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., p. 77.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

phenomena' that infringed upon our 'consciousness' in a manner that could not, or should not, be ignored. For Doyle, having established what he considered to be reliable evidence, the fact that incontrovertible evidence was elusive became less important than recognising how such unknown phenomena, including spiritualism, interacted with the natural world.

Doyle's *The Maracot Deep* explores how the natural world could include fantastic creatures, moral degeneration via spiritual decay, apocalyptic warnings and the chance of spiritual rebirth. According to Lellenberg, Stashower and Foley *The Maracot Deep's* subtitle was *The Lost World Under the Sea*.<sup>88</sup> Doyle's interest in imperialism is evident in this novel, yet this is secondary to the story's engagement with spiritualism. The narrative details the adventures of Professor Maracot's attempt to explore the floor of the Atlantic Ocean with his two companions Cyrus Headley, a zoologist, and Bill Scanlan, an American engineer. Once the trio are cut adrift from the *Stratford*, a ship towing their diving bell, they are rescued by the descendents of the survivors of Atlantis deep beneath the sea upon the ocean floor. *The Maracot Deep* can be divided unevenly between the first five chapters that are broadly in line with Doyle's other tales of exploration and the final two which detail Maracot's confrontation with a spirit entity.<sup>89</sup> In the first part comparisons are made between the new territories, the seabed in this case, with rural scenes of home. This is comparable to similar scenes in *The Lost World*, described above. For instance, Headley recalls 'the slopes of some blackish slag-like material' were 'dotted' with marine life, noting the 'lovely coloured creatures' were gathered 'as thickly as ever an English spring time bank was sprinkled with hyacinths

---

<sup>88</sup> Lellenberg Stashower and Foley, *A life in Letters*, p. 682.

<sup>89</sup> As Green and Gibson note, *The Maracot Deep* reflects Doyle's own interest in marine biology, although he was also assisted by his daughter Lena Jean Annette, who while being ill with mumps made notes of a list of fish her father had compiled, Richard Lancelyn Green and John Michael Gibson, *A Bibliography of A. Conan Doyle* (Boston: Hudson House, 1983; repr. 2000), p. 207 and Lycett, p. 427.

and primroses'.<sup>90</sup> Headley's description is similar in tone to Malone's in *The Lost World*. Both novels align fantastical natural worlds with the English countryside. There is also a similar sense of wonder and the otherworldly, evident when Headley notes how he and his companions were 'gazing enraptured at the fairy scene'.<sup>91</sup> *The Maracot Deep* is another example of how Doyle utilised science fiction to portray other worlds upon the border of the everyday world. Doyle's use of wonder in his later fiction indicates his desire to encourage scientific investigation and to encourage a sense of curiosity and awe at the phenomena he advocated. His use of 'fairy scene' here is used, as it is in *The Lost World*, to open up the possibility that the extraordinary is evident within the mundane. As we have seen in *The Coming of the Fairies*, the discovery of fairy creatures would open up a new field of scientific discovery, a subject that resonates throughout his imperial and science fiction writings and one that is evident in both *The Lost World* and *The Maracot Deep*.

However, in *The Maracot Deep*, it is the 'decline of spirit' at the expense of 'accretion of matter' that is important.<sup>92</sup> The first part of *The Maracot Deep* resembles the exploration undertaken by Challenger's party in *The Lost World* and in other imperial fiction. As Maracot explores the culture of the descendents of the Atlanteans who survived the destruction of their civilisation, he learns the reason for this cataclysm. As their civilisation expanded a taint began to appear in their society, '[d]own, down they sank from one generation to another', until signs of 'lascivious dissipation or moral degeneracy, of the accretion of matter and decline of spirit'.<sup>93</sup> As with *The Poison Belt*, an attachment to worldly goods and pleasures provides a

---

<sup>90</sup> *The Collected Supernatural & Weird Fiction of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle*, 3 vols ([n.p.]: Leonaur, 2009), I, p. 27.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 64.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*

distraction from spiritual development. As Maracot's party watch a telepathic projection of the degeneration of Atlantis, Headley notes that 'as the riches increased the faces upon the screen became more animal and more cruel'.<sup>94</sup> The consequence for their society is the development of a powerful, 'over-rich class' that gained mastery of the 'over-poor residue'.<sup>95</sup> Reformers failed to turn the people away from this destructive path, leaving Atlantis facing cataclysm.

The apocalyptic tone of this narrative is also evident in *The Poison Belt* enabling *The Maracot Deep* to be read alongside Doyle's other science-fiction and his spiritualist writings. In *The New Revelation*, Doyle argues that the 'agonized world' brought into being after World War One 'brought earnestness into all our souls and made us look more closely at our own beliefs' in a manner similar to the conclusion of *The Poison Belt*.<sup>96</sup> In *The Maracot Deep*, Doyle illustrates the consequences of ignoring such warnings by portraying the remnants of Atlantis as an isolated and dwindling population trapped beneath the sea. Headley describes the last scene of Atlantis's history, 'a murky sun low on the horizon, showed us the grave of the land that God had weighed and found wanting'.<sup>97</sup> In the conclusion to *The Poison Belt*, there is a strong indication that humanity's spiritual growth could only occur after cataclysmic change to the planet. In *The Maracot Deep* Atlantean society is destroyed by a tidal wave after the people ignored warnings about their continued moral and spiritual decay. This point is expressed by Headley as he reflects on the destruction of Atlantis:

The lesson which we carry from their rise and their fall is  
that the greatest danger which can come to a state is when

---

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., p. 65. Such a dichotomy was not new. In H.G. Wells's time traveller in *The Time Machine* (1895) encounters a similar situation on Earth in the far future, where the working classes have evolved into a predatory race of Morlocks who prey upon the Eloi, the descendents of the wealthy social elite.

<sup>96</sup> Doyle, *The New Revelation*, p. 26.

<sup>97</sup> Doyle, *The Collected Supernatural & Weird Fiction of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle*, p. 67.

its intellect outruns its soul. It destroyed this old civilization, and it may yet be the ruin of our own.<sup>98</sup>

This apocalyptic tone is also evident in Doyle's record of contact with his spirit guide in *Pheneas Speaks*. Pheneas's last message on November 26, 1926 warns:

Those who have stood in the way of God's truth are being swept aside. Soon, very soon, the light will be seen in the sky, God's untainted sky and great will be fear. Great also the rejoicing of those who have kept the lamps burning against the coming of the bridegroom.<sup>99</sup>

Doyle sent copies of *Pheneas Speaks* to a number of prominent people, indicating he took Pheneas's counsel seriously.<sup>100</sup> In *Pheneas Speaks*, Doyle's spirit guide frequently warned of drastic change to the planet's surface. For instance, Pheneas warned Doyle that there would be 'an upheaval (a change) of unprecedented force' capable of transfiguring 'the Earth's surface, so that it will be as God intended it to be'.<sup>101</sup> *Pheneas Speaks* detailed séances between the years 1921-1926 and it was published in 1927. Doyle claimed that during this period, Pheneas predicted a number of environmental disturbances that ranged from seismic activity in 'Dalmatia' to cyclones in Jamaica and America.<sup>102</sup> However, as Lycett notes Doyle embellished the text before publication, adding prophecies about seismic activity and the weather, in order to impress the reader with Pheneas's accuracy.<sup>103</sup> Nevertheless, this indicates Doyle's preoccupation with catastrophic changes in atmospheric and geological conditions. *The Maracot Deep* was serialised in *The Strand* from October 1927 to February 1928, so Doyle was communicating with Pheneas while writing about the tidal wave that struck Atlantis and

---

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., p. 99.

<sup>99</sup> Doyle, *Pheneas Speaks: Direct Spirit Communications in the Family Circle* (London: The Psychic Press and Bookshop, 1927). The edition I quote from is a pdf document available from <<http://www.jhardaker.plus.com/pdf/Pheneas%20Speaks.pdf>> [accessed 21 January 2010], pp. 138-139.

<sup>100</sup> Miller, p. 458.

<sup>101</sup> Doyle, *Pheneas Speaks*, p. 130.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., p. 140, p. 74, and p. 8.

<sup>103</sup> Lycett, p. 416.

the attempts of one spiritual leader, Warda, to save the faithful. *The Maracot Deep* is intended to be a stark warning prompting a need for fundamental spiritual reform before apocalyptic prophecies indicate a cataclysmic change to the physical and spiritual conditions upon Earth.

In *The Maracot Deep* it is no coincidence that the prophet Warda, the instrument for salvation in the novel, was seen frequently in ‘what seemed to be a trance, communing with higher spirits’.<sup>104</sup> This aligns *The Maracot Deep* with Doyle’s serious spiritualist writings such as *Pheneas Speaks*. Warda, like Doyle’s contact with Pheneas, received the prophetic messages through communion with a higher spirit that warned of a cataclysmic change to Atlantis. Warda brought ‘all the science of the land’ to the ‘task of building an ark of refuge against the coming troubles’, representing a unification of science and spirituality to counter moral decay.<sup>105</sup> This communion with higher spirits, free from what Doyle regarded as forms of traditional Christian ideology, in order to heed God’s will is also at the core of *The New Revelation*. As we have seen in the introduction to this thesis, Doyle argued that World War One acted as a catalyst for change making spiritualism ‘a direct undeniable message from beyond’ that breaks down ‘the walls between two worlds’, representing a ‘call of hope and guidance to the human race at a time of its deepest affliction’.<sup>106</sup> One of Doyle’s objectives in writing *The New Revelation* was to read all spiritualist phenomena as a linked chain of evidence that represented a series of ‘signs’ that will ‘lead up to the message which God wishes to send’.<sup>107</sup> Part of this new revelation was the reorganisation and unification of religious views centred on spiritualist faith. Less emphasis was to be placed upon original sin and atonement, a notion Doyle expressed as early as *The Stark Munro*

---

<sup>104</sup> Doyle, *The Collected Supernatural & Weird Fiction of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle*, p. 65

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

<sup>106</sup> Doyle, *The New Revelation*, p. 27.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.



*Letters*. Furthermore, Christ's life as a moral example was more significant than his resurrection. He would be 'the Christ Spirit' whose 'special care is the Earth'.<sup>108</sup> Beneath Christ on this new celestial hierarchy would be the 'higher spirits' who act as guides to the souls of humans who have died.<sup>109</sup> *The Maracot Deep* closely resembles this notion of a spiritual hierarchy with its figure of a mediumistic Atlantean communing with higher spirits and merging faith and science to serve the will of God. Both the *The Maracot Deep* and *The New Revelation* indicate that a time of trial is necessary for the seeds of future spiritual harvest to be sewn, but as we shall see the fear of moral decay can still threaten humanity even after a cataclysmic change.

### **Materialism versus Spiritual Development: The Threat of Baal-seepa**

In *The Maracot Deep* those that have survived the Atlantean cataclysm find refuge in Warda's ark at bottom of the sea. Their descendents are still threatened by the malign presence of the Lord of the Dark Face, Baal-seepa, who epitomises the moral decay of the ancient people of Atlantis. Maracot describes Baal-seepa as "a creature, one can hardly call him a man", who had "trafficked in unholy arts and had acquired magic powers of the most far-reaching sort which he turned to evil ends".<sup>110</sup> Maracot's party explore the sunken 'Black Marble Palace', the home of Baal-seepa in the days of Atlantis. Maracot observes:

It was a gloomy shadowy place at the best, but in those hideous shadows lurked the obscene shapes of monstrous polyps and strange, misformed fish which were like the creations of a nightmare.<sup>111</sup>

The nightmarish quality of the Black Marble Palace is evocative of the descriptions of Challenger's pterodactyl and the hound of the Baskervilles. However, in *The Maracot*

---

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 38.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>110</sup> Doyle, *The Collected Supernatural & Weird Fiction of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle*, p. 101.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, p.101 and p. 102.

*Deep* Doyle's tone is firmer. Rather than alluding to unusual phenomena, as discussed in earlier chapters, his description of 'hideous', 'monstrous' and 'misformed' imagery is now clearly associated with the malign consequences of a location steeped in dark practices.

In opposition to Baal-seepa's malign presence in Atlantean society is Warda, who since death has become a spiritual prophet and guardian of the uncorrupted generations that survived the cataclysm. Baal-seepa informs Maracot that Warda still survives and "revisits the earth, but it is as a spirit, not a man", claiming the prophet was "wiser than I in this" matter.<sup>112</sup> Warda represents the triumph of spirituality over materialism. Baal-seepa's immortality is a consequence of his materialism, his sensual response to life as opposed to spirituality, and his occult knowledge. He states, "I am he who went so far into the inner secrets of Nature that I could defy death himself".<sup>113</sup> Warda's wisdom was accepting his mortality and using his time on Earth to prepare for his spirit-life. The dangers of an adherence to materialism at the expense of spiritual development are also expressed in one of Doyle's later Sherlock Holmes short-stories. In 'The Adventure of the Creeping Man' (1923), Professor Presbury attempts to recapture his fading youth and his virility by experimenting with various drugs. While being regarded as medical research in the story, Presbury's experiments are associated with 'medical fadism and quackery' interested in utilising animal extracts for human 'rejuvenation'.<sup>114</sup> However, the 'Creeping Man' expands Doyle's interest in medical self-experimentation with drugs to include a condemnation of a love of materialism. The 'Creeping Man' was published in 1923, between *The New Revelation* and *Pheneas Speaks* at a time when Doyle was preoccupied with spiritualist matters. In the 'Creeping

---

<sup>112</sup> Ibid., p. 106.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid., p. 105.

<sup>114</sup> Rodin and Key, *Medical Casebook of Doctor Arthur Conan Doyle: From Practitioner to Sherlock Holmes and Beyond* (Malabar FL: Robert E Krieger Publishing Company, 1984), p. 253.

Man', Holmes criticises the objective of Presbury's studies. He states, '[w]hen 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'.<sup>115</sup> Holmes continues with a warning identical to Doyle's cautionary tone in *The Maracot Deep*. Holmes states:

There is danger there – a very real danger to humanity. Consider, Watson, that the material, the sensual, the worldly would all prolong their worthless lives. The spiritual would not avoid the call to something higher. It would be the survival of the least fit. What a cesspool may not our poor world become?<sup>116</sup>

Presbury and Baal-seepa share a sensual and material love of life to the exclusion of spiritual development. Warda, the saviour of those Atlanteans who opposed Baal-seepa, is representative of those people who Holmes describes as 'spiritual'. According to Holmes, those spiritual people who answering 'the call to something higher', would leave behind a world that would degenerate into a 'cesspool' populated only by base characters such as Baal-seepa, and Presbury. However, Doyle cleverly reinforces this point in *The Maracot Deep* by using Baal-seepa to reveal the emptiness of an eternal life devoid of spiritual meaning. Baal-seepa makes an extraordinary confession while threatening Maracot's group and the Atlantean colony. He states, "[o]h, mortals, never pray to be delivered from death. It may seem terrible, but eternal life is infinitely more so. To go on and on while the endless procession of humanity goes past you".<sup>117</sup> Baal-seepa, combined with Holmes's warning, describes how a material life would mean eternal spiritual stagnation. Such worthless lives would be condemned to watch the endless procession of those, who upon death would retain the potential to answer a higher spiritual calling.

---

<sup>115</sup> Doyle, *The Penguin Complete Sherlock Holmes* (London: Penguin, 1981), p.1082.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 1082 -1083.

<sup>117</sup> Doyle, *The Collected Supernatural & Weird Fiction of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle* p. 105.

Doyle's argument in 'Dwellers on the Border' that a strict, secular adherence to science at the expense of ignoring spirituality makes the world hard, clean and bare, is relevant here. The purpose of *The Maracot Deep* is to illustrate how Maracot broadens his scientific outlook to include the existence of advanced benevolent spirit guides that could, under certain conditions, affect the material world. This would allow Maracot to counter the physical and spiritual threat of Baal-seepa. Warda represents such a spirit guide who functions in a capacity similar to Doyle's spirit guardian Pheneas. Maracot is similar to characters such as Professor Gilroy in *The Parasite* as well as the explorers in stories such as 'The Horror of the Heights' and 'The Terror of Blue John Gap'. The protagonists of these stories are pioneers who explore the unknown yet are unable to confront or comprehend some of its unexpected challenges. This is also relevant to Watson's experience of the Devil's-foot root drug in the 'Devil's Foot'. As we have seen in chapter four, Watson perceives the 'advent of some unspeakable dweller upon the threshold, whose very shadow would blast my soul'. Watson also is unable to comprehend the 'unspeakable' threat upon the threshold of an unknown world. Combined with Doyle's later concept of spirituality in *The Maracot Deep*, it becomes possible to see Baal-seepa as the malign ideological embodiment of Watson's vision in the 'Devil's Foot' capable of 'blasting' souls.

In *The Maracot Deep*, Baal-seepa confronts Maracot and threatens to "blast" him "where [he] stands".<sup>118</sup> However, by this time Maracot has undergone a transformation that enables him to defeat Baal-seepa by enlisting aid from Warda's spirit. Maracot temporarily enters the spirit plane, allowing him to confront Baal-seepa on equal terms. Maracot informs Scanlan and Headley that he despaired of finding a countermeasure to the threat of Baal-seepa. With nothing to lose Maracot confesses:

---

<sup>118</sup> Ibid., p. 110.

I prayed – yes, I, the hardened materialist, prayed – for help. When one is at the very end of all human power, what can one do save to stretch appealing hands into the mists which gird us round?<sup>119</sup>

As well as Maracot affirming his conversion from materiality to a greater spirituality, his comments above consider how the higher forms of spirit-life dwell in the metaphorical ‘mists which gird us round’, the realm of undiscovered laws of nature in which fantastic creatures and worlds originate. It is not coincidental that Maracot’s words here echo those of the narrator of ‘Lot No. 249’ as discussed in chapter two, written when Doyle was a much younger man and repeated much later in *The Poison Belt*. As we have seen in this chapter, for Doyle science was still relevant if modified by his new criteria for evidence, although it was now secondary to his advocacy of spiritualism. What Doyle describes in this scene also evidences his revision of Christianity in *The New Revelation*. Doyle portrays the now familiar scene of the ‘hardened materialist’ reaching out into the unknown boundaries of scientific knowledge represented here by ‘the mists which gird us round’. It is also noteworthy that Maracot ‘prays’ in a fashion recognisable in Doyle’s *The New Revelation*. Maracot appeals to whatever powers that might exist in what he describes as ‘spirit’ as opposed to the ‘material plane’ in which we commonly dwell. Instead of communion with God, Maracot comes into contact with the spirit of Warda. In order to defeat Baal-seepa, Maracot opened his mind to the possibility of spirit contact. He also acknowledges how “[s]uch things teach one humility” in a manner that is concordant with the repercussions of the gas cloud in *The Poison Belt*.<sup>120</sup> Maracot swiftly moderates his scientific view to include the existence of powerful spirit phenomena over a short period of time. This is mainly because of the urgency of the crisis he faced and the desperate

---

<sup>119</sup> Ibid., p. 113.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid., p. 114.

position he was in that left him with no other alternative. Other characters, such as Challenger, take much longer to overcome their hostility to spiritualism, which is the subject of Doyle's spiritualist novel *The Land of Mist*. However, there is one character, Roxton, in this novel that undergoes a transformation from imperial adventurer to psychic investigator whose response to a haunted house modifies his understanding of what is possible in the natural world.

### **A Psychic Investigator in *The Land of Mist***

In *The Lost World* Roxton is the embodiment of the imperial hero of quest romance, recognisable in characters such as Sir Henry Curtis in Haggard's *King Solomon's Mines*. Roxton is partially based on Sir Roger Casement who assisted in confirming accounts of the extremely brutal treatment of rubber plantation workers in the Belgian Congo. Doyle's relationship with the Irish nationalist grew when he expressed his admiration for Casement before his departure in 1910 to the Puteyemo River in South America to investigate allegations of atrocities committed by the Peruvian Amazon Company. Doyle asked Casement to keep a record of "anything weird & strange out there", thinking it would add colour to his novel.<sup>121</sup> In *The Lost World* Roxton boasts of waging "a little war of my own" against "Peruvian slave-drivers", claiming the title of "the flail of the Lord".<sup>122</sup> Roxton's reputation as an expert sportsman in a number of disciplines, as well as a seasoned game-hunter, makes him the ideal guide and guardian for Challenger's expedition to the lost world, as well as being what Doyle might have recognised as an amalgamation of a factual and fictional imperial hero.

By the time *The Land of Mist* was published, Roxton had undergone significant changes to his character that indicate a trajectory from imperial hero to psychic

---

<sup>121</sup> Lycett, p. 326.

<sup>122</sup> Doyle, *The Lost World*, p. 52.

investigator. Malone learns of Roxton's active service during World War One. Roxton "led a small column in East Africa" where, in words that echo Roxton's description of his conflict in South America, he 'waged a wee war of his own until he got an elephant bullet through his chest'.<sup>123</sup> After the war Roxton continued heavy game shooting before embarking upon an Alpine mountaineering expedition. Upon his return to London, Roxton complains that the "[t]op of the Alps is becomin' a perfect bear garden", a place so frequented by tourists that "[s]hort of Everest there don't seem to be any decent privacy left".<sup>124</sup> Roxton's point, that there are fewer places left in the world for adventure, is in concordance with Malone's editor at the *Gazette* in *The Lost World*. Similarly in *The Land of Mist*, Roxton is looking for a fresh adventure in a new world. An article in the *Evening Standard* states 'Lord John Roxton, third son of the Duke of Pomfret, is seeking fresh worlds to conquer'.<sup>125</sup> Here, imperial adventure and the possibilities of new realms and creatures conjoin. The article continues, '[h]aving exhausted the sporting adventures of this terrestrial globe, he is now turning to those of the dim, dark and dubious regions of psychic research'.<sup>126</sup> In particular, he is in the 'market' for a 'genuine specimen of a haunted house' or any 'violent or dangerous manifestation, which called for investigation'.<sup>127</sup> Roxton's love of violence, danger and a desire to explore new worlds seeks expression in the 'dim, dark and dubious' regions, the indistinct land of mist, which borders the known world.

Brantlinger reads Roxton's article in the newspaper as part of the imperialist's response to the reduction of opportunities for adventure and romance during the late Victorian and Edwardian period. Brantlinger argues that Roxton's article in *The Land of*

---

<sup>123</sup> Doyle, *The Lost World and Other Stories*, p. 319.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 318.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 319.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*

*Mist* forms a contextual element for the complicated and wide-ranging genre of ‘Imperial Gothic’ as discussed in the introduction to this thesis. It is easy to read Roxton’s character in *The Land of Mist* as conforming to Brantlinger’s concept of imperial gothic. For instance, Roxton’s approach to psychic investigation is indistinguishable from preparing to explore a foreign country. When Reverend Charles Mason responds to Roxton’s article and invites him to investigate poltergeist activity in a haunted house, the adventurer acknowledges that “[w]hen I’m explorin’, I begin by ropin’ in a friendly native. I expect you’re just the man”.<sup>128</sup> The encroachment, or more accurately the merging, of the spirit world with the material world is apparent in both *Pheneas Speaks* and *The New Revelation* but its link to imperialism is not just that it provides other realms to explore. Although Brantlinger argues ‘[Doyle] believed the spirit world was arranged in a marvellous, infinite bureaucratic hierarchy very much like the British Raj in India’, Doyle uses an imperial tone to discuss a subject that he felt was struggling to appropriate its own mode of expression.<sup>129</sup> In *Pheneas Speaks* Doyle describes an Indian villager’s relationship with the local magistrate as analogous to mankind’s connection to their spirit guides. This is not to say that Doyle’s spirit world is an exact ideological replica of the imperial bureaucratic hierarchy that Brantlinger suggests. Despite Doyle’s imperial tone in describing the analogy of the Indian villager his point was that in spiritual matters a human soul is reliant upon a benevolent representative of the celestial hierarchy capable of guiding someone along an unknown path. Brantlinger does not acknowledge Doyle’s eloquent discussion of Christianity, or his description of ‘Spiritland’ in *The New Revelation*, which makes no reference to an imperial hierarchy.<sup>130</sup> Instead, Doyle presents a spiritual realm that dissolves physical

---

<sup>128</sup> Ibid., p. 321.

<sup>129</sup> Patrick Brantlinger, *Rule of Darkness: British Literature and Imperialism, 1830-1914* (London: Cornell University Press, 1988), p. 252.

<sup>130</sup> Doyle, *The New Revelation*, p. 49.



and racial differences where '[p]reoccupations of food, money, lust, pain, etc., are of the body and are gone'.<sup>131</sup> Doyle noted the difficulties in expressing 'the lines of the life beyond', arguing 'it is not all simple, and we catch dim glimpses of endless circles below descending into gloom, and endless circles above, ascending into glory, all improving, all purposeful, all intensely alive'.<sup>132</sup> Doyle's depiction of an infinite arrangement of 'circles' of spiritual life enables him to argue that all people, regardless of their actions, race or creed, could be accommodated in an afterlife that was innately 'all improving' and 'purposeful'. As we shall see, it is this celestial hierarchy that assists Roxton in his role as a psychic investigator when exploring a haunted house with Mason in *The Land of Mist*.

In 1924 Doyle wrote to the *Strand Magazine* and stated 'I have for years had a big psychic novel in me which shall deal realistically with every phase of the question, pro and con'.<sup>133</sup> In *The Land of Mist*, published two years later, Roxton epitomises Doyle's argument in 'Dwellers Upon the Border' that the world was full of phenomena that could not be ignored, regardless of the position of scientific orthodoxy on this question. As we have seen, this appeal to consider a wider spiritual world is also demonstrated through Maracot in *The Maracot Deep*. However, Maracot is forced to accept the existence of fantastic creatures as a consequence of his exploration of the boundaries of the known world and his encounter with Bal-seepa. In contrast, Roxton in *The Land of Mist* is already open to the idea of psychic research even before Mason invites him to investigate the poltergeist activity of the spirit of a deceased man called Tremayne. The refiguring of Roxton as a willing psychic investigator means that he embarks upon exploration with an open mind that does not ignore the fantastical

---

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 49.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 50. For a further, but earlier example of Doyle's fiction that expresses a tolerance for racial difference in empire, see: Doyle, *The Narrative of John Smith*, pp.53-54.

<sup>133</sup> Green and Gibson, p. 197.

phenomena that science cannot define. Roxton's investigation of poltergeist activity in *The Land of Mist* mirrors Doyle's earlier exploits in the field of psychic investigation. In 1894, as part of an investigation for The Society for Psychical Research, Doyle travelled to Dorset with fellow members Frank Podmore and Dr Sydney Scott to investigate poltergeist activity. Doyle later wrote about his investigation in both *The New Revelation* and his autobiography *Memories and Adventures*. In both texts Doyle describes how the poltergeist activity and noises his group heard during the night could be explained by the discovery, some years after their investigation, of the skeleton of a child buried in the grounds of the house.<sup>134</sup> In *Memories and Adventures* Doyle explains how the apparent poltergeist activity originates in '[t]he unknown and the marvellous' that 'press upon us from all sides. They loom above us and around us in undefined and fluctuating shapes'.<sup>135</sup> Roxton's article in *The Evening Standard*, seeking the 'dim, dark and dubious' land of mist are similar to Doyle's 'undefined and fluctuating shapes' of the 'unknown and the marvellous' in *Memories and Adventures*. Both examples are similar to Watson's dim perception of a dweller beyond the border in the 'Devil's Foot', but more importantly they demonstrate Doyle's attempt to create a realistic psychic novel in *The Land of Mist* through which the unknown laws of the natural world can be investigated through characters like Roxton who are willing to explore such psychic phenomena.

Roxton is introduced to the idea of a spiritual plane by Mason. In the novel Mason represents Doyle's vision of the unification of spiritualism and Christianity. For instance, Malone notes how Mason, a 'Church of England vicar' had 'left his model

---

<sup>134</sup> Doyle, *The New Revelation*, pp. 123-124 and Arthur Conan Doyle, *Memories and Adventures* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), pp. 147-148.

<sup>135</sup> Doyle, *Memories and Adventures*, p. 148. In her analysis of this investigation, Wynne notes that Doyle confided to Jerome K Jerome that the ghost was in fact the daughter of the household, Wynne, 'Arthur Conan Doyle's Domestic Desires: Mesmerism, Mediumship and *Femmes Fatales*', in *Victorian Literary Mesmerism*, ed. by Martin Willis and Catherine Wynne, Costerus New Series, 160 (New York: Rodopi B. V., 2006), p. 224.

parish and the church [...] in order to preach freely the doctrines of Christianity, with the new psychic knowledge superadded'.<sup>136</sup> Mason explains how those who undertake the task of assisting souls who have lost their way after death, an idea featured in both *The New Revelation* and *Pheneas Speaks*, are protected by powerful, benign spirits. In *The Land of Mist* Mason states, “[w]e may call them ‘guardian angels’ as the Catholics do, or ‘guides’ or ‘controls’ [...] they guard us from evil on the spiritual plane”.<sup>137</sup> Roxton, Malone and Mason confront the spirit of Tremayne. Doyle writes how:

The black shadows at the top of the staircase had thickened, had coalesced, had taken a definite, batlike shape. Great God! They were moving! They were rushing swiftly and noiselessly downwards! Black, black as night, huge, ill-defined semi-human and altogether evil and damnable.<sup>138</sup>

Roxton’s instinctive response to this spiritual threat is identical to Scanlan’s in *The Maracot Deep*. Both are men of action who confront their respective threats, the spirit of Tremayne and Baal-seepa with violence. When Roxton confronts the partially materialised spirit form of Tremayne in *The Land of Mist*, he opens fire at it with his gun. Earlier he tells Malone, “‘if my automatic was not a spook-stopper nothin’ else would serve”.<sup>139</sup> Not surprisingly, Roxton fails to make any impact on the spirit of Tremayne. Similarly, in *The Maracot Deep* Scanlan picks up a revolver stating, “[m]aybe if I made as many holes in the big stiff it would let out some of his magic” in his confrontation with Baal-seepa.<sup>140</sup> As with Roxton this idea fails because Baal-seepa psychically attacks Scanlan from a distance forcing him to drop his gun. Scanlan’s response, “[y]ou don’t fight hell with six-shooters” is as equally applicable

---

<sup>136</sup> Doyle, *The Lost World and Other Stories*, p. 320.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 324-5.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 330.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 322.

<sup>140</sup> Doyle, *The Collected Supernatural & Weird Fiction of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle*, p. 108.

to Roxton.<sup>141</sup> The significance of this point, that threatening a spirit creature with violence upon the material plane can have no effect, is indicated by its appearance in two separate novels. Both novels state that the solution to such threats is the development of knowledge and the cultivation of human spirituality. In *The Land of Mist* after Mason succeeds in assisting the spirit of Tremayne to free itself from its desire to haunt the material plane, he describes how he was “[b]ut the instrument of higher forces”, referring to the spirit ‘guides’ above.<sup>142</sup> In receiving spiritual aid as the instrument of higher, benign spirits, Mason is acting in the same manner as Maracot in *The Maracot Deep*. Both men are instruments of higher spiritual forces. In *The Land of Mist* it is left to Mason with his knowledge of the spiritual plane to exorcise Tremayne, but the effect of the existence of a psychic realm is not lost on Roxton. At the end of the novel, Doyle writes that Roxton ‘had become assiduous in his psychic studies, and was rapidly progressing in knowledge’.<sup>143</sup> Doyle presents Roxton’s development of psychic knowledge as a consequence of his open mind and desire for new experiences. This places Roxton on the road to embracing a higher sense of spirituality at the expense of his pursuit of materialism and adventure. Roxton is an expression of Doyle’s romance of imperial adventure and exploration that comes to an appreciation of spiritualism, not through new revelation, but through being aware of the endless possibilities of the natural world.

### **Illuminating the Limited Circle of Knowledge: Technology**

As we have seen in ‘Dwellers on the Border’, advocates of the limited circle of scientific knowledge were unwilling to examine the possibility that the natural world was surrounded by unusual phenomena that could be explained by natural law. In response to this obstinacy, Doyle argued that fantastic phenomena could no longer be

---

<sup>141</sup> Ibid.

<sup>142</sup> Doyle, *The lost World and Other Stories*, p. 332.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid., p. 399.

ignored. At this juncture Doyle maintained that an investigation of such phenomena, regardless whether it is fairies or spiritualism, must be undertaken with an open mind and a willingness to accept a broader definition of evidence, as exemplified by Roxton in *The Land of Mist* and envisioned by investigators such as Crowe and Mayo. While Doyle argued that science was unable or unwilling to accept his ideas, he did not abandon his belief that science was capable of achieving this. Doyle used his science fiction and his serious spiritualist writings to anticipate a future where there is an amalgamation between technology and the spirit world. In *The New Revelation* he urges his readers not to ‘sneer at the humble beginnings’ of spiritualism, but to ‘[r]emember that the falling apple taught us gravity, a boiling kettle brought us the steam engine, and the twitching leg of a frog opened up the train of thought and experiment which gave us electricity’.<sup>144</sup> *The Maracot Deep* is a strong example of Doyle’s use of science-fiction and the potential of technology to advance ideas of underwater exploration and communication. Doyle writes how Atlantean technology allows their people to ‘walk the ocean floor’ safely sheltered in ‘vitrine oxygen bells’.<sup>145</sup> The Atlanteans also communicate telepathically, creating images on enormous screens that project messages to the wider community and their new guests. Headley describes this example of Atlantean science as a ‘combination of such telepathy and television as we dimly comprehend upon Earth’, indicating that Doyle was keen to speculate about the future application of technology.<sup>146</sup>

---

<sup>144</sup> Doyle, *The New Revelation*, p. 34.

<sup>145</sup> Doyle, Doyle, *The Collected Supernatural & Weird Fiction of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle*, p. 84. It is unsurprising to note the influence of Jules Verne’s *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea* (1870) on *The Maracot Deep*. Doyle had read Verne’s fiction at an early age in French, something he dutifully reported to his mother in a letter written in 1873, see: Lellenberg, Stashower and Foley, *A Life in Letters*, p. 53.

<sup>146</sup> Doyle, *The Collected Supernatural and Weird Fiction of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle*, p. 49. For instance Headley discovers the Atlanteans had managed to harness the power of atomic energy noting, ‘though the energy released is less than our scientists anticipated, it is still sufficient to supply them with a great reservoir of power’, *ibid.*, p. 75. Here, Doyle is referring to scientists such as Ernest Rutherford and Frederick Soddy, who had ‘been the first to calculate the vast amount of energy released in radioactive

In *The Maracot Deep* Baal-seepa exploits the gulf of knowledge between himself and Maracot's group of explorers. Baal-seepa mocks Maracot's "mind with its little grain of earth science".<sup>147</sup> From Maracot's perspective it is impossible for Baal-seepa to be alive underwater without breathing apparatus, while also being able to communicate freely. Baal-seepa explains that he only visits his temple once summoned by another's presence and that he is free to roam the earth at will. This is because he is "an ether-breathing creature. There is as much ether here as on a mountain top".<sup>148</sup> Baal-seepa possesses a mode of telepathic correspondence that he describes as being analogous to radio communication. During their first encounter, Baal-seepa explains how he is able to communicate with Maracot's mind. Baal-seepa asks rhetorically, "[i]s it not the very essence of wireless transmission that it turns from the ether to the air?" before explaining that "I, too, can turn my words from my etheric utterance to impinge upon your ears through the air".<sup>149</sup> Baal-seepa's analogy is indicative of more than just a plot device for Doyle's science fiction. Jill Galvan in *The Sympathetic Medium* (2010) considers how the rapid technological advancement during the nineteenth century meant that remote communications between the living could be compared to a correspondence with the dead.<sup>150</sup> Doyle alludes to the potential for technology to bridge the spiritual divide in his article 'The Rift in the Veil'. He describes the spirit-rapping of the Fox sisters in technological terms:

the spiritual telegraph was at last working, and it was left to the patience and moral earnestness of the human race to

---

decay' during the first decade of the twentieth century, Mark L Brake and Neil Hook, *Different Engines: How Science Drives Fiction and Fiction Drives Science* (London: Macmillan, 2008), p. 102.

<sup>147</sup> Doyle, *The Supernatural and Weird Fiction of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle*, p. 104.

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 105.

<sup>150</sup> Jill Galvan, *The Sympathetic Medium: Feminine Channelling, The Occult, and Communication Technologies, 1859-1919* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2010), p. 9.

determine how high might be the uses to which it was put in the future.<sup>151</sup>

Doyle's use of 'spiritual telegraph' shows how he felt certain areas of technology could be used to enhance communication with the spirit world. In *Pheneas Speaks*, the potential for new technology is directly applied by Doyle to the communication with spirits. Doyle is informed by a spirit that '[a] machine is being made in secret. A bridge is being made'.<sup>152</sup> Despite giving no specific details about this machine, Doyle was optimistic that a technological bridge between the living and the dead could be engineered on both sides of the divide.

In *The Coming of the Fairies* Doyle speculated about other uses of technology when bridging the gulf between the fairy world and ours. He argued that if we could 'conceive a race of beings which were constructed in material which threw out shorter or longer vibrations, they would be invisible unless we could tune ourselves up or tone them down'.<sup>153</sup> Doyle also contends that fairy creatures may exist in a spectrum of light invisible to human sight. According to Doyle something similar occurs to a spiritualist medium during a séance. He states:

It is exactly that power of tuning up and adapting itself to other vibrations which constitutes a clairvoyant, and there is nothing scientifically impossible, so far as I can see, in some people seeing that which is invisible to others.<sup>154</sup>

Doyle adds that:

If the objects are indeed there, and if the inventive power of the human brain is turned upon the problem, it is likely that some sort of psychic spectacles, inconceivable to us at the moment, will be invented.<sup>155</sup>

---

<sup>151</sup> Doyle, *The Edge of the Unknown*, p. 115.

<sup>152</sup> *Pheneas Speaks*, p. 118.

<sup>153</sup> Doyle, *The Coming of the Fairies*, p. 7.

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*

Doyle speculated that because ‘high-tension electricity can be converted by a mechanical contrivance into a lower tension’ then it is ‘hard to see why something analogous might not occur with the vibration of ether and the waves of light’.<sup>156</sup> *The Coming of the Fairies* combined with *The Maracot Deep* and *Pheneas Speaks* indicate that an open scientific mind may lead to a development of new forms of technology, such as psychic spectacles, capable of bridging the divide between worlds bordering our own. It was an expression of Doyle’s faith, not only in the existence of realms and creatures beyond our everyday perception, that humanity retained the potential to bridge the gulf between known and unknown realms.

Doyle’s hope that the world would come to accept the new revelation of spiritualism never came to pass. Technology never provided the answers Doyle hoped for. Faced with the obstinacy of science and his desire to fully embrace spiritualism, Doyle was never able to convince a sceptical public to the ideas of unusual phenomena existing within the natural world. As we have seen in this chapter, Doyle’s contention that circumstantial evidence, such as eye witness reports if repeated by people of good character should be considered as suitable proof, did not encourage a revision of scientific study of unexplainable phenomena that he had hoped for. The unanswerable argument, or evidence, required by an ever increasingly sceptical audience remained elusive. In his response to the obstinacy of Victorian science, in danger of adhering to an insistence upon material proof at the expense of ignoring a higher spiritual truth, Doyle moved away from the idea of seeking suitable scientific evidence to the notion of finding spiritual salvation. At the end of his life Doyle fully embraced spiritualism.

---

<sup>156</sup> Ibid., pp. 7-8. Smajić notes how ‘the wave theory of light’ as it theoretically passed through the ether ‘buttressed claims for the existence of invisible spirits and higher intelligences’. This is because ‘[i]f the ether is real, and if it channels light and other kinds of wave, who is to say that it does not also mediate occult communications?’ Srdjan Smajić, *Ghost-Seers, Detectives, and Spiritualists: Theories of Victorian Literature and Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 7.



Although his fictional works, including his most famous creation Sherlock Holmes, would be regarded with affection, it is interesting to note that to a modern reader the author is not just remembered as Arthur Conan Doyle, writer, but as Arthur Conan Doyle, writer and spiritualist.

## CONCLUSION

In *The Hound of the Baskervilles* (1902) when Sherlock Holmes states to Dr. Mortimer that ‘I see you have quite gone over to the supernaturalists’, it is meant as an observation that also accuses the doctor of abandoning his scientific rationalism and adopting a belief in the supernatural. It is appropriate that within a wider cultural context Doyle has been described as undertaking a similar movement, from science to spiritualism. This portrayal of Doyle is inaccurate and it also misses the point of much of his diverse range of writings. As this thesis has demonstrated, Doyle did not move from scientific rationalism to irrational supernaturalist, because the latter did not exist. Spiritualism, the existence of fairies and other phenomena were all attributable to previously unknown or ignored laws of nature. I have examined a wide range of Doyle’s fictional and non-fictional writings that, when read together, indicate how he attempted to portray science as being able to explore and explain unusual phenomena that had previously been misinterpreted as supernatural. Although Doyle never proposed a scientific method to investigate unknown laws of nature, he advocated that it was a worthy subject that should be considered by scientists. Towards the end of Doyle’s life and career he had failed to accomplish this and had fully embraced a religious faith in spiritualism. Despite the failure of scientists to recognise Doyle’s argument that an investigation of spiritualism was a subject worthy of serious attention, his position on the non-existence of the supernatural remained constant. This was because, for Doyle, a phenomenon such as spiritualism had to belong to the natural world. In *The New Revelation* (1918) Doyle argued that spiritualism, unlike Christianity, was founded upon evidence not an act of faith. What is apparent in Doyle’s later writings is his attempt to redefine the nature of relevant material evidence. Doyle argued that personal testimony of witnesses possessing good character, as judged by

Doyle, was of more importance than material evidence that could be measured and defined by sceptical scientific orthodoxy. Contacting deceased friends and relatives at the séance table was proof of the soul's survival after bodily death. In addition, Doyle argued that all of the séances conducted throughout the world were unified by guiding spirits providing a co-ordinated chain of evidence proving survival after death. This marks a point of departure from an attempt to unify his thoughts on investigating the limits of natural law scientifically towards fully embracing his religious faith in spiritualism.

### **A Life's Work**

This thesis has engaged with Doyle's assertion that his life was one long preparation for his public endorsement of his spiritualist revelation. It is correct to be naturally suspicious of Doyle's intention (albeit a psychologically understandable one) to relate one neatly constructed narrative with a beginning, middle and an end in his autobiography *Memories and Adventures* (1924). In Doyle's case the desire to frame a lifetime's history in such a manner incorporates the religious notion that his spiritualist faith was the spiritually ordained conclusion to his life's work. However, through a diverse range of Doyle's fiction and non-fictional writings, from his early to later literature including autobiography, medical, detective, science fiction and spiritualist works, I have demonstrated how they can be combined to form a concept of natural laws that can incorporate spiritualism.

Doyle's metaphor from 'Lot No. 249' (1894), which I have named 'the darkness which girds it round', expresses his idea that potentially unexplained phenomena loom at the border between what is understood in the laws of nature and the unknown. I read it as being part of Doyle's attempt to express a need to open our minds to the possibility that phenomena may occur beyond our current comprehension. I consider this metaphor

to be further indication that Doyle was attempting to create a cohesive theory that exemplifies his notion that natural law may explain unusual phenomena that had been misunderstood and attributed to the supernatural. When this metaphor first appears in 'Lot No. 249' it is expressive of the type of danger faced by Professor Gilroy in *The Parasite* (1894), whereby one can be completely unprepared to face the dangers of a phenomenon such as Miss Penelosa's threat of mesmeric domination. The problem highlighted by Doyle here, as well as in his other stories, is that a disregard for such subjects, or a sense that they are unworthy of serious scientific study, means not only are they unprepared to tackle its potential dangers – but also that a natural phenomenon may be misunderstood and defined as supernatural occurrences. This dual threat to scientific progress, an arrogance that insists upon maintaining the status-quo of what Doyle felt was scientific orthodoxy and a misunderstanding of unusual phenomena, is frequently apparent throughout his writings.

### **Establishing the Boundaries**

Before I began to explore how Doyle's writings may be read as representing different strands of his attempt to re-orientate phenomena typically ignored or misrepresented as supernatural, I explored how it is rooted within his personal, religious, medical and scientific interests and experience. Doyle's early quasi-autobiography *The Stark Munro Letters* (1895) is important to any examination of his spiritualist quest. In chapter one, I considered how the early influences of Charles Doyle, notions of addiction, illness and religious ideas of evolution established the roots of Doyle's later belief that natural laws were capable of explaining unusual phenomena that had been misinterpreted as supernatural. At the early part of his professional medical career, Doyle had already moved away from his religious education from Stonyhurst to consider the ideas of the natural world. At the same time, Doyle's

traumatic personal life that involved his father Charles's alcoholism and mental illness was concurrent with a religious schema that saw such addiction as immoral and regressive. The early Doyle defined evolution as a system engineered by the creator to improve humanity as a method of selecting and eliminating degenerate attributes of the human race. I have shown how addiction and madness influence his religious ideas, operating as two key components of natural selection that weed out those unfit to advance the human race. Second, in the other stories discussed in chapter one, there is a strong indication that mental illness can act to heighten a person's sensitivity of unusual phenomena, in the form of visions that could be mistaken for being supernatural in origin. Charles Doyle's artwork with its gothicised imagery offered another interpretation to his father's mental illness and addiction. Such visions from the unworldly and transcendental Charles were possible because of a heightened perception. The parasitic addiction with Miss Penelosa in *The Parasite* and Colmore's vision of a supernatural fiend are aspects of this heightened perception. It is when these stories are read alongside Charles's artwork and Doyle's short-story 'The Silver Mirror' it becomes possible to see the beginning of a trajectory that considers the existence of supernatural phenomena. Charles Doyle was not suffering from an immoral fevered imagination, but he is an example of an individual capable of witnessing unusual phenomena through his heightened perceptions. This is a softening in Doyle's stance towards his father. It also permits a refiguring of Doyle's early religious ideas that addiction and madness marked out the immoral for extinction via natural selection. Importantly, Gilroy's belief that Miss Penelosa's powers were not supernatural, but natural in origin offer an early reference to Doyle's belief that unexplained phenomena actually originated in the natural world and could be investigated by science.

In chapter two, these ideas of religion and heightened perceptions merged with Doyle's medical realism and its exploration of taboo sexual diseases and unjust physical ailments such as syphilis. In a reading of Doyle's medical realism stories in *Round the Red Lamp* I demonstrated how he incorporated the ideas of supernatural phenomena via gothic modes. The romance of medicine and the chivalric role of a doctor combine to ameliorate taboo sexual conditions, such as hereditary syphilis. Doyle portrays these illnesses, the anxieties and unease they create through gothic suspense and the potential for the supernatural. In 'A Medical Document' (1894) and 'The Third Generation' (1894) the importance of contagion and hereditary taints mark their sufferers out for the type of extinction Doyle considered in *The Stark Munro Letters*. However, those characters unjustly doomed to such hereditary illnesses prompted a substantial rethinking of his early religious beliefs. For Doyle, such unfair prognoses were rooted not in the sins of the father but in the sins of the creator. Although nature was still ordained and controlled by the creator, ideas of natural selection could no longer be incorporated within Doyle's developing religious ideas. This meant that if those characteristics, such as addiction, madness and illness, were no longer markers of degeneration then they could be refigured as progressive. This is a step in the process of incorporating such occurrences within a scientific explanation. Rather than insist upon disputable generic boundaries between horror and medical fiction, I read Doyle's story 'Lot No. 249' in his collection of medical fiction as being indicative of how he attempted to provide a rational explanation for what was currently unknown that may be mistaken for the supernatural. For Doyle, supernatural phenomena became unexplained unusual phenomena. To demonstrate this idea he presented a metaphor in 'Lot No. 249'. Doyle's metaphor of 'the darkness which girds it round' serves as a potentially unifying principle underlying the various strands of his fictional output that allows him to include

the narrative within a collection of short-stories aimed at portraying medical realism. Doyle's belief that unusual and not supernatural phenomena existed in the shadows of the path of nature meant that science could investigate such occurrences because they originated in the natural world and were held to account by natural laws. The medical lamps of medicine, or science, provide a light of knowledge that could investigate and expand our understanding of the natural world.

### **Investigation**

Having considered the difficulties of identifying and explaining unusual phenomena misinterpreted as supernatural in the previous chapters, I then tackled the question of how Doyle intended such occurrences to be investigated. Doyle's essay a 'New Light on Old Crimes' (1920) argued that spiritualism or a psychic science could be useful in solving real-life criminal cases as there was no division between investigating crime and spiritualism because they both belonged to the natural world. In order to analyse this, I focussed upon *The Hound of the Baskervilles* as it establishes a coherent position on Doyle's interest in science and unusual phenomena. *The Hound* illustrates methods of investigating an unusual phenomenon as well as revealing some of the tensions that occurred between scientists who sought to prove the existence of spiritualism and their opponents who argued it should be exposed as trickery aimed at fooling the gullible. Doyle's metaphor in 'Lot No. 249' that discounted the supernatural in favour of undetected natural laws is apparent in *The Hound* through Holmes and his deductive method. Holmes also rejects the supernatural. In its place he raises the possibility that unusual phenomena existed in the ordinary and extra-ordinary laws of nature. Holmes is an example of an investigator who can successfully apply a scientific method to mediate natural laws. Mortimer on the other hand is presented as a cautionary figure. Doyle portrays him as an absent minded man of science with a narrow definition

of the natural world who is too quick to accept superstition and the supernatural as a solution to the spectral hound of the Baskervilles. In *The Hound* Stapleton's role resembles that of a fraudulent medium who adopts the tactics of tricksters who sought financial gain from the gullible willing to believe in superstition or the supernatural. Holmes in his role as mediator of natural laws investigates Stapleton and ensures Baker Street rationalism defeats rural superstition, further developing Doyle's idea that science can provide the answers to unusual phenomena including spiritualism.

### **Exploration**

My final two chapters investigate the latter part of Doyle's literary career. At this phase in Doyle's life he was still attempting to argue that it was the role of science to investigate as well as validate unusual phenomena such as spiritualism. Chapter four demonstrated how Doyle's ideas of medical self-experimentation and detective fiction interacted and merged with his interest in the romance of empire and exploration. Doyle held a lifelong interest in imperial exploration and in chapter four I examined how those explorers who return to England with a variety of drugs shaped his ideas of scientific exploration. I considered how the historical explorer Waterton visited South America partly to investigate the properties of Curare, and how that drug inspired a number of Sherlock Holmes stories. In 'The Adventure of the Devil's Foot' (1910) Sterndale similarly returns to England from Africa with a deadly drug that Holmes and Watson self-experiment with to define and explore its properties. Holmes's role as chemist parallels Christison's self-experimentation with the Calabar bean. Holmes and Watson self-experimentation with the Devil's-foot root potentially heightens the mind's perception in a manner concordant with mental strain and addiction as discussed in my first two chapters. Medicine and science combine to expand the boundaries of the threshold of the known world. Watson's quasi-mystical experience is very similar to the



type of occurrence that features in Doyle's later science fiction and spiritualist stories. In the 'Devil's Foot' the exposure to a drug allow Watson to undergo a transcendental exploration that can be read within the context of Doyle's wider concerns. Consequently Watson is able to witness the presence of a spirit creature similar to those confronted by Roxton in *The Land of Mist* (1926) and Maracot in *The Maracot Deep* (1929).

The final chapter considered how Doyle's portrayal of a sceptical and obstinate scientific community refused to consider what he considered reliable evidence when attempting to prove the existence of fairies and other worlds. Doyle's imperial fiction and science fiction combine in *The Lost World* (1912). The fairyland landscape with its fantastic creatures that Challenger and his group discover portrays a primeval wilderness that is simultaneously a part of and apart from the natural world. I argued that one overlooked purpose of *The Lost World* is to present Doyle's argument that circumstantial evidence is more valid than physical proof. Challenger's production of an unanswerable argument in the form of a living pterodactyl is not enough to sway scientific orthodoxy. The pterodactyl flees captivity leaving only eye witness testimony to indicate the existence of a primeval land located in the natural world. *The Lost World* and *The New Revelation* (1918) present Doyle's ideas that despite being men of honour their testimony would not be accepted. Doyle argued that a chain of circumstantial evidence, such as repeated testimony represented proof that should be enough to counter the obstinacy of scientific orthodoxy. He argued that if fairies were proved to exist, or perhaps more importantly be accepted by the general public, then this would provide evidence of another world bordering our own incorporating the idea of spiritualism into a new scientific discourse. Doyle's metaphor from 'Lot No. 249' is developed in 'Dwellers on the Border' (1921). Rather than Doyle's earlier belief in the potential of science to explain the unknown aspects of the natural world, he modified his ideas.

Doyle argued that science was too limited in its approach to expand its investigations yet the fantastic world could no longer be ignored. Doyle's science fiction writings run concurrently with his public advocacy of spiritualism that marked a vigorous campaign for its acceptance upon the criteria established above. Furthermore, his later belief in spiritualism needed a mode of expression that could draw upon his past interests, yet also carry the vital religious message that spiritual renewal may only come at the cost of cataclysmic changes to the world brought on by an atavistic adherence to materialism. In *The Poison Belt* (1913) and *The Maracot Deep* Doyle expressed his fear that the modern world was in danger of becoming devoid of spiritual salvation and, perhaps of more importance, it would lose much of the romance associated with bold visions of the wonders (and horrors) that exist upon the threshold of the unknown. Doyle's use of apocalyptic imagery is concurrent with his messages from Pheneas in *Pheneas Speaks* (1927) that warn of dire consequences to humanity if it did not reject materialism and seek spiritual salvation. Doyle's belief in a celestial hierarchy provides spiritual guides to assist characters such as Maracot and Roxton to defeat the malign spirit presence of Bal-Seepa and Treymayne, demonstrating his ideas in spiritual growth. The transformation of Roxton, a recurring character in Doyle's series of stories featuring Challenger, from imperial explorer to psychic investigator demonstrates the ideas of retaining an open scientific mind. Roxton is one of many characters, including Sherlock Holmes and Watson, who occur throughout Doyle's fictional writings who investigate unusual phenomena that can ultimately be defined by natural laws that remain unexplored. These characters are not disparate creations. Rather they are unified by Doyle's notion that the various phenomena investigated by these characters are all facets of the natural world. Doyle did not abandon his belief that science could potentially define the varied phenomena he described in his writings as originating in

the natural world. He also considered the possibility of technology to advance such an investigation. However, later in life spiritualism became Doyle's primary focus that surpassed his other concerns. It became increasingly apparent that spiritualism would not be considered a serious subject for investigation. During Doyle's lifetime (as well as after) spiritualism had not only remained unproven, there was also little progress in it becoming recognised as a serious subject worthy of scientific investigation. The failure and obstinacy of science meant that Doyle's wish to see such phenomena proved and accepted by the scientific community, as well as being presented as valid evidence of spiritual survival after death, was constantly thwarted.

### **Unification**

Throughout my thesis I have engaged with Doyle's assertion that his entire life's work had been in preparation for his eventual belief in and advocacy of spiritualism. Doyle's metaphor of 'the darkness which girds it round' is a key statement that science retains the possibility to investigate and define the limits of the natural world. This metaphor provides the ground upon which I establish Doyle's notion that all of the unusual phenomena described within the wide range of his apparently disparate writings can be unified through his notion of scientific investigation. Doyle's writings, both fiction and non-fiction, demonstrate his belief that phenomena attributed to the supernatural and ignored by orthodox science belonged to hitherto misunderstood and undiscovered natural laws. Doyle failed to win the argument that it was possible to establish the investigation of unusual phenomena, primarily spiritualism, as a subject worthy of serious scientific attention. Likewise, he failed to convince a highly sceptical scientific and the wider cultural audience of the validity of his evidence. However, it remains possible to detect this desire within his fictional and non-fictional writings. To argue that Doyle underwent a transition from science to supernatural is an incorrect and

reductive assumption. At no point does Doyle deviate from his belief that science can explain phenomena previously attributed to the supernatural. Instead, his methodology of defining evidence changes. For Doyle, there was no separation between science and the supernatural, because phenomena attributed to the supernatural did in fact originate in previously unknown laws of nature. This distinguishes his belief in spiritualism from a faith in Christianity or other world religions. Doyle consistently argued that the fundamental difference separating the two is that spiritualism is provable by evidence that as a consequence located it within the natural world. What changed for Doyle was that the type of evidence he now considered to be relevant bears no resemblance to what would convince any scientist worthy of the name.

This thesis has evaluated the critically neglected area of Doyle's interest in the interpretation of unusual phenomena as a misunderstood facet of the natural world. Doyle attempted to portray his life as one long preparation for his psychic quest. It was a task that, if measured against its persuasive effect upon popular culture, he failed to accomplish. However, as this thesis has shown, Doyle was more disciplined in his writings and much more self-conscious in its preparation and execution than has been credited to him. Within Doyle's writings the integrity of his position that the supernatural did not exist remained uncompromised. Doyle's belief that unusual phenomena originated in the undetected laws of nature was dependent upon his revision of what constituted valid proof for such occurrences. Nonetheless, once his position is made clear it possesses the potential to unify his writings as an argument that stated science could unravel the mysteries of the universe.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

### PRIMARY SOURCES

#### Sherlock Holmes:

Doyle, Arthur Conan, *The Penguin Complete Sherlock Holmes* (London: Penguin, 1981)

- ‘A Scandal in Bohemia’ (1891)
- *A Study in Scarlet* (1888)
- ‘The Adventure of the Devil’s Foot’ (1910)
- ‘The Adventure of the Final Problem’ (1893)
- ‘The Adventure of the Greek Interpreter’ (1893)
- ‘The Adventure of the Missing Three-Quarter’ (1904)
- ‘The Adventure of the Six Napoleons’ (1904)
- ‘The Adventure of the Speckled Band’ (1892)
- ‘The Five Orange Pips’ (1891)
- *The Hound of the Baskervilles* (1902)
- ‘The Man with the Twisted Lip’ (1891)
- *The Sign of Four* (1890)

#### Non-Sherlock Holmes Fiction:

*The Captain of the Polestar and Other Tales* (1890)

*The Collected Supernatural and Weird Fiction of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle*, 3 vols ([?]: Leonaur, 2009), I

- ‘A Pastoral Horror’ (1890)
- *The Maracot Deep* (1929)

*The Conan Doyle Stories* (London: John Murray, 1929; repr. 1960)

- ‘The Horror of the Heights’ (1913)
- ‘The Japanned Box’ (1899)
- ‘Playing with Fire’ (1900)
- ‘The Silver Mirror’ (1908)

—— ‘The Terror of Blue John Gap’ (1910)

*The Lost World*, ed. by Ian Duncan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998)

*The Lost World and Other Stories* (London: Wordsworth, 1995)

—— *The Land of Mist* (1926)

—— *The Poison Belt* (1913)

*The Mystery of Cloomber* (London: Hesperus Press, 2004)

*The Narrative of John Smith*, ed. by Jon Lellenberg, Daniel Stashower and Rachel Foss (London: The British Library, 2011)

*The Parasite* (1894), in *The Parasite & The Watter’s Mou’*, ed. by Catherine Wynne (Kansas MO: Valencourt, 2009), pp. 1-48

*Round the Red Lamp* (1894), in *Round Conan Doyle’s Tales of Medical Humanism and Values: ‘Round the Red Lamp: Being Facts and Fancies of Medical Life’*, ed. by Alvin E Rodin and Jack D Key (Malabar FL: Krieger Publishing Company, 1992)

—— ‘A Medical Document’ (1894)

—— ‘The Case of Lady Sannox’ (1893)

—— ‘Lot No. 249’ (1894)

—— ‘The Third Generation’ (1894)

*‘Round the Red Lamp’ and Other Medical Writings*, ed. Robert Darby (Kansas: Valencourt Books, 2007)

—— ‘The Surgeon of Gaster Fell’ (1890)

*The Stark Munro Letters: Being a Series of Twelve Letters Written by J. Stark Munro, M.B., to his Friend and Former Fellow Student, Herbert Swanborough, of Lowell, Massachusetts, During the Years 1881-1884* (London: Longmans, Green and Co, 1895; Fairfield IA: 1st World Library, 2004)

### **Non Fiction:**

‘A New Revelation. Spiritualism and Religion’, *Light*, 36 (1916), 357-8

*The Coming of the Fairies* (London: Pavilion Books, 1997)

‘The Consumption Cure’, *Daily Telegraph*, 20 November 1890, p. 3

‘Dr. Koch and His Cure’, *Review of Reviews*, 2 December 1890, pp. 552-556

*The Edge of the Unknown* (London: John Murray, 1930; repr. Teddington: The Echo Library, 2006)

—— ‘A New Light on old Crimes’ (1920)

—— ‘Dwellers on the Border’ (1921)

—— ‘The Law of the Ghost’ (1919)

—— ‘The Rift in the Veil’ (1920)

‘Gelseminum as a Poison’, *British Medical Journal*, 2.977 (20 September 1879), 481-484 (repr. in Darby, pp. 265-264)

*Memories and Adventures* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989)

*The New Revelation* (New York: Cosimo, 2007)

*Pheneas Speaks: Direct Spirit Communications in the Family Circle* (London: The Psychic Press and Bookshop, 1927) pdf from:

<<http://www.jhardaker.plus.com/pdf/Pheneas%20Speaks.pdf>> [accessed 21 January 2010]

‘The Psychic Question as I see it’, in Oliver Lodge et al, *The Case for and Against Psychical Belief*, ed. by Carl Murchison (Worcester MA: Clark University, 1927), pp. 15-24

‘The Romance of Medicine’, *St Mary’s Hospital Gazette*, 16 (1910), 100-106 (repr. in Darby pp. 306-320)

*Through the Magic Door*, (London: Smith Elder, 1907; London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, [n.d.]

*The Vital Message* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1919), p. 33  
<<http://books.google.co.uk/>> [accessed 23 June 2010]

*The Wanderings of a Spiritualist* (New York: George H Doran, 1921)

## SECONDARY SOURCES

Altman, Lawrence K., *Who Goes First? The Story of Self-Experimentation in Medicine* (Wellingborough: Equation, 1986; repr. 1988)

Baker, Michael, *The Doyle Diary: The Last Great Conan Doyle Mystery* (New York: Paddington press, 1978)

Barsham, Diana, *Arthur Conan Doyle and the Meaning of Masculinity* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000)

Beer, Gillian, *Darwin’s Plots: Evolutionary Narrative in Darwin, George Eliot and Nineteenth Century Fiction*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2000)

Botting, Fred, *Gothic* (London: Routledge, 1996; 2002)

Booth, Martin, *The Doctor and the Detective: A Biography of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle* (New York: Thomas Dunne Books, 1997; repr. 2000)

Blum, Deborah, *Ghost Hunters: William James and the Search for Scientific Proof of Life after Death* (London: Century, 2007)

Brake, Mark L., and Neil Hook, *Different Engines: How Science Drives Fiction and Fiction Drives Science* (London: Macmillan, 2008)

Brandon, Ruth, *The Spiritualists: The Passion for the Occult in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (London: George Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1983)

Brantlinger, Patrick, *Rule of Darkness: British Literature and Imperialism, 1830-1914* (London: Cornell University Press, 1988)

Brooke, John Hedley, *Science and Religion: Some Historical Perspectives* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991)

Brown, Nicola, and others, eds, *The Victorian Supernatural* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004; repr. 2005)

Browning, Robert *Selected Poems*, ed. by Daniel Karlin (London: Penguin, 1989; repr. 2004)

Caldwell, Janis McLarren, *Literature and Medicine in Nineteenth-Century Britain: From Mary Shelley to George Eliot*, (Cambridge: Cambridge university Press)

Carr, Caleb, *The Italian Secretary* (London: Little, Brown, 2005)

Carr, John Dickson, *The Life of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle* (New York: Carroll and Graff, 1949; repr. 2003)

Carrington, Hereward, *The Story of Psychic Science: (Psychical Research)* (London: Rider and Co.,[1930])

Costello, Peter, *Conan Doyle Detective: True Crimes Investigated by the Creator of Sherlock Holmes* (London: Constable and Robinson, 2006)

Crowe, Catherine, *The Night Side of Nature: or Ghosts and Ghost Seers*, ed. by Gillian Bennett (London: Wordsworth, 2000)

Daniels, J. W., *Spiritualism Versus Christianity; or, Spiritualism Thoroughly Exposed* (New York: Miller Orton & Mulligan, 1856)

Darby, Robert, ed., *'Round the Red Lamp' and Other Medical Writings* (Kansas: Valancourt Books, 2007)

Daston, Lorraine and Peter Galison, *Objectivity* (New York: Zone Books, 2010)

Daston, Lorraine and Katharine Park, *Wonders and the Order of Nature 1150 -1750* (New York: Zone Books, 1998)

Dickens, Charles, *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* (1870)

Edwards, Owen Dudley, *The Quest for Sherlock Holmes* (London: Penguin, 1984)



- Fournier, Alfred, *Syphilis and Marriage*, trans. by P. Albert Morrow (New York: D. Appleton, 1882)  
 <<http://www.archive.org/stream/syphilismarriage00four#page/n3/mode/2up>> [accessed 16 January 2009]
- Frank, Lawrence, *Victorian Detective Fiction and the Nature of Evidence: the Scientific Investigations of Poe, Dickens and Doyle* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2009)
- Frayling, Christopher, ed., *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, (London: Penguin Classics, 2001; repr. 2003)
- Fraser, Robert, *Victorian Quest Romance: Stevenson, Haggard, Kipling and Conan Doyle* (Plymouth: Northcote House, 1998)
- Galvan, Jill, *The Sympathetic Medium: Feminine Channelling, The Occult, and Communication Technologies, 1859-1919* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2010)
- Gauld, Alan, *The Founders of Psychical Research* (New York: Schocken Books, 1968)
- Green, Richard Lancelyn and John Michael Gibson, *A Bibliography of A. Conan Doyle* (Boston: Hudson House, 1983; repr. 2000)
- Greenblatt, Stephen, *Shakespearean Negotiations: the Circulation of Social Energy in England* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988)
- *Learning to Curse: Essays in Early Modern Culture* (Routledge: New York, 1992)
- Haynes, Renée, *The Society for Psychical Research 1882-1982: A History* (London: Macdonald, 1982)
- Higham, Charles, *The Adventures of Conan Doyle: The Life of the Creator of Sherlock Holmes* (New York: Norton, 1976)
- Inglis, Brian, *Natural and Supernatural: A History of the Paranormal from Earliest Times to 1914* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1977)
- Jay, Mike, *Emperors of Dreams: Drugs in the Nineteenth Century* (Sawtry: Dedalus, 2000; repr. 2011)
- Jones, Kelvin I, *Conan Doyle and the Spirits: The Spiritualist Career of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle* (Wellingborough: The Aquarian Press, 1989)
- Klinger, Leslie S., ed., *The New Annotated Sherlock Holmes*, 3 vols (New York: W.W. Norton, 2005 and 2006)
- Lellenberg, Jon, Daniel Stashower and Charles Foley, eds., *Arthur Conan Doyle: A Life in Letters* (London: Harper Collins, 2007)
- London Dialectical Society, *Report on Spiritualism of the Committee of the London Dialectical Society Together with the Evidence, Oral and Written, and a Selection of the Correspondence* (London: Longmans, Green, Reader and Dyer, 1871), pp. 390-391  
 <<http://www.archive.org/details/reportonspiritu00socioog>>

- Lycett, Andrew, *Conan Doyle: The Man Who Created Sherlock Holmes* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2007)
- Mayo, Herbert, *On the Truths Contained in Popular Superstitions: with an Account of Mesmerism* Second ed. (London: William Blackwood and Sons, 1851)
- Meadows, Jack, *The Victorian Scientist: The Growth of a Profession* (London: The British Library, 2004)
- Mighall, Robert, *A Geography of Victorian Gothic Fiction: Mapping History's Nightmares* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999)
- Miller, Russell, *The Adventures of Arthur Conan Doyle* (London: Pimlico, 2009)
- O'Gorman, Francis, ed., *The Hound of the Baskervilles with 'The Adventure of the Speckled Band'* (Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview Press, 2006)
- Oppenheim, Janet, *The Other World: Spiritualism and Psychical Research in England, 1850-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985)
- Pallen, Mark, *The Rough Guide to Evolution* (London: Rough Guides, 2009)
- Podmore, Frank, *Modern Spiritualism A History and a Criticism*, 2 vols (London: Methuen, 1902), II
- Porter, Roy, *The Greatest Benefit to Mankind: A Medical History of Humanity from Antiquity to the Present* (London: Harper Collins, 1997; repr. 1999)
- Pugh, Brian W., *A Chronology of the Life of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle May 22nd 1859 to July 7th 1930: A Detailed Account of the life and Times of the Creator of Sherlock Holmes* (London: MX Publishing: 2009)
- Principe, Lawrence M, *The Scientific Revolution: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011)
- Punter, David, *The Literature of Terror: A History of Gothic Fictions from 1765 to the Present Day, The Gothic Tradition*, 2 vols (Harlow: Longman, 1996), I
- Quétel, Claude *History of Syphilis*, trans. by Judith Braddock and Brian Pike (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992)
- Robson, W. W., ed., *The Hound of the Baskervilles* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993)
- Rodin, Alvin E and Jack D Key, eds., *Conan Doyle's Tales of Medical Humanism and Values: 'Round the Red Lamp: Being Facts and Fancies of Medical Life'* (Malabar FL: Krieger Publishing Company, 1992)
- *Medical Casebook of Doctor Arthur Conan Doyle: From Practitioner to Sherlock Holmes and Beyond* (Malabar FL: Robert E Krieger Publishing Company, 1984)
- Rothfield, Lawrence, *Vital Signs: Medical Realism in Nineteenth-Century Fiction* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992)

Sandford, Christopher, *Houdini and Conan Doyle: The Great Magician and the Inventor of Sherlock Holmes* (London: Duckworth, 2011)

Shapin, Steven, *The Scientific Revolution* (London and Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996)

Showalter, Elaine, *Sexual Anarchy: Gender and Culture at the Fin de Siècle*, (London: Virago, 1991; repr. 2001)

Smajić, Srdjan, *Ghost-Seers, Detectives, and Spiritualists: Theories of Victorian Literature and Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010)

Smith, Jonathan, *Fact and Feeling: Baconian Science and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (London and Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin, 1994)

Spongberg, Mary, *Feminizing Venereal Disease: The Body of the Prostitute in Nineteenth-Century Medical Discourse* (New York: New York University Press, 1997)

Stafford, Barbara Maria, *Artful Science: Enlightenment Entertainment and the Eclipse of Visual Education* (Cambridge MA: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1999)

Stashower, Daniel, *Teller of Tales: The Life of Arthur Conan Doyle* (London: Penguin, 2000)

Stavert, Geoffrey, *A Study in Southsea: The Unrevealed Life of Doctor Arthur Conan Doyle* (Portsmouth, Milestone, 1987)

Stoker, Bram, 'Sir Arthur Conan Doyle Tells of his Career and Work, his Sentiments Towards America, and his Approaching Marriage', *New York World* (28 July 1907), 1 (repr. in Catherine Wynne, *The Parasite & The Watter's Mou'* (Kansas MO: Valencourt, 2009), pp.153-65, p. 159)

Tougaw, Jason Daniel, *Strange Cases: The Medical Case History and the British Novel* (London: Routledge, 2006)

Walkowitz, Judith R., *Prostitution and Victorian Society: Women, Class and the State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980; repr. 1995)

Waterton, Charles, *Wanderings in South America, the North-West of the United States, and the Antilles, in the Years 1812, 1816, 1820 and 1824* (London: J. Mawman, 1825)

Weller, Philip, *'The Hound of the Baskervilles': Hunting the Dartmoor Legend* (Dartmoor: Devon Books, [2001?])

Wells, H.G., *The War of the Worlds*, ed. by Patrick Parrinder (London: Penguin, 2005)

Willis, Martin, *Vision, Science and Literature, 1870 – 1920: Ocular Horizons*, Science and Culture in the Nineteenth Century, 15 (London: Pickering and Chatto: 2011)

Wynne, Catherine, *The Colonial Conan Doyle: British Imperialism, Irish Nationalism and the Gothic* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2002)

——— *The Parasite & The Watter's Mou'* (Kansas MO: Valencourt, 2009)

### Book Chapters

Flint, Kate, 'The Victorian Novel and its Readers', in *The Cambridge Companion to the Victorian Novel*, ed. by Deirdre David (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 17-36

Hunt Verity, 'Narrativizing "The World's Show": The Great Exhibition, Panoramic Views and Print Supplements', in *Popular Exhibitions, Science and Showmanship, 1840-1910*, ed. by Joe Kember, John Plunkett and Jill A Sullivan, *Science and Culture in the Nineteenth Century*, 16 (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2012), pp. 115- 132

Loudon, Irvine, 'Medical Education and Medical Reform', in *The History of Medical Education in Britain*, ed. by Vivian Nutton and Roy Porter (Amsterdam GA: Editions Rodopi B. V., 1995), pp. 229-249

Luckhurst, Roger, 'Passages in the Invention of the Psyche: Mind-reading in London 1881-84' in *Transactions and Encounters: Science and Culture in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. by Roger Luckhurst and Josephine McDonagh (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), pp. 117-150

——— 'Trance-Gothic, 1882-97', in *Victorian Gothic: Literary and Cultural Manifestations in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. by Ruth Robbins and Julian Wolfreys (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave, 2000), pp. 148-67

Mighall, Robert, 'Diagnosing Jekyll: the Scientific Context to Dr Jekyll's Experiment and Mr Hyde's Embodiment', in *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde and Other Tales of Terror* (London: Penguin, 2002; repr. 2003), pp. 143-161

Noakes, Richard, 'Spiritualism, Science and the Supernatural in Mid-Victorian Britain', in *The Victorian Supernatural*, ed. by Nicola Bown and others (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004; repr. 2005), pp. 23-43

Willis, Martin, 'On Wonder: Situating the Spectacle in Spiritualism and Performance Magic', in *Popular Exhibitions, Science and Showmanship, 1840-1910*, ed. by Joe Kember, John Plunkett and Jill A Sullivan, *Science and Culture in the Nineteenth Century*, 16 (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2012), pp. 167-182

Wynne, Catherine, 'Arthur Conan Doyle's Domestic Desires: Mesmerism, Mediumship and *Femmes Fatales*', in *Victorian Literary Mesmerism*, ed. by Martin Willis and Catherine Wynne, *Costerus New Series*, 160 (New York: Rodopi B. V., 2006), pp. 223-243

Zwierlein, Anne-Julia, 'From Parasitology to Parapsychology: Parasites in Nineteenth Century Science and Literature', in *Unmapped Countries: Biological Visions in Nineteenth Century Literature and Culture*, ed. by Anne-Julia Zwierlein (London: Anthem Press, 2005), pp.155-172

### Journal Articles

Review of Doyle's *Round the Red Lamp*, *Spectator*, 16 February 1895, pp. 238-9

Carpenter, William Benjamin, 'Spiritualism and its Recent Converts', *The Quarterly Review*, 131 (October 1871), 301-353

Christison, Robert, 'Observations on the Effects of Cuca, or Coca, the Leaves of Erythroxyton Coca', *British Medical Journal*, 1.800 (29 April 1876), 527-531

——— 'On the Properties of the Ordeal-Bean of Old Calabar, West Africa' *Monthly Journal of Medicine*, 20 (January 1855), 193-204

Claussion, Nils, 'Degeneration, *Fin-de-Siecle* Gothic, and the Science of Detection: Arthur Conan Doyle's *The Hound of the Baskervilles* and the Emergence of the Modern detective Story', *Journal of National Theory* 35.1 (Winter 2005), 60-87

William Crookes, 'Experimental Investigation of a New Force', *Quarterly Journal of Science*, (01January 1871)

<[http://www.mindserpent.com/American\\_History/books/Crookes/researches/investigation.htm](http://www.mindserpent.com/American_History/books/Crookes/researches/investigation.htm)> [accessed 05 January 2012]

Frank, Lawrence, 'The Hound of the Baskervilles, the Man on the Tor, and a Metaphor for the Mind', *Nineteenth-Century Literature*, 54.3 (1999), 336-372

Harris, Susan Cannon, 'Pathological Possibilities: Contagion and Empire in Doyle's Sherlock Holmes Stories', *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 31.2 (2003), 447- 466

Goldsmith, Hilary A., 'Darwin and the Detective: Aspects of the Darwinian Worldview and the Sherlock Holmes stories of Arthur Conan Doyle', *Clues: A Journal of Detection*, 28.2 (2010), 19-28

Junior Member, 'Syphilis and Marriage', *British Medical Journal*, 1.1269 (25 April 1885), 821-876

Kennedy, Meegan, 'The Ghost in the Clinic: Gothic Medicine and Curious Fiction in Samuel Warren's *Diary of a Late Physician*', *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 32. 2 (2004), 327-351

Kerr, Douglas, 'Arthur Conan Doyle and the Consumption Cure', *Literature and History*, 19.2 (2010), 36-51

Krasner, James, 'Arthur Conan Doyle as Doctor and Writer', *Mosaic: a Journal for the Interdisciplinary Study of Literature*, 33.4 (2000), 19-34 < <http://lion.chadwyck.co.uk/>> [accessed 20 December 2011]

Lowndes Frederick W., 'Syphilis and Marriage', *The Lancet*, 120.3071 (1882), 7-9

Maltby, J. R., 'Charles Waterton (1782-1865): Curare and a Canadian National Park', *Canadian Journal of Anesthesia / Journal Canadien d'anesthésie*, 29.3 (May 1982), 195-202

——— 'History of Medicine: Sherlock Holmes and Anaesthesia', *Canadian Journal of Anesthesia / Journal Canadien d'anesthésie*, 35.1 (January 1988), 58-62

Ogilvie, George, 'A Rare Case of Hereditary Syphilis, With Remarks on Interstitial Keratitis', *The Lancet*, 141.3641 (10 June 1893), 1372-1374

—— ‘A Rare Case of Hereditary Syphilis, With Remarks on Interstitial Keratitis’, *The Lancet*, 141.3642 (17 June 1893), 1436-1438

Ravin, James G., and Clive Migdal, ‘Sir Arthur Conan Doyle: The Author was an Ophthalmologist’, *Survey of Ophthalmology*, 40.3 (November-December 1995), 237-244

Silverstein, Arthur M., and Christine Ruggere, ‘Dr. Arthur Conan Doyle and the Case of Congenital Syphilis’, *Prospectives in Biology and Medicine*, 49.2 (Spring 2006), 209-219

Snelders, Stephen, Frans J Meijman and Toine Pieters, ‘Hereditary and Alcoholism in the Medical Sphere: The Netherlands, 1850 - 1900’, *Medical History*, 51 (2007), 219–236

Taylor-Ide, Jesse Oak, ‘Ritual and the Liminality of Sherlock Holmes in *The Sign of Four* and *The Hound of the Baskervilles*’, *English Literature in Transition, 1880-1920*, 48.1 (2005), 55-70

Waller, John C., “‘The Illusion of an Explanation’: The Concept of Hereditary Disease, 1770 - 1870’, *Journal of the History of Medicine*, 57 (October 2002), 410-448

Wynne, Catherine, ‘Arthur Conan Doyle and Psychic Photographs’ *History of Photography*, 22:4 (1998), pp. 385-392

### Newspaper Articles

‘The Davenport Brothers’, *The Liverpool Mercury*, 15 February 1865, p. 7, in *19<sup>th</sup> Century British Newspapers* <<http://find.galegroup.com>> [accessed 21 December 2007]

‘The Davenport Brothers’, *The Manchester Weekly Times*, 11 February 1865, p. 2

‘Spiritualism and Science’, *The Times*, 26 December 1872, p. 5, in *The Times Digital Archive* <<http://infotrac.galegroup.com>> [accessed 21 December 2007]

### Online Resources

‘Datura’ *The Oxford Dictionary of English*, ed. by Catherine Soanes and Angus Stevenson Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005) <<http://www.oxfordreference.com/>> [accessed 20 June 2009]

‘Hippocratic Oath’, in *The Royal Society of Medicine Health Encyclopedia* <<http://www.credoreference.com/entry/2229054>> [Accessed 2 March 2008]

Baldick, Chris, “realism”, in *The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* (Oxford University Press, 2008), in *Oxford Reference Online*. Oxford University Press <<http://www.oxfordreference.com/views/ENTRY.html?subview=Main&entry=t56.e954>> [28 July 2011]

Gardiner, Juliet, ed., *The History Today: Who's Who in British History* (London: Collins and Brown, 2000)

Graffius, Jan, 'Wanderings in South America and Arthur Conan Doyle', E-Mail, 17 September 2009, [Online] <curator@stonyhurst.ac.uk>

Loudon, Irvine, 'Why are (Male) Surgeons still Addressed as Mr?', *BMJ.com* <<http://www.pubmedcentral.nih.gov/articlerender.fcgi?artid=1119265>> [accessed 12 April 2008]

Tooley, Michael, 'The Problem of Evil', *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Spring 2010)* <<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2010/entries/evil/>>

<<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/146779/curare>> [accessed 15/08/09]

<<http://www.cdc.gov/malaria/about/history/ross.html>> [accessed 27/10/08]

<<http://www.cdc.gov/malaria/biology/mosquito/>> [accessed 27/10/08]

<<http://www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk/about/organisation/history.aspx>> [accessed 27/03/11]

<<http://www.localhistory.scit.wlv.ac.uk/Museum/metalware/japtech.htm>> [14 March 2011]

<<http://medical-dictionary.thefreedictionary.com>>

<<http://www.oed.com/>>

<<http://sacred-texts.com/etc/mco/ml06.htm>> [accessed 15 April 2009]

<<http://www.sciencemuseum.org.uk/broughttolife/people/johnscotthaldane.aspx>> [accessed 04/09/09]

<[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arthur\\_Conan\\_Doyle#cite\\_ref-20](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arthur_Conan_Doyle#cite_ref-20)> [accessed 29 May 2011]

## Films

*The Hound of the Baskervilles*, dir. by Sidney Lanfield (20th Century Fox, 1939) [on DVD]

*The Hound of the Baskervilles*, dir. by David Attwood (BBC, 2002) [on DVD]

*Murder Rooms: Mysteries of the Real Sherlock Holmes*, Episode 1: *The Dark Beginnings of Sherlock Holmes*, dir. by Paul Seed (BBC, 2000)

## Reference (offline)

Abrams, M. H., *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, 7th edn (Fort Worth TX: Harcourt Brace College, 1999)

*Brewer's Dictionary of Phrase and Fable: Millenium Edition*, Rev. by Adrian Room (London: Cassell, 1999; repr. 2001)

*Oxford Concise Colour Medical Dictionary*, 4th edn. (Oxford: Oxford university Press, 2007)