Françoise DUPEYRON-LAFAY
Professor of nineteenth-century literature
Université Paris Est Créteil, UPEC
dupeyronlafay@aol.com AND dupeyron@u-pec.fr

Absent, Symbolic and Imagined Communities in Arthur Conan Doyle's "*The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*" (1892)

Abstract. — The urban setting of *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* accounts for the almost complete absence of communities, and the lost reassuring sense of belonging. But even in the stories set in the countryside, rural communities are not evoked either, which appears as a fertile breeding-ground for criminal acts. The very few non-criminal micro-communities briefly mentioned in the texts primarily serve as clues, as sociocultural, psychological and behavioural markers that the detective reads and deciphers.
Holmes himself does not belong to any community. Yet, in spite of his individualism and unconventional traits, he paradoxically plays a healing role, as the weaver, or at least mender, of the social "fabric" for the male middle-class readership of *The Strand Magazine*. Indeed, he defends and preserves social and moral values, threatened both in the stories and in late Victorian society. Therefore, *The Adventures* reflect Conan Doyle's own values, and, through Holmes, they recreate and restore the feeling of belonging to an (imagined) ideological and ethical community.

Keywords. — *The Strand Magazine*, middle class, values, ideology, imagined communities, belonging.

About The Author

Françoise Dupeyron-Lafay is Professor of 19th century literature at Université Paris Est Créteil (UPEC) and specializes in Dickens, Wilkie Collins, J. S. Le Fanu, H. G. Wells, and A. Conan Doyle, highlighting the cross-fertilization between genres, closely focusing on questions of style and poetics, and on the links between ideology and representation. She also published various papers on Thomas De Quincey and a monograph on his autobiographical works (2010).

Absent, Symbolic and Imagined Communities in Arthur Conan Doyle's "*The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*" (1892)

The twelve short detective stories by Arthur Conan Doyle collected as *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* (1892) after being published serially in *The Strand Magazine* from July 1891 to June 1892, are characterized by the almost complete absence of communities.[1] Some of the very few notable exceptions in the collection concern criminal organizations such as the fraudulent, eponymous league[2] that turns out to be a clever, temporary cover-up for a dangerous gang of bank robbers in "The Red-Headed League", the KKK[3] and its deadly spider's web in "The Five Orange Pips", and the gang of German forgers in "The Engineer's Thumb".

After inquiring into the correlation between these scarce or absent communities, the predominantly urban setting of the stories and the presence of crime, this paper will briefly address the indicial function some aspects of non-criminal communities have for the detective, before focusing on Holmes himself, and all the sociological and ideological

[1] "A Case of Identity" stands as a relative exception and features some aspects of working and lower middle class life. Miss Mary Sutherland, a typist, lives in Camberwell (39) and picks up some of her private letters at the Leadenhall Street post office (36); her father used to be a plumber in the Tottenham Court Road (34), and regularly received invitations to the "gasfitters' ball" (35). Albeit purely fictitious, the ball testifies to the existence of "unusual clubs and institutes, such as those of the rag-pickers, paper-bag makers, undertakers, pipe-makers and lamplighters" and A. Conan Doyle may have been inspired by "A Few Queer Trade Societies", a paper listing them in *Tit-Bits*, 1 Nov. 1890 (Green, note 311).

[2] Jabez Wilson comes to consult Holmes about an advertisement in "*The Morning Chronicle* of April 27, 1890": the "Red-Headed League", founded thanks to a bequest by an American millionaire, advertises a vacancy supposed to entitle any selected red-haired applicant "to a salary of four pounds a week for purely nominal services". (52)

[3] The story of the American Klan and its worldwide ability to chase and eliminate "traitors" to their cause are described in detail on pages 117-18.

implications of the stories. Holmes's cultivated isolation and individualism, as signs of the times, make him a new hero of modernity. Paradoxically, although he is himself unconventional and individualistic, he serves as a role model and plays a healing role, as the weaver, or mender, of the social "fabric" for the male middle-class readership of *The Strand Magazine*. Through Holmes, *The Adventures* support a series of threatened social and moral values that A. Conan Doyle cherished, and recreate and restore their readers' feeling of belonging to an imagined ideological and ethical community.

By and large, the twelve "Adventures" are characterized by the almost complete absence of communities and of the attendant, reassuring sense of belonging. Unsurprisingly, seven out of twelve of the short stories take place in an urban setting. In *Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. L'Homme et l'œuvre*, Pierre Nordon shows that in the Holmes adventures, the metropolis is not represented like a cluster of neighbourhoods or parishes with their local habits and specificities, but rather looks like a huge web innervated by an intricate network of new information and communication devices, such as the railway, the press or telegrams (Nordon,164: 281) In "The Red-Headed League" for instance, Watson, who is the narrator of the stories, evokes the tumultuous movements of the anonymous London crowds:

> "The road in which we found ourselves as we turned round the corner from the retired Saxe-Coburg Square presented as great a contrast to it as the front of a picture does to the back. It was one of the main arteries which conveyed the traffic of the City to the north and west. The roadway was blocked with the immense stream of commerce flowing in a double tide inward and outward, while the footpaths were black with the hurrying swarm of pedestrians." (64)

In addition, some of Holmes's clients, such as Violet Hunter, the governess of "The Copper Beeches"[4] or Victor Hatherley, the engineer of "The Engineer's Thumb",[5] represent ideal prey since they are orphaned, and live quite alone in London, without any ties or relatives.

But even in the stories in the collection set in the countryside, such as "The Speckled Band", "The Five Orange Pips"[6] or "The Copper Beeches", rural communities are not evoked either and the protagonists usually live in complete seclusion in large isolated houses. Besides, in "The Copper Beeches" when Holmes is travelling by train to Hampshire with

---

[4] "[…] 'I have no parents or relations of any sort from whom I could ask advice […].'" (272)

[5] "'You must know," said he, "that I am an orphan and a bachelor, residing alone in lodgings in London.'" (202)

[6] When John Openshaw comes to consult Holmes after the mysterious and suspicious death of his uncle, he describes his relative's life as quite isolated: "'During all the years that he lived at Horsham, I doubt if ever he set foot in the town. He had a garden and two or three fields round his house, and there he would take his exercise, though very often for weeks on end he would never leave his room.'" (105-106)

Watson, the detective's vision of the countryside is far from pastoral and emphasizes its potential for crime precisely because of the absence of communities in this type of scattered habitat:

> "All over the countryside, away to the rolling hills around Aldershot, the little red and grey roofs of the farm-steadings peeped out from amid the light green of the new foliage.
>
> "Are they not fresh and beautiful?" I cried with all the enthusiasm of a man fresh from the fogs of Baker Street.
>
> But Holmes shook his head gravely.
>
> "Do you know, Watson," said he, "that it is one of the curses of a mind with a turn like mine that I must look at everything with reference to my own special subject. You look at these scattered houses, and you are impressed by their beauty. I look at them, and the only thought which comes to me is a feeling of their isolation and of the impunity with which crime may be committed there."
>
> "Good heavens!" I cried. "Who would associate crime with these dear old homesteads?"
>
> "They always fill me with a certain horror. It is my belief, Watson, founded upon my experience, that the lowest and vilest alleys in London do not present a more dreadful record of sin than does the smiling and beautiful countryside." ("The Copper Beeches": 280)[7]

Because of the absence of communities and social bonding, the world of the Sherlock Holmes stories appears as a fertile breeding-ground for criminal acts. Actually, in close-knit communities, members know and recognize one another, which involves familiarity, visibility and sometimes surveillance. In *Form and Ideology in Crime Fiction*, Stephen Knight evokes the characteristics of this pre-industrial "organic model" (Knight, 1980: 11) of social organization, especially as it is reflected through the prism of the various collections of real-life (but slightly fictionalized) crime stories published as *The Newgate Calendar* from 1773 on. In these edifying stories, set within a "highly Christian framework" (Knight, 1980: 12), the community "can sometimes suffer from disorderly elements" but "can deal with them by its own integral means" (Knight, 1980: 11), "without mediation, without specialists". (Knight, 1980: 13) In the *Calendar*, society "is so tightly knit that escape will not be possible" since the murderer is likely to have been "seen in the act" and is bound to be identified. (Knight, 1980: 12) Yet, Knight insists that this paradigm of "unmediated social control of crime" (Knight, 1980: 13) was akin to wishful thinking, since, even in the late 1700s, this

[7] In The *Watersplash* (1954), one of her novels staging the female amateur detective Miss Silver, Patricia Wentworth shows how influential Holmes's vision has become since he "has exposed the myth of country innocence." (1) However, it remains a moot point whether "Holmes's claim is to draw the sting of the threats of city living". (Knight, 1980: 95)

"implied social model was disappearing" because "many people lived in large and increasing conurbations, and there was a hardened and relatively successful criminal class". (Knight, 1980, 13) In fact, *The Newgate Calendar*, far from "offering a real account of crime control", has primarily an ideological role and rests on the reassuring fantasy that "our society is integral" and forms "a single healthy body" (Knight, 1980: 13), therefore offering "a consoling fable in the face of disturbing reality".[8]

Doyle's stories also represent a "disturbing reality", even if some of them are lighter in mood, and feature a few non-criminal micro-communities such as Freemasons (in "The Red-Headed League": 51), or racegoers and horse lovers in "A Scandal in Bohemia" in which Holmes, dressed up as a groom, gets vital information because of what he calls "[the] freemasonry among horsey men" ("A Scandal in Bohemia": 16). Similarly, in "The Blue Carbuncle", he very cunningly sizes up one of the salesmen whom he wants to question at Covent Garden Market thanks to *The Sporting Times* he sees in his pocket, making the most of this so as to learn what he needs from the otherwise unhelpful and short-tempered man:

> "When you see a man with whiskers of that cut and the 'Pink 'un' protruding out of his pocket, you can always draw him by a bet," said he. "I daresay that if I had put £100 down in front of him, that man would not have given me such complete information as was drawn from him by the idea that he was doing me on a wager. Well, Watson, we are, I fancy, nearing the end of our quest […]." (163)

The familiar name for *The Sporting Times* came from the pink paper on which it was printed. It "was more than a mere journal" as it "had established itself as a social centre of a highly specialised nature, and its readers constituted a species of home and overseas club, whose bond of fellowship was good humour and good sportsmanship" (Green: note 359).[9] These micro-communities primarily seem to serve as clues since they represent sociocultural,

---

[8] "The Image that *The Newgate Calendar* presents, a world of integrated Christian society, was still credible through the nineteenth century, though the real world was increasingly unlike the one assumed and implied in these stories, and though other versions of society and the control of crime were being dramatized in fiction. Any thorough cultural analysis reveals how patterns overlap in many confusing ways; there is rarely a simple linear progress to be found and one society can sustain quite contradictory views of the world at one time, many of them quite outdated. Even while the calendar was in its early editions, professional thief-catchers, such as the Bow Street Runners, were at work. They were not a salaried force, though, often little more than paid informers—and they made little impact in crime fiction." (Knight, 1980: 18)

[9] Green is here quoting J. B. Booth, *Sporting Times. The 'Pink'Un' World*, 1938.

psychological and behavioural markers[10] that the detective reads and deciphers. They enable him to make progress in his investigations, or to get a more thorough understanding of the personality, habits and background of his interlocutors, or of the clients asking for his services. This is the case in "The Red-Headed League" when Holmes, by simply looking at Jabez Wilson, is able to understand he is a Freemason because "against the strict rules of [his] order", he wears "an arc and compass breastpin." ("The Red-Headed League": 51)[11]

Holmes himself does not belong to any community. He is an individualist who leads a solitary life, except for his professional relations and his friendship with Watson. In *Bloodhounds of Heaven*, Ian Ousby draws his detailed psychological and sociological portrait and defines him as "reclusive and eccentric in his habits" (Ousby, 1970: 140), and "a gentleman, not a modestly successful burgher" (Ousby, 1970: 141) unlike the policemen that had recently appeared in works of fiction, such as Inspector Bucket in Dickens's *Bleak House* (1853), an assessment confirmed by Watson's description of him in "A Scandal in Bohemia", the first story of the collection:

> […] Holmes, who loathed every form of society with his whole Bohemian soul, remained in our lodgings in Baker Street, buried among his old books, and alternating from week to week between cocaine and ambition, the drowsiness of the drug, and the fierce energy of his own keen nature. He was still, as ever, deeply attracted by the study of crime, and occupied his immense faculties and extraordinary powers of observation in following out those clues, and clearing up those mysteries which had been abandoned as hopeless by the official police. (5)

In Holmes's adventures spanning five decades, from *A Study in Scarlet* in 1887 to the last collection *The Case-Book of Sherlock Holmes* (1927), some of his traits and characteristics changed, even within the 1892 collection in which he gradually grows more respectable and less distant and detached. Watson introduces him as "the most perfect reasoning and observing machine" (5) in "A Scandal in Bohemia", going on to add that "grit in a sensitive instrument, or a crack in one of his own high-power lenses would not have been more disturbing than a strong emotion in a nature such as his". (5) But over the course of the collection, Holmes becomes less inhuman, more humane and starts to manifest various

---

[10] In "A Scandal in Bohemia", Irene Adler's address in the London neighbourhood of St John's Wood (15), with its bohemian community, represents one of these markers for Holmes since it was "favoured by artists and authors, and was the home of several noted courtesans". (Green: note 305)

[11] The display of Masonic emblems and jewellery was discouraged and seen as improper. Conan Doyle was a Freemason himself and a member of the Phoenix Lodge in Portsmouth. (Green: note 316)

feelings such as excitement, anxiety, compassion, or anger, no longer dealing with “criminals and human problems” as if they were “simply scientific puzzles”. (Ousby, 1970: 156) Similarly, his drug addiction is evoked in “A Scandal in Bohemia”, the first story of the collection, and quite humorously in the sixth one, “The Man with the Twisted Lip”: “‘I suppose, Watson […] that 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.’” (127) But significantly, drugs are no longer mentioned after this. *The Strand Magazine* had initially ordered a series of six Holmes stories from Doyle in July 1891 but they were so hugely popular that George Newnes, the owner and editor of *The Strand*, asked for an additional series of six. It is in this new series that Doyle gradually started to tone down or even eliminate some of Holmes’s most anti-conformist and decadent[12] aspects such as his drug use and aesthetic approach to life. From this moment on, he is only depicted as a cigarette and pipe smoker[13] and behaves more conventionally and respectably by middle-class standards.[14] This corresponds to the watershed when Doyle had “found his true metier and his true audience” (Ousby, 1970: 151), so that the “Holmes of this period is more calculated to appeal to a middle-class readership than the earlier figure”, becoming “the embodiment of the polished English gentleman” (Ousby, 1970: 161). Besides, at “a time when knowledge was becoming increasingly compartmentalized”, his “ability to master the various compartments and to range freely between them” was reassuring and proved that the “all-round man of knowledge, the liberally educated gentleman—could still survive.” (Ousby, 1970: 162)

The publication of the *Adventures* in the recently created “middlebrow”[15] *Strand Magazine* largely accounts for many of Holmes’s traits and informs the stories in terms of plot, themes, as well as representational and ideological logic. There is, for instance, a

[12] At the end of “The Red-Headed League”, he tells Watson that the case was an abstract “little problem” and a mere diversion that briefly “saved [him] from ennui” and enabled him to “escape from the commonplaces of existence.” (74)

[13] Holmes assesses the case of “The Red-Headed League” as “quite a three-pipe problem”. (62)

[14] Ousby lists various attractive characteristics of the detective gradually emerging throughout the corpus: Holmes’s “passion for justice and mercy” (140), “a vein of pleasantly whimsical humor”, his “courteous and mildly avuncular” attitude to his downtrodden clients (especially women), his gentlemanly “sang-froid and cutting irony” towards bullies and villains. (161)

[15] The concept of the “middlebrow” was not yet used in the 1890s. Yet, the Holmes stories, “their publishing history, the position of *The Strand* within the late-Victorian literary marketplace, and the career of Arthur Conan Doyle more broadly, engage with the issues of class, money, popularity and value which framed later debates on the middlebrow. The ‘battle of the brows’ which took place in interwar Britain echoes many late nineteenth-century anxieties about literary hierarchy and the morality of writing for money. Doyle’s Holmes stories are infused with these issues.” (Clarke 73)

correlation between the targeted commuting urban readership of *The Strand* and the abundance of realistic effects, and contextual or toponymic references: "the vivid pieces of London life" present in "The Blue Carbuncle" or "The Red-Headed League" could actually conjure up a familiar image of the streets "the readers would walk through to catch their trains." (Knight, 1980: 94) George Newnes "had a long editorial and publishing career behind him" (Knight, 1980: 70), first with the popular weekly *Tit-Bits* which targeted an urban "audience of literate but hurried readers who sought diversion and a sense of contact with a world that seemed increasingly complex" and were "aware of modern forces but unable to handle them adequately".

> "[Newnes] struck his goldmine when […] he designed a magazine that had a bourgeois, middle-brow content and satisfyingly modern format. *The Strand* started in 1890 and the first issue sold 300,000 copies. It cost sixpence (quite a small sum compared with other journals), was widely distributed through railway bookstalls to catch the commuting white-collar market, and was strikingly up-to-date in form. […].
>
> The contents of early copies define the magazine's ideology: […] biographies of successful men, stories about courage and adventure, features about new machines, […] and sections for housewives and children regularly occur. The magazine was to be read and taken home by the white-collar men who worked in London. It was a central piece of middle-class ideological literature, oriented towards the family and respectable success in life. (Knight 70)
>
> There are many relations between the meaning of the Sherlock Holmes stories and the world-view of *The Strand* and its purchasers. […] Doyle effectively created patterns that supported, even developed, the attitudes of his audience. (71)"

The nature of the cases Holmes has to deal with, and the identity, (social) background[16] and gender of the offenders, represent a response to his readers' expectations, needs and concerns. Murders occur "only" in three out of the twelve stories of *The Adventures* – "The Boscombe Valley Mystery", "The Five Orange Pips" and "The Speckled Band" –, and in a fourth one, "The Engineer's Thumb", the gang of forgers fail to kill Victor Hatherley who manages to escape unscathed, except for his lost (severed) thumb. These four adventures are set in the

[16] Pierre Nordon shows the importance of class and class consciousness in chapter 14, "Sherlock Holmes et son audience" (Nordon, 1964: 284-287).

countryside and evil has mainly foreign origins in them[17]: Australian in "The Boscombe Valley Mystery", North American in "The Five Orange Pips", (East) Indian in "The Speckled Band", and German in "The Engineer's Thumb". The (seven) remaining stories all take place in London and rest on crimes such as theft or robbery ("The Red-Headed League", "The Blue Carbuncle" and "The Beryl Coronet"), usurpation of identity usually motivated by greed ("A Case of Identity", "The Man with the Twisted Lip"), bigamy ("The Noble Bachelor") and what may be called "sentimental" blackmail ("A Scandal in Bohemia"[18]). As a matter of fact, in spite of the undeniable existence of "professional villainy" (Knight, 1980: 90) and the presence of "organised crime in nineteenth-century England, especially in an around London", the "city-bred" (Knight, 1980: 88) problems the stories hinge on make "the issue inevitably one of moral and family disorder rather than any external criminal threat". What is mainly at stake, then, is "disorder threatening the normative morality of bourgeois, respectable England" (Knight, 1980: 89), which "demonstrates how far Doyle is from presenting a realistic account of the sources and patterns of real crime in late nineteenth-century England." (Knight, 1980: 95)

Besides, the predominance of *male* villains, offenders, and criminals is particularly striking and concerns ten out of the twelve "Adventures".[19] As Tobias Jasper Körtner points out in *Sherlock Holmes and the Failure of Masculine Values*, the stories "deal with gender roles and ideals of masculinity", such as chivalry (Körtner, 2009: 91) or nobility of mind and character in a world threatened and corrupted by men "without decency or manners" (Körtner, 2009: 98).

Significantly, except for the evil *American* members of the KKK or the *German* forgers of "The Engineer's Thumb" whose origins and social background we know very little about, the most dangerous *British* criminals in *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* are not middle-class men but belong to the gentry or aristocracy: John Clay, the unscrupulous and

[17] Most of "The Copper Beeches" takes place near Winchester (Hampshire), and, contrary to the four other stories set in the countryside, its villain is definitely English.

[18] "Apart from helping to protect his country from external danger, Holmes […] presents himself as a suppressor of scandal and an enemy of unfortunate publicity." (Ousby 164-165) "This aspect of the detective's role would have been especially important to contemporary readers, for during the late Victorian and Edwardian eras the reputation and self-respect of the upper middle classes were badly shaken by a succession of scandals. […] Holmes, the enemy of the blackmailer and the scandalmonger, would have been a reassuring hero." (Ousby 165)

[19] The only female characters breaking the law and disregarding Victorian rules of propriety are Irene Adler who blackmails the King of Bohemia and Mary who aids and abets a dangerous thief in "The Beryl Coronet". Yet, in both cases, the offence is not caused by greed, but by love (respectively for the King and the evil and corrupt aristocrat Sir George Burnwell).

violent bank robber in "The Red-Headed League" claims he has "royal blood in his veins" ("The Red-Headed League": 71), the murderous squire Dr Grimesby Roylott in "The Speckled Band" kills one of his stepdaughters out of greed; and Sir George Burnwell wrecks Mr Holder's family in "The Beryl Coronet". The title of the story, "The Noble Bachelor", both indicates Lord St Simon's aristocratic status and ironically highlights his dishonesty and despicable behaviour. These characters that middle-class readers, aspiring to reach a better status, could have envied and considered as role models to emulate, are on the contrary represented as enemies of the sound middle-class values of honesty and decency. These aristocrats' deviant behaviour is a far cry from the ideology of "personal achievement and personal morality" (Knight, 1980: 95) supported by Doyle and *The Strand*.

In the stories where crime involves property and identity, the offenders are actually either lower middle-class ("The Blue Carbuncle", "A Case of Identity"), or apparently respectable upper middle-class family men (Neville St Clair in "The Man with the Twisted Lip" or Jephro Rucastle in "The Copper Beeches"). Their social background is, therefore, both ideologically strategic *and* cautionary within the logic of *The Strand*. It is through these wrongdoers that Doyle defined, as if in negative and by implication, what a Victorian middle-class man should be and should value, as a husband, father, and a citizen, reminding readers that their "successful position depended on vigilance, on a sustained defence and propagation of the virtues that seemed central to [the] continued security" of their class. (Knight, 1980: 92)

Watson appears in many respects as more life-like than Holmes, and must have been the stronger figure of identification of the pair for *The Strand* readers.[20] Yet, Ousby rightly sees the detective as "a fantasy version of Doyle himself" (Ousby, 1970: 163), whose mother and upbringing[21] definitively shaped his world-view, and "whose own life shows a continual aspiration toward perfect gentility". Jaffe even evokes a form of slippage between creature and creator, the latter being literally eclipsed by his hero.

---

[20] Watson is "more down-to-earth" and "provides some stability and control in Holmes's life". He is a "reasonable" and "reliable companion" combining a "middle-class background" and "a romantic streak". (Körtner, 2009: 98) However, in *Sherlock Holmes. The Unauthorized Biography* (2005), Nick Rennison argues that: "The image that we have of Watson as the stolid representative of Victorian values […], is a misleading one" and claims that, as a young man, he was "a womanizer and a gambler", and that "the urge to gamble beyond his means remained with him into middle age" (49) as "The Adventure of Shoscombe Old Place" shows.

[21] The first chapter of Jacqueline Jaffe's monograph on A. Conan Doyle is entitled "The Pattern of a Gentleman" and evokes the determining influence the writer's mother had on his world-view and values, instilling into him a sense of his family origins and tradition of honour.

Holmes was so popular that many people refused to believe he was fiction, and his name often eclipsed that of his creator. Letters, telegrams, and parcels addressed to Sherlock Holmes, Esq., were duly delivered […] to Arthur Conan Doyle. People wrote to enquire after Holmes's health, to send him their favourite recipes, to argue with his readings of the evidence, and to beg Dr. Watson to publish more stories about his friend and mentor." (Jaffe, 1987: 9)[22]

Therefore, in spite of his various oddities, eccentricities and flaws, even if he is a far cry from the Victorian middle-class ideal of the family man, Holmes embodies the yearnings and aspirations of his creator and his audience alike. He is a much more abstract and idealized character than Watson and as such, he expresses a fantasy of power and control[23] at a time when this very sense of control over the world was waning and some of the values at stake in the stories were dangerously threatened. Indeed, because of the "scientistic and rational explanation of a materially known world", of the "psychic protection of a powerful hero" who upholds "central bourgeois values", thereby "maintaining order" (Knight, 1980: 103), the stories keep up or restore an overall (jeopardized) sense of meaning, coherence, and belonging.

Nordon, Jaffe and Knight unanimously emphasize Holmes's larger-than-life and heroic dimension. For Jaffe, he has the "status of a fairy-tale hero" (Jaffe, 1987: 9), and Nordon claims the "Holmesian cycle" pertains to the epic, because of the protagonists' heroism, and of the choric function and collective value of the texts. (Nordon, 1964: 271)[24] Knight similarly considers that the stories are "a contemporary analogue to a series of folk-tales, or a set of epic lays in which a figure fitted to be a culture-hero of his period was

[22] "When Doyle decided to kill Holmes at the Reichenbach Falls in "The Final Problem", "the shock to the public was so great" that there was "an enormous outpouring of grief and protest". The "extent of the national dismay" was so great that "twenty thousand people immediately canceled their subscription to *The Strand*, while ten thousand more wrote to the editor, the publisher, and the author to complain. Many readers mourned, and the queen herself was rumoured to be upset." (Jaffe, 1987: 9)

[23] Holmes occasionally bends or breaks the law and can be a law unto himself when he deems it fit and just, as in "The Boscombe Valley Mystery" (John Turner, the murderer, goes unpunished because he has extenuating circumstances and is fatally ill), and in "The Blue Carbuncle" when he lets James Ryder get away with his theft: "I suppose that I am committing a felony, but it is just possible that I am saving a soul. […] Send him to gaol now, and you make him a gaol-bird for life." (170)

[24] Nordon invokes the epic model of *Paradise Lost*, for instance, and remarks: "[…] la facture épique des Aventures de Sherlock Holmes est assez frappante. L'héroïsme du détective, le thème moral qui assure l'unité de l'œuvre, la place qu'y tiennent discours, péripéties et catastrophes, le merveilleux, sous l'aspect scientifique, l'humour, enfin, ne sont-ils pas des traits spécifiquement épiques ? Mais surtout, l'œuvre satisfait certaines exigences idéologiques, et s'accorde à la sensibilité d'une époque encore proche, révolue sous ses aspects les plus apparents, mais dans laquelle l'univers anglais d'aujourd'hui plonge encore de très profondes racines." (271)

presented in a medium and form technologically and epistemologically valid for a contemporary class." (Knight, 1980: 103). Knight identifies a series of "manifest", consolatory "folk tale" aspects in the Holmes *Adventures* whose "essential functions" are "to explain the world, to protect […] against psychic and physical threats, to offer escapist entertainment and to be socially normative—to urge that these values will keep society on an even keel, resist discommoding change."

Holmes's cultivated isolation and prodigious intellectual faculties make him a new hero of modernity. Paradoxically, too, however individualistic, eccentric and lonesome he may be, he brings people together and restores a sense of community, thereby playing a creative, reconstructive and healing role as the weaver, or mender, of the social "fabric" for a community eager to restore or retrieve ties and links, however intangible they may be, at a time when the communal feeling was waning. "Thus, Doyle's entertaining, sensational stories are more than merely thrilling crime mysteries; they […] attempt to constitute a social conscience." (Körtner, 2009: 4)

The role played by Holmes is undeniably much wider than the mere fictional framework of the stories: for the male middle-class readers of *The Strand Magazine* for whom they were written, *The Adventures* recreated and restored the feeling of belonging to an ideological and ethical community. Their being printed in magazines and read by commuters evokes Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities*, and the way he interprets newspaper reading as a very subtle, immaterial and wide-ranging communal cement:

> "The significance of this mass ceremony – Hegel observed that newspapers serve modern man as a substitute for morning prayers – is paradoxical. It is performed in silent privacy […]. Yet each communicant is well aware that the ceremony he performs is being replicated simultaneously by thousands (or millions) of others whose existence he is confident, yet of whose identity he has not the slightest notion. Furthermore, this ceremony is incessantly repeated […] throughout the calendar. What more vivid figure for the secular, historically clocked, imagined community can be envisioned? At the same time, the newspaper reader, observing exact replicas of his own paper being consumed by his subway, barbershop, or residential neighbours, is continually reassured that the imagined world is visibly rooted in everyday life." (Anderson 35-36)

The rationale of the communities created by the Holmes stories is, then, similar to Anderson's definition of "community in anonymity which is the hallmark of modern nations". (Anderson,

1991: 36) The community created by Doyle was, therefore, dematerialized and intangible, geographically diffuse, since it was primarily ideological, both imaginary and imagined. For Ousby, Holmes was "a hero designed for the late Victorian and Edwardian period" (Ousby, 1970: 172), and his "triumphs reflect the age's belief in certain values", such as "the power of reason to control the environment and eliminate danger" and "the ability of the gentleman to enforce a sense of justice and fair play". Although he admits the stories occasionally "echo contemporary anxieties", he tends to downplay them when he claims that the *Adventures* "express the self-confidence of the period". (Ousby, 1970: 172) It could on the contrary be argued that their binding communal scope would be irrelevant in a context of full confidence, and represents a consoling response to the prevalent sense of loss, distress and confusion, accounting for the comforting epic and heroic dimension of Holmes's power, but also for his enduring appeal and aura. "Holmes was a hero shaped for a particular class in a particular time and place, but like many other heroes he has survived out of context as a figure of heroism." (Knight, 1980: 103) Nick Rennison's *Sherlock Holmes, the Unauthorized Biography* (2005), Thomas Bruce Wheeler's *Finding Sherlock's London. Travel Guide to over 200 Sites in London* (2003), his revised edition with 300 sites in 2009, and even more recently, Christina Lee's paper "'Welcome to London'. Spectral Spaces in Sherlock Holmes's Metropolis" (2014) that investigates the "Sherlock Holmes cultural phenomenon, that is, tourism of locations featured" in the narratives (Lee, 2014: 173), clearly testify to the survival and evolution of the imagined communities created by Doyle.

References

Bibliography

Primary Sources

Conan Doyle, Sir Arthur. *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* (1892). Ed. Richard Lancelyn Green. Oxford: Oxford UP, Oxford World's Classics, 1998.

Wentworth, Patricia. *The Watersplash* (1954). London: Hodder and Stoughton, 2006.

Secondary Sources

Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. London and New York: Verso, 1991.

Clarke, Clare. “Professionalism and the Cultural Politics of Work in the Sherlock Holmes Stories”. *The Masculine Middlebrow, 1880–1950*. Ed. Kate Macdonald. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011. 73-89.

Green, Richard Lancelyn. Introduction and Notes. Arthur Conan Doyle. *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*. Oxford: Oxford UP, Oxford World’s Classics, 1998.

Jaffe, Jacqueline. *Arthur Conan Doyle*. Boston: Twayne, 1987.

Knight, Stephen. *Form and Ideology in Crime Fiction*. London: Macmillan, 1980.

Körtner, Tobias Jasper. *Sherlock Holmes and the Failure of Masculine Values: Detecting Attitudes towards Race and Gender in Sir Arthur Conan Doyle’s Detective Fiction*. VDM Verlag, 2009.

Lee, Christina. “‘Welcome to London’. Spectral Spaces in Sherlock Holmes’s Metropolis”. *Cultural Studies Review* (*CSR*) 20.2 (September 2014): 172-195.

Macdonald, Kate, ed. *The Masculine Middlebrow, 1880-1950: What Mr Miniver Read*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011.

Mitchell, Sally. “Reading Class”. *Victorian Literature and Culture* 33 (2005): 329-337.

Nordon, Pierre. *Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. L’Homme et l’œuvre.* Paris : Didier, « Études anglaises 17 », 1964.

Ousby, Ian. *Bloodhounds of Heaven. The Detective in English Fiction from Godwin to Doyle*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1976.

Rennison, Nick. *Sherlock Holmes. The Unauthorized Biography*. London: Atlantic Books, 2005.

Tuan, Yi-Fu. “The Landscapes of Sherlock Holmes”. *Journal of Geography* 84.2 (1985): 56-60.

Wheeler, Thomas Bruce. *Finding Sherlock’s London. Travel Guide to over 200 Sites in London*. London, Lincoln, Shanghai: iUniverse, 2003.

---, *The New Finding Sherlock’s London. Travel Guide to over 300 Sherlock Holmes Sites in London*. New York, Bloomington: iUniverse, 2009.

Williams, Raymond. *Keywords. A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*. 1976. New York: Oxford UP, 1983