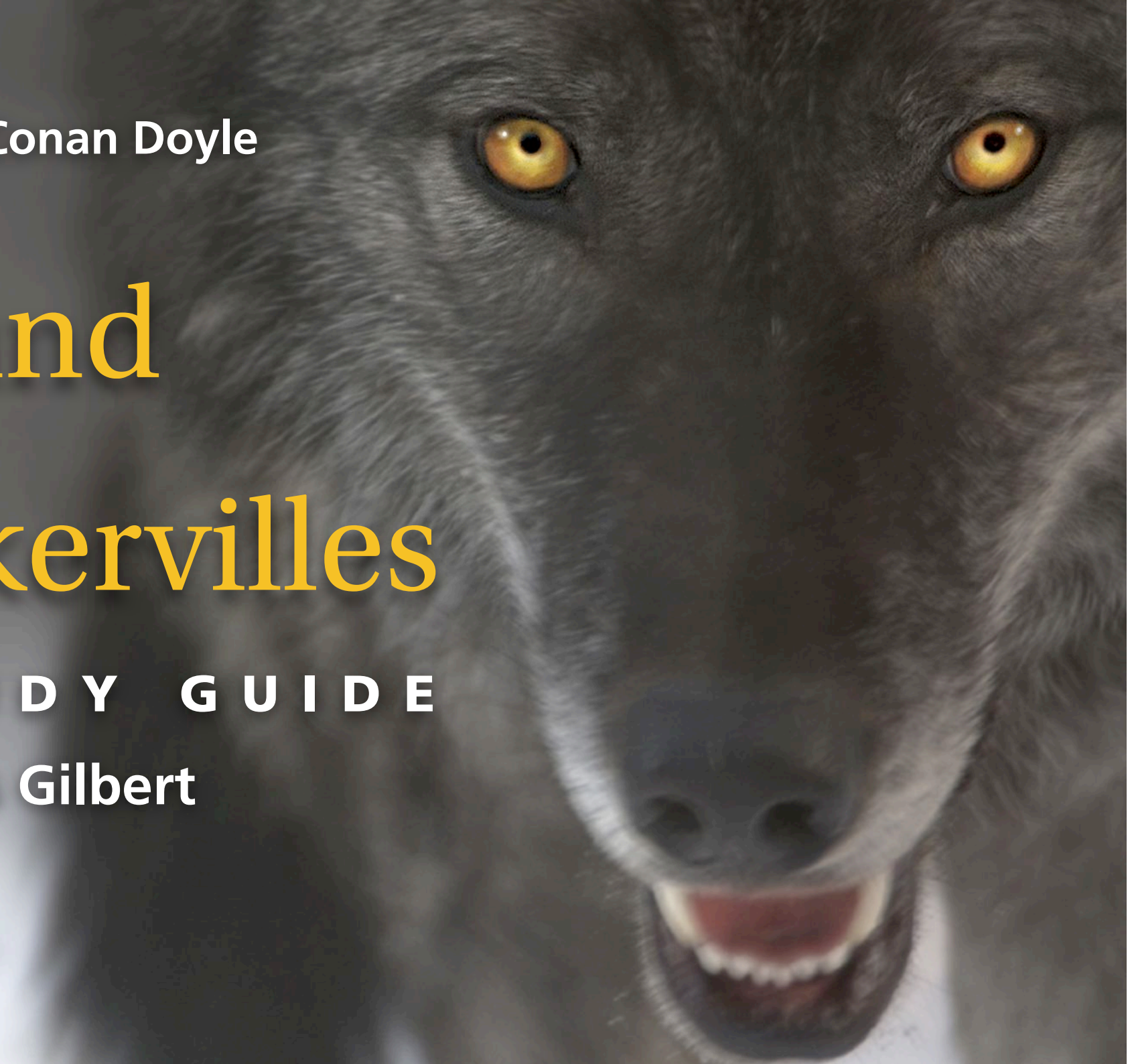


Sir Arthur Conan Doyle

The Hound of the Baskervilles

A STUDY GUIDE

by Francis Gilbert



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Introduction

This study guide takes a different approach from most study guides. It does not simply tell you more about the story and characters, which isn't actually that useful. Instead, it attempts to show how the author's techniques and interests inform every single facet of this classic novel. Most study guides simply tell you WHAT is going on, then tack on bits at the end which tell you HOW the author creates suspense and drama at certain points in the book, informing you a little about WHY the author might have done this.

This study guide starts with the HOW and the WHY, showing you right from the start HOW and WHY the author shaped the key elements of the book.

Contexts

Understanding Contexts

In order to fully appreciate a text, you need to appreciate the CONTEXTS in which it was written – known as its contexts of writing – and the CONTEXTS in which you read the book, or the contexts of reading.

This is potentially a huge area to explore because ‘contexts’ essentially means the ‘worlds’ from which the book has arisen. For the best books, these are many and various. The most obvious starting point is the writer’s own life: it is worth thinking about how and why the events in a writer’s life might have influenced his or her fiction. However, you do have to be careful not to assume too much. For example, Conan Doyle may have based certain elements of Sherlock Holmes on an influential figure in his own life – the surgeon Joseph Bell – but you must remember that Sherlock Holmes is a character in his own right in the novel – a vital cog in the narrative wheel, a literary construct and NOT A REAL PERSON !

As a result, it is particularly fruitful to explore other contexts of writing. We can look at the broader world from which Conan Doyle arose – the Victorian values that informed his life and the details of his own life which shaped the language of his writing – and consider carefully how Conan Doyle both adopted and rejected the morals of his time. Other contexts might be the influence of the literary world that Conan Doyle inhabited (what other authors were writing at the time), how religion shaped his views, and so on.

Just as important as the contexts of *writing* are the contexts of *reading*: how we read the novel today. *The Hound of the Baskervilles* remains a hugely influential text, it has spawned numerous screen adaptations, and it has

been much imitated and parodied. Your own personal context is important too. You may read this novel very differently if you are approaching it from a female perspective, or that of a dog-lover, or dog-hater! In order for you to fully consider the contexts of reading rather than my *telling* you what to think, I have posed open-ended questions in the Notes, Quotes and Discussion section that seem to me to be important when considering this issue.

Contexts of Writing: Arthur Conan Doyle's Life

Arthur Conan Doyle (ACD) was born in 1859 in Edinburgh, Scotland, the third child of ten and the eldest son; his father was a chronic alcoholic, but his mother was a lively, brilliant woman who was devoted to her son. Baptised a Catholic, and supported by wealthy relatives, since his father was very poor, he attended Jesuit schools in the Ribbles Valley Lancashire: Hodder Place and Stonyhurst College. Only nine at the time, he hated the repressive atmosphere of these very religious schools and being sent away from his beloved mother. His salvation was in stories – a passion he shared with his mother. Escaping from the brutality of the school into a world of fiction, he became a popular spinner of yarns among his school friends.

He passed the London Matriculation Examination at Stonyhurst in 1875 and attended a Jesuit college in Austria for a year before becoming a student of medicine at Edinburgh University. He supplemented his studies by working as a surgeon's clerk to Joseph Bell in the city. While he was to meet many brilliant individuals in Edinburgh, such as the writers James Barrie and Robert Louis Stevenson, it was Bell who had the greatest influence on him. And many commentators have come to believe that Bell was a model for Sherlock Holmes, being a man who prided himself on using the scientific method,

deduction, rationalism, logic and diagnosis to solve problems.

As well as working for Bell, ACD took a number of temporary positions as a medical assistant in Sheffield, Shropshire and Birmingham and, in 1880, served as a surgeon on a whaling ship – an experience which both terrified and fascinated him, while he loved the camaraderie of his shipmates. By now his writing career had also begun, and his stories and non-fiction were being published in a variety of journals, including an article on poison in the *British Medical Journal*. After resuming his studies, and graduating in 1881, he served as a surgeon on a steamer to West Africa, tending to a dying US Minister, who was a black abolitionist leader. Returning to England, he was involved in a failed business venture in Plymouth but quickly established himself as a successful general practitioner in Southsea. However, his family misfortunes distracted him, with his father being confined because of alcoholism and epilepsy, while his mother moved to Yorkshire, and ACD had to care for his young brother, Innes, a schoolboy and surgery page.

In 1885, ACD married Louisa Hawkins, the sister of a patient, John Hawkins, who had died of cerebral meningitis, and they honeymooned in Ireland. The following year the first Sherlock Holmes story, *A Study in Scarlet*, was published, marking the beginning of what was to be prodigious success as a writer. But it did not entirely end his medical career. In 1891 he set himself up as an eye-specialist, with a surgery near London's Harley Street. However, having failed to attract a single patient, and after suffering from a terrible attack of flu, which nearly killed him, ACD came to the realisation that it would be wise to give up the medical profession and concentrate entirely on his writing.

Spurred by public demand, a flurry of Sherlock Holmes short stories was written and these were published in the most popular literary magazines of the day, such as *The Strand*. But ACD was becoming increasingly frustrated by his most famous literary character. In 1893, in order to

free himself for 'more serious literary work', he famously killed off Holmes in a short story, *The Final Problem*, in which Sherlock Holmes and his arch nemesis, Professor Moriarty, plunge to their deaths at The Reichenbach Falls in Switzerland.

Moving to the Surrey countryside, at Hindhead, for the sake of his wife, who was suffering from tuberculosis, ACD wrote prolifically in an attempt to find a subject other than Holmes, but was drawn back inexorably to his money-spinner. And in 1899 Holmes even made his stage debut, in a play, *Sherlock Holmes*, written in collaboration with the actor William Gillette, who was to star as Holmes for the next 33 years.

In 1901, to the horror of his family, ACD enlisted to fight in the Boer War. As an out-of-shape 40-year-old, and suffering from stomach complaints in Africa, he didn't see any action but he did write a 500-page blockbuster on the war, *The Great Boer War*. In it he highlighted the shortcomings of the British effort, showing that more soldiers died of typhoid than in battle. Demoralised and ill, he returned to England, first trying and failing to establish a political career in Scotland and then travelling to Dartmoor to research the famous prison there. It was to prove a productive visit: he quickly shaped a story about a ghostly hound, an escaped convict and a creaky manor house, and titled it *The Hound of the Baskervilles*. But he realised that the story lacked a central figure. 'Why should I invent such a character, when I have Sherlock Holmes?' he asked himself. And so it was that Holmes returned, to the delight of his fans, in serial form in *The Strand*. The novella became a sensation, outselling all previous Holmes stories and selling more copies of the magazine than ever before, whilst provoking more debate than any of the other stories.

Yet in many ways it is not a typical 'Sherlock Holmes' and even its authorship is in some doubt. ACD had struck up a friendship with a fellow passenger, Bertram Fletcher Robinson, while returning on the ship *Briton* from South Africa, and they later took a short golfing holiday together.

On one Sunday in March 1901, Robinson told Doyle an old country legend about a spectral hound, which was to inspire Doyle's trip to Dartmoor. Writing later, Robinson recalled: 'One of the most interesting weeks that I ever spent was with Doyle on Dartmoor. He made the journey in my company shortly after I had told him, and he had accepted from me, a plot which eventuated in *The Hound of the Baskervilles*. Dartmoor, the great wilderness of bog and rock that cuts Devonshire at this point, appealed to his imagination.' Doyle himself was to write to his mother: 'Robinson and I are exploring the moor together over our Sherlock Holmes book. I think it will work splendidly – indeed I have already done nearly half of it. Holmes is at his very best, and it is a highly dramatic idea – which I owe to Robinson.' Doyle neatly sidestepped the question of Holmes's death by refusing to provide a date, although some critics believe that it is most probably 1889. Others think it is definitely 'post-Reichenbachian' because Holmes is a more human character than in the earlier stories.

In 1906, ACD was grief-stricken by the death of his ailing wife, Louisa, but it freed him to marry a woman he was said to have met and fallen in love with some 10 years earlier, Jean Leckie. Moving to Sussex, ACD became involved in various political causes, such as stopping the Belgian oppression in the Congo, changing the divorce laws, forming a local volunteer force when war was declared in 1914, and appealing for mercy for an Irish nationalist who led the Easter Week Rising. Increasingly, he found himself treated suspiciously by the British authorities; his history of *The British Campaign in France and Flanders* was censored for its inflammatory content and implicit criticism of the war.

In 1901, ACD published *The New Revelation* in which he called himself a Spiritualist, claiming that there was a world of spirits beyond the ordinary physical world; and this was soon to become a crusade. Between 1920 and 1930 he toured the world, attempting to convert people into believing in the after-life. But this didn't stop him publishing stories about the arch-rationalist, Sherlock

Holmes, and *The Complete Sherlock Holmes* was published in 1928. He died on 7 July 1930, and although the epitaph on his grave reads ‘Steel True, Blade Straight’, a more fitting one may be found in the Sherlock Holmes story *The Red Circle*: ‘Education never ends, Watson. It is a series of lessons with the greatest for the last’.

Selected Reading on Conan Doyle's Life

Arthur Conan Doyle (Author), David Stuart Davies (Introduction)

Memories and Adventures: An Autobiography

(Wordsworth Literary Lives; 1997)

Together with its illuminating introduction, this forms perhaps the best introduction to Conan Doyle's life, with the great man himself giving the account.

Hesketh Pearson (Author), Tim Pigott-Smith (Reader)

Arthur Conan Doyle: A Life

(Naxos AudioBooks)

In this excellent audiobook biography, Pearson considers how Doyle's life is reflected in his books – including his background as a doctor, and his enduring (and public) belief in spiritualism.

Russell Miller

The Adventures of Arthur Conan Doyle

(Harvill Secker; 2008)

This entertaining biography is very good on the emergence of Holmes as a literary figure who would dominate Doyle's life.

Contexts of Reading

We read this story very differently now from how it was read at the time. Some parts of the story still retain their power to shock; the horrific description of the hound and the way it attacks Sir Hugo, Sir Henry and Stapleton still

sends shivers down the spine. Perhaps the dog has become a more menacing symbol than it was then: concern in recent years about so-called ‘dangerous dogs’ has changed the way we regard man's best friend. Controversies about hunting and its subsequent ban in the UK countryside have meant that the hound remains a symbol for the upper classes, and it is still an emblem for savagery and mindless violence, while its piercing howl can scare us. In this sense, the story still carries its full freight of horror.

However, what was considered then to be highly risqué explorations of sex now seem rather tame. Stapleton's dalliance with Laura Lyons and his violent marriage are not as shocking to us as they were then. Nevertheless, Doyle mined a theme that has gained in significance with the passing years: that of men's brutal treatment of women. Throughout the story, women are presented as the victims of male violence: ‘Miss Stapleton’ is brutally tied up at the end of the story, and Laura Lyons is cruelly betrayed, not only by her first husband but also by her false fiancé.

But this is a detective story and such issues are never fully explored, only hinted at. There is, though, a modern pertinence: Holmes's fallibility has a peculiarly present-day ring to it. He is not the all-seeing, all-knowing god of the earlier stories. The combination of his absence for much of the story, and his fear at the end that he has failed, engenders sympathy in the reader. There is an Inspector Morse-like quality to him and an atmosphere of mournful regret, of loss – a sense that nothing can be the same again after this adventure.

The story doesn't have the closure of even a Victorian narrative: it ends with Sir Henry deeply traumatised by the events and possibly unable to recover, and the murderer has mysteriously disappeared into the mire, never heard of but never certainly dead. While solving the mystery of the hound, Doyle leaves much to the reader's imagination. In particular, the character of Stapleton is left more or less unexplained. We learn that he is, in fact, a Baskerville, but his manifest intelligence, his sexual

predilections, the mysteries of his marriage and his engagement to Laura Lyons are not entirely wrapped up. He is, without doubt, the most interesting villain to emerge in any of the Sherlock Holmes stories. Unlike Professor Moriarty, Stapleton is not a true psychotic, a pure embodiment of evil; he is presented as revengeful, embittered, troubled in his relationships, but he is also highly educated, charming, inquisitive and very attractive to women.

Structure and Theme

As with most detective stories, the narrative is structured around the theme of murder. In this case a suspicious death, that may be murder, has taken place, and another one looks likely. But this one is different compared to Doyle's other Sherlock Holmes stories because he has elongated his traditional narrative from its usual 30 or 40 pages. Here he extends his central theme to embrace and explore others, often attached to those of murder: deceit, sexual intrigue, and inheritance. He also develops a theme that is present in some Holmes stories but never as fully explored as here: that of the supernatural.

We could break down the novel into the following structure:

OPENING

- The establishment of the central issue within the London setting
- Holmes and Watson learn of the suspicious death of Sir Charles Baskerville from Dr Mortimer
- They believe that Sir Henry Baskerville, fresh off the boat from Canada, is the next candidate

COMPLICATIONS

- Dr Watson, without Holmes at Baskerville Hall, reports back on the possible suspects, learning more about Sir Charles and his death
- A cast of suspects is properly developed: Barrymore and his wife, Selden, the psychopath loose on the moor, the botanist Stapleton and his sister, Miss Stapleton, the litigious Mr Frankland, and the embittered, poverty-stricken Laura Lyons

CRISIS

- Holmes reappears and informs Watson that Stapleton is married to his supposed sister
- Selden is found dead on the moor in Sir Henry's clothing
- Laura Lyons learns that Stapleton was married
- Holmes pretends to leave for London, but returns

CLIMAX

- Holmes, Watson and Lestrade rescue Sir Henry from the hound on the moor
- They discover the truth about the supernatural hound and find Mrs Stapleton imprisoned at Merripit House
- Stapleton, now discovered to be a Baskerville, disappears into the Grimpen Mire

RESOLUTION

- Holmes explains how and why Stapleton was motivated to murder
- Sir Henry attempts to convalesce
- There is a deep sense of loss and foreboding at the end of the story

The Influence of Genre – the emergence of the detective story and the influence of the Gothic

Like many other Sherlock Holmes stories, the influence of the Gothic is paramount: the setting of creepy Baskerville Hall, the blasted Dartmoor, and the role of the ghostly hound could have been lifted directly from a Gothic novel. These novels, which evolved as popular potboilers in the 18th century, followed a set format: a heroine was usually lured by an unscrupulous villain to a haunted castle or old house and terrified out of her wits, only to be rescued from the villain's clutches by a handsome hero. Invariably, all the ghosts and ghouls that persecuted her would turn out to be wicked illusions generated by the villain.

In this sense, Stapleton fits the pattern of the Gothic villain: he is presented as sexually rapacious, imprisoning his wife and deceitfully enticing Laura Lyons into an engagement. His hound is similar to many supernatural elements in Gothic novels: the 'ghost' is revealed at the end as being very real and merely a method for the villain to accomplish murder.

However, it is Doyle's blend of the emerging genre of the detective story with the Gothic that makes this story so interesting. He uses many elements of the Gothic but shoehorns them into the format of a detective story, which, as we have seen, itself follows a very set format. This combination means that Doyle dispenses with many of the excesses of the Gothic: for instance, rather than having many ghouls and ghosties, he opts for one and concentrates all his verbal energies into generating a real sense of menace around it. To create an atmosphere of threat, he removes Sherlock Holmes from the narrative, because he is the one character whom the reader knows is invulnerable, and uses the voice of Watson, speaking from the lonely crucible of the moor, to bring a genuine mood of fear and danger. While Doyle explores the plight of damsels in distress – a habit of the Gothic – he keeps the hysterics muted: Laura Lyons's discovery that she has been betrayed by Stapleton is not melodramatic, but pathetic and sad.

In such a way, we see Doyle rewriting the rules of the detective story, which he himself had invented over a decade earlier; he leaves behind the certainties of the 'perfect' detective plot, in which all mysteries are solved, and introduces a new genre, a narrative in which investigating psychological issues is more important than solving the case. The trauma that Watson, Sir Henry, Laura Lyons and Stapleton's wife suffer at the hands of the unscrupulous, avaricious Stapleton is more striking than the way Holmes brings the case to a conclusion. The dark, terrifying atmosphere of the moor and the hound infect the resolution of the book: this is a new type of detective story, a narrative laced with the genuine menace of the Gothic and informed by a new, 20th-century fascination with the psychological.

Critical Perspectives

Is *The Hound of the Baskervilles* the first modern detective story?

So we have now established that *The Hound of the Baskervilles* plays around with the genres of the Gothic and the detective story in fascinating ways to create a truly 'psychological' story – a plot in which it is the psychologies of the villain, the victims and the detectives that play a leading role. There is a deep-rooted pessimism here, which has led some critics to note that this is the first truly modern detective story, because the detective is not presented as the omniscient being of many Victorian detective yarns. Holmes is a haunted, troubled and largely absent figure, plagued by a deep-rooted sense that he has made mistakes and has incurred a real cost in unmasking the murderer.

The novel lends itself to a number of other readings. A feminist interpretation might examine the way in which women are presented. All the female characters are depicted as victims of male brutality: even Mrs Barrymore is the victim of her brother Selden's psychosis, inexorably drawn to provide succour for him, even though she knows it is wrong. And Laura Lyons and Stapleton's wife are portrayed as two intelligent and beautiful women dragged down into the pit of immorality by their need, both psychological and physical, to have men at their sides. In the case of 'Miss Stapleton' we see how Doyle highlights one of the major injustices of the age: the difficulty of women to obtain a divorce from a reluctant husband. A few years later, Doyle would campaign for the divorce laws to be changed.

Also possible is a Marxist interpretation; in many ways the novel could be read as a parable of the old and new worlds of the ruling classes at war with one another. Sir Henry, with his psychological simplicity and his thirst to possess what he sees as his inheritance, could represent the new world order across the Atlantic, while Stapleton could symbolise the old – the ‘true’ aristocrat. He looks and acts most like his ancestor, the wicked Sir Hugo, but for all his brilliance and sophistication of mind, he is corrupt, immoral, murderous. He is an embodiment of the dying aristocracy of England, while Sir Henry is a representative of new blood. The new order triumphs and Sir Henry, with the help of Holmes, defeats the old Baskerville line, but at a cost: he is, at the end of the story, nearly broken by the experience. So the story could be interpreted as Doyle’s parable of the British aristocracy just before the First World War: a society riven by divisions and psychological problems.

On a deeper, more metaphorical level, the story could be a parable about the human mind. It is full of ‘archetypes’, symbols which are universal in all cultures: there is the wise man in the form of Holmes, Watson is possibly the fool, Stapleton is a version of the devil and his hound his agent of evil, the Grimpen Mire and Dartmoor represent the untamed horror of nature, while Baskerville Hall is a version of the threatened, endangered home. The story is satisfying because on one level it taps into these archetypal symbols going to war with each other.

There is another interpretation – that the story is a parable about the process of creativity. In this scenario, Holmes represents the creative artist, constructing his narrative by investigating the world around him but constantly being challenged with new facts, new images, new symbols in the form of the characters and the settings. It is only when he strings them coherently together at the very end of the story that he manages to provide the solution. The last chapter in this sense is the first chapter, the chapter that enabled Doyle to start writing the book from the beginning. Once Doyle had

found the solution, he could thread together a narrative that has thrilled and entertained generations of readers.

Selected Reading on Conan Doyle’s writing and *The Hound of the Baskervilles*

David C. Humphrey

Sir Hugo’s Literary Companion: A Compendium of the Writings of Hugo’s Companions, Chicago On the Subject of Mr. Sherlock Holmes

(iUniverse.com; 2007)

A compendium of essential essays on Sherlock Holmes, including ones on *The Hound of the Baskervilles*.

Robert F. Fleissner

Shakespearean and Other Literary Investigations with the Master Sleuth (and Conan Doyle): Homing in on Holmes (Studies in British Literature)

(Edward Mellen Press Ltd; 2003)

This work presents some major influences on Conan Doyle (especially Shakespeare), but also deals with the influence of Doyle on others, notably T.S. Eliot. Other essays deal with onomastics, religion, and race.

Notes, Quotes and Discussion

Important extracts and quotations from the novel with commentary and discussion points.

The discussion points below are deliberately questions with no right or wrong answers given. They are there to help you think in more depth about particular aspects of the book.

N.B. All the following quotations are from the complete, unabridged text.

From Chapter I

'I am afraid, my dear Watson, that most of your conclusions were erroneous. When I said that you stimulated me I meant, to be frank, that in noting your fallacies I was occasionally guided towards the truth. Not that you are entirely wrong in this instance. The man is certainly a country practitioner. And he walks a good deal.'

'Then I was right.'

'To that extent.'

'But that was all.'

'No, no, my dear Watson, not all – by no means all.'

As with all the Sherlock Holmes stories, the great detective stands in strong contrast to his hapless companion, Dr Watson. However, Doyle is careful not to present Watson as a total buffoon, as we see in the above extract: Watson is able to deduce what the reader may also be able to

deduce from Dr Mortimer's walking stick. Holmes's corrections of Dr Watson's observations serve to remind us of the detective's amazing powers of 'deduction'. The modern reader, too familiar with these 'clever-clever' judgements may find that Holmes comes across a little too much as a 'know-it-all'. It must be remembered, though, that in Doyle's day, readers less familiar with what have become well-worn conventions of the detective genre would have been delighted by them, and thrilled by the return of Holmes, who was believed to be dead. Overall, it is a successful opening to the story: light-hearted, suggestive and, ultimately, symbolic. The walking stick is a symbol for 'traversing the moor'. The reader is dimly aware that we will be crossing the dark moor of murderous human intent during the story.

DISCUSSION POINT

To what extent is this opening to the story successful? What do you think of Doyle's presentation of Holmes?

'So your grave, middle-aged family practitioner vanishes into thin air, my dear Watson, and there emerges a young fellow under thirty, amiable, unambitious, absent-minded, and the possessor of a favourite dog, which I should describe roughly as being larger than a terrier and smaller than a mastiff.'

Doyle's narrative constantly develops by building the reader's expectations with Watson's observations and having them undercut by Holmes's actions and comments, and the events themselves. Here is a typical example: Watson believes Dr Mortimer to be a 'grave' character, but we learn from Holmes that he is actually an 'amiable' one. This extract also shows Doyle's liking for setting up clues and themes that thread the whole story – a typical

convention of the detective genre. Here it is the theme of dogs, which are central to the narrative.

DISCUSSION POINT

Why are dogs so important in this narrative?

'Glad to meet you, sir. I have heard your name mentioned in connection with that of your friend. You interest me very much, Mr. Holmes. I had hardly expected so dolichocephalic a skull or such well-marked supra-orbital development. Would you have any objection to my running my finger along your parietal fissure? A cast of your skull, sir, until the original is available, would be an ornament to any anthropological museum. It is not my intention to be fulsome, but I confess that I covet your skull.'

Sherlock Holmes waved our strange visitor into a chair. 'You are an enthusiast in your line of thought, I perceive, sir, as I am in mine,' said he. 'I observe from your forefinger that you make your own cigarettes. Have no hesitation in lighting one.' The man drew out paper and tobacco and twirled the one up in the other with surprising dexterity. He had long, quivering fingers as agile and restless as the antennae of an insect.

Holmes was silent, but his little darting glances showed me the interest which he took in our curious companion.

'I presume, sir,' said he at last, 'that it was not merely for the purpose of examining my skull that you have done me the honour to call here last night and again to-day?'

'No, sir, no; though I am happy to have had the opportunity of doing that as well. I came to you, Mr. Holmes, because I recognized that I am myself an unpractical man and because I am suddenly confronted with a most serious and extraordinary problem.'

Mortimer's observation of the shape of Holmes's skull introduces a theme that runs throughout the story: that of using people's appearances to analyse their psychologies.

The tone is dryly comic, pseudo-scientific, and dispassionate. Having established Mortimer as a relatively unemotional, amiable man, Doyle is able to deliver the lines that are essential for any detective story: 'I am suddenly confronted with a most serious and extraordinary problem'. The adjective 'extraordinary' is important because this is what Holmes specialises in: the extraordinary, not the mundane. We are leaving the realm of the 'realistic' crime story and entering a different place – a world of swirling mists, of spectral hounds, of ancient curses and ingenious murder.

DISCUSSION POINT

The belief that the shape of their skulls can now diagnose the geniuses of criminals and geniuses is now utterly discredited. Does this affect our appreciation of the story?

From Chapter II

Dr. Mortimer turned the manuscript to the light and read in a high, cracking voice the following curious, old-world narrative: –

'Of the origin of the Hound of the Baskervilles there have been many statements, yet as I come in a direct line from Hugo Baskerville, and as I had the story from my father, who also had it from his, I have set it down with all belief that it occurred even as is here set forth. And I would have you believe, my sons, that the same Justice which punishes sin may also most graciously forgive it, and that no ban is so heavy but that by prayer and repentance it may be removed. Learn then from this story not to fear the fruits of the past, but rather to be circumspect in the future, that those foul passions whereby our family has suffered so grievously may not again be loosed to our undoing.

'Know then that in the time of the Great Rebellion (the history of which by the learned Lord Clarendon I most earnestly commend to your attention) this Manor of

Baskerville was held by Hugo of that name, nor can it be gainsaid that he was a most wild, profane, and godless man. This, in truth, his neighbours might have pardoned, seeing that saints have never flourished in those parts, but there was in him a certain wanton and cruel humour which made his name a byword through the West. It chanced that this Hugo came to love (if, indeed, so dark a passion may be known under so bright a name) the daughter of a yeoman who held lands near the Baskerville estate. But the young maiden, being discreet and of good repute, would ever avoid him, for she feared his evil name. So it came to pass that one Michaelmas this Hugo, with five or six of his idle and wicked companions, stole down upon the farm and carried off the maiden, her father and brothers being from home, as he well knew. When they had brought her to the Hall the maiden was placed in an upper chamber, while Hugo and his friends sat down to a long carouse, as was their nightly custom. Now, the poor lass upstairs was like to have her wits turned at the singing and shouting and terrible oaths which came up to her from below, for they say that the words used by Hugo Baskerville, when he was in wine, were such as might blast the man who said them. At last in the stress of her fear she did that which might have daunted the bravest or most active man, for by the aid of the growth of ivy which covered (and still covers) the south wall she came down from under the eaves, and so homeward across the moor, there being three leagues betwixt the Hall and her father's farm

The ancient manuscript, which recounts the legend of the Baskervilles, suggests sexual violence: the maiden is imprisoned in the upper chamber in order to be raped by Hugo Baskerville. Again, we see Doyle setting up a key theme and motif of the story. It is hinted that Stapleton is guilty of such a crime himself. This is typical of the Gothic genre, to which, as we have seen, the story owes a considerable debt – the rapacious, sexual libertine. Doyle cleverly evokes the antique nature of the curse through his use of archaic language, such as 'long carouse' and 'betwixt'. Having Mortimer read the text is another masterstroke: this stolid, ordinary doctor believes there is substance in it.

 DISCUSSION POINT

How does the manuscript set up the tone and tenor of the story to come?

The moon was shining bright upon the clearing, and there in the centre lay the unhappy maid where she had fallen, dead of fear and of fatigue. But it was not the sight of her body, nor yet was it that of the body of Hugo Baskerville lying near her, which raised the hair upon the heads of these three daredevil roisterers, but it was that, standing over Hugo, and plucking at his throat, there stood a foul thing, a great, black beast, shaped like a hound, yet larger than any hound that ever mortal eye has rested upon. And even as they looked the thing tore the throat out of Hugo Baskerville, on which, as it turned its blazing eyes and dripping jaws upon them, the three shrieked with fear and rode for dear life, still screaming, across the moor. One, it is said, died that very night of what he had seen, and the other twain were but broken men for the rest of their days.

There is real horror in the way that the hound ‘tore the throat out of Hugo Baskerville’. A furious beast of divine retribution, it appears, the hound is presented as a punishment for Hugo’s crimes.

 DISCUSSION POINT

This description establishes real elements of horror in the story. How and why does Doyle do this?

When Dr. Mortimer had finished reading this singular narrative he pushed his spectacles up on his forehead and stared across at Mr. Sherlock Holmes. The latter yawned and tossed the end of his cigarette into the fire.

‘Well?’ said he.

‘Do you not find it interesting?’

‘To a collector of fairy tales.’

Holmes’s forthright response is funny and provokes a laugh from the reader, but possibly not from the author, who was himself a collector of fairy tales and great believer in the supernatural. His fictional creation’s supreme rationalism troubled Doyle and possibly explains the love – hate relationship he had with Holmes, spending most of his writing life trying unsuccessfully to kill him off. Your own attitudes towards the supernatural will profoundly affect your reading of the story, which, for all its underlying logic, has many mysterious elements.

 DISCUSSION POINT

Does the modern reader have more sympathy for Holmes’s faith in rationalism than readers during Doyle’s time would have done?

‘No signs of violence were to be discovered upon Sir Charles’s person, and though the doctor’s evidence pointed to an almost incredible facial distortion – so great that Dr. Mortimer refused at first to believe that it was indeed his friend and patient who lay before him – it was explained that that is a symptom which is not unusual in cases of dyspnoea and death from cardiac exhaustion. This explanation was borne out by the post-mortem examination, which showed long-standing organic disease, and the coroner’s jury returned a verdict in accordance with the medical evidence. It is well that this is so, for it is obviously of the utmost importance that Sir Charles’s heir should settle at the Hall and continue the good work

which has been so sadly interrupted. Had the prosaic finding of the coroner not finally put an end to the romantic stories which have been whispered in connection with the affair, it might have been difficult to find a tenant for Baskerville Hall. It is understood that the next of kin is Mr. Henry Baskerville, if he be still alive, the son of Sir Charles Baskerville's younger brother. The young man when last heard of was in America, and inquiries are being instituted with a view to informing him of his good fortune.'

Here we have the heart of the mystery: the death of Sir Charles Baskerville. The prevailing atmosphere of Gothic horror and gloom deeply affects our interpretation of his death, which, on first reading, appears to be 'natural'. However, Doyle's writing skill ensures there is no such thing as a natural death in a Sherlock Holmes story and he whets the reader's appetite to know more by using the phrase 'incredible facial distortion'. We immediately feel that the poor man has died of shock; Doyle builds horror here by not providing more details.

DISCUSSION POINT

How successful is Doyle in creating a real sense of mystery here?

'Within the last few months it became increasingly plain to me that Sir Charles's nervous system was strained to the breaking point. He had taken this legend which I have read you exceedingly to heart – so much so that, although he would walk in his own grounds, nothing would induce him to go out upon the moor at night. Incredible as it may appear to you, Mr. Holmes, he was honestly convinced that a dreadful fate overhung his family, and certainly the records which he was able to give of his ancestors were not encouraging. The idea of some ghastly presence constantly haunted him, and on more

than one occasion he has asked me whether I had on my medical journeys at night ever seen any strange creature or heard the baying of a hound. The latter question he put to me several times, and always with a voice which vibrated with excitement.

'I can well remember driving up to his house in the evening some three weeks before the fatal event. He chanced to be at his hall door. I had descended from my gig and was standing in front of him, when I saw his eyes fix themselves over my shoulder, and stare past me with an expression of the most dreadful horror. I whisked round and had just time to catch a glimpse of something which I took to be a large black calf passing at the head of the drive. So excited and alarmed was he that I was compelled to go down to the spot where the animal had been and look around for it. It was gone, however, and the incident appeared to make the worst impression upon his mind.

Dr Mortimer's sighting of the hound corroborates that the legend has real truth and is not a myth. Notice, though, how Doyle is careful not to reveal the hound in full at this point; like a magician who saves his best trick until last, Doyle only shows the reader the dog in its full horrific glory at the end of the story.

DISCUSSION POINT

Why are we only given a glimpse of the dog here?

'Footprints?'

'Footprints.'

'A man's or a woman's?'

Dr. Mortimer looked strangely at us for an instant, and his voice sank almost to a whisper as he answered: –

'Mr. Holmes, they were the footprints of a gigantic hound!'

Doyle shifts from deploying long chunks of first-person narrative to quick-fire questions from Holmes; there is a notable change in tone, moving from substantial explanation to dramatic, urgent interrogation. Holmes's forthrightness could be construed as rudeness and very much the antithesis to the polite Victorian gentleman. Meanwhile the footprints, mentioned by Mortimer, appear to contradict the supernatural qualities of the hound.

DISCUSSION POINT

How does Doyle generate suspense in his use of Holmes's cross-questioning?

From Chapter III

Sherlock Holmes struck his hand against his knee with an impatient gesture.

'If I had only been there!' he cried. 'It is evidently a case of extraordinary interest, and one which presented immense opportunities to the scientific expert. That gravel path upon which I might have read so much has been long ere this smudged by the rain and defaced by the clogs of curious peasants. Oh, Dr. Mortimer, Dr. Mortimer, to think that you should not have called me in! You have indeed much to answer for.'

'I could not call you in, Mr. Holmes, without disclosing these facts to the world, and I have already given my reasons for not wishing to do so. Besides, besides –'

'Why do you hesitate?'

'There is a realm in which the most acute and most experienced of detectives is helpless.'

'You mean that the thing is supernatural?'

'I did not positively say so.'

'No, but you evidently think it.'

'Since the tragedy, Mr. Holmes, there have come to my ears several incidents which are hard to reconcile with the settled order of Nature.'

'For example?'

'I find that before the terrible event occurred 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. They all agreed that it was a huge creature, luminous, ghastly, and spectral. I have cross-examined these men, one of them a hard-headed countryman, one a farrier, and one a moorland farmer, who all tell the same story of this dreadful apparition, exactly corresponding to the hell-hound of the legend. I assure you that there is a reign of terror in the district, and that it is a hardy man who will cross the moor at night.'

'And you, a trained man of science, believe it to be supernatural?'

'I do not know what to believe.'

Holmes shrugged his shoulders.

'I have hitherto confined my investigations to this world,' said he. 'In a modest way I have combated evil, but to take on the Father of Evil himself would, perhaps, be too ambitious a task. Yet you must admit that the footmark is material.'

This is a strange and rare moment, when Holmes appears to accept that there may be a 'supernatural' realm, and that not everything has a rational explanation. However, Holmes undercuts his own speculations with some wry irony: 'In a modest way I have combated evil, but to take on the Father of Evil himself would, perhaps, be too ambitious a task'. Holmes does not rule out the possibility that he could take on the devil but suggests that it might be 'too ambitious'. The following sentence creates a real sense of antithesis: 'Yet you must admit that the footmark is material'. From reflecting upon the possibility of battling with Lucifer, Holmes now returns to the small specifics of the case, the 'footmark', which seems to indicate there is a real hound.

DISCUSSION POINT

Doyle revels in creating mystery around the hound here. How and why does he do this?

'There is no other claimant, I presume?'

'None. The only other kinsman whom we have been able to trace was Rodger Baskerville, the youngest of three brothers of whom poor Sir Charles was the elder. The second brother, who died young, is the father of this lad Henry. The third, Rodger, was the black sheep of the family. He came of the old masterful Baskerville strain, and was the very image, they tell me, of the family picture of old Hugo. He made England too hot to hold him, fled to Central America, and died there in 1876 of yellow fever. Henry is the last of the Baskervilles. In one hour and five minutes I meet him at Waterloo Station. I've had a wire that he arrived at Southampton this morning. Now, Mr. Holmes, what would you advise me to do with him?'

'Why should he not go to the home of his fathers?'

'It seems natural, does it not? And yet, consider that every Baskerville who goes there meets with an evil fate. I feel sure that if Sir Charles could have spoken with me before his death he would have warned me against bringing this, the last of the old race, and the heir to great wealth, to that deadly place. And yet it cannot be denied that the prosperity of the whole poor, bleak country-side depends upon his presence. All the good work which has been done by Sir Charles will crash to the ground if there is no tenant of the Hall.'

Some critics say that, as with Agatha Christie, Doyle spoils his stories by withholding some crucial clues (for instance, we do not learn that Rodger had a son, which, of course, is vital for the purposes of the narrative). However, this would be to ignore the spirit of the Sherlock Holmes story: the reader's belief in Holmes's genius is an act of faith, a suspension of disbelief throughout. Holmes is, in fact, more in the position of the author, the creator of his own reality, a character who can construct his own explanations and truth by revealing them to other characters. We have to accept this is the case, otherwise the story becomes absurdly implausible. Perhaps the most interesting element of *Hound* is that Doyle often denies Holmes full access to the truth until the very end. In other stories, Holmes is smugger than the other characters and clearly in full possession of the narrative before any of them.

Note also how Holmes is the protector of the old aristocratic order of England in this story. As Mortimer says, 'it cannot be denied that the prosperity of the whole poor, bleak countryside depends upon his presence'.

DISCUSSION POINT

What do you think of the way Doyle refuses to reveal vital clues until the very end of the story?

'Have you turned the case over in your mind?'

'Yes, I have thought a good deal of it in the course of the day.'

'What do you make of it?'

'It is very bewildering.'

'It has certainly a character of its own. There are points of distinction about it. That change in the footprints, for example. What do you make of that?'

'Mortimer said that the man had walked on tiptoe down that portion of the alley.'

'He only repeated what some fool had said at the inquest. Why should a man walk on tiptoe down the alley?'

'What then?'

'He was running, Watson – running desperately, running for his life, running until he burst his heart and fell dead upon his face.'

'Running from what?'

'There lies our problem. There are indications that the man was crazed with fear before ever he began to run.'

'How can you say that?'

These conversations with Watson are crucial, allowing the reader to have an insight into Holmes's questioning mind. His use of Watson as a foil for his ruminations shows his respect for the good doctor and also enables us to witness the detection through discussion that enables Holmes to solve the case. Notice how Watson asks all the right questions.

💬 DISCUSSION POINT

What are the pleasures in eavesdropping upon Holmes's conversations with Watson?

'I think it unlikely that he waited at the moor-gate every evening. On the contrary, the evidence is that he avoided the moor. That night he waited there. It was the night before he made his departure for London. The thing takes shape, Watson. It becomes coherent. Might I ask you to hand me my violin, and we will postpone all further thought upon this business until we have had the advantage of meeting Dr. Mortimer and Sir Henry Baskerville in the morning.'

A typical trope of the Holmes stories is the detective's tendency to say 'it becomes coherent', or words to that effect, and then refuse to tell us what exactly has become clear to him. There is comedy when he immediately asks Watson to hand him the violin. Notice again how Holmes in his most authoritative moods is like the author who is struggling to find the story: 'the thing takes shape'.

💬 DISCUSSION POINT

What does Holmes have in common with the author?

From Chapter IV

Across the middle of it a single sentence had been formed by the expedient of pasting printed words upon it. It ran: 'As you value your life or your reason keep away from the moor.' The word 'moor' only was printed in ink. 'Now,' said Sir Henry Baskerville, 'perhaps you will tell me, Mr. Holmes, what in thunder is the meaning of that, and who it is that takes so much interest in my affairs?'

'What do you make of it, Dr. Mortimer? You must allow that there is nothing supernatural about this, at any rate?'

'No, sir, but it might very well come from someone who was convinced that the business is supernatural.'

The introduction of the warning, constructed from letters in *The Times*, gave the novel a very contemporary atmosphere, bringing the historic Gothic story of the Baskervilles into the present with a reference to the most popular paper of the day. It is also very sinister and mysterious, ratcheting up the suspense in this London setting, bringing the threat into the city.

💬 DISCUSSION POINT

Why and how does Doyle generate suspense within the London setting?

'Your hat and boots, Watson, quick! Not a moment to lose!'

He rushed into his room in his dressing-gown and was back again in a few seconds in a frock-coat. We hurried together down the stairs and into the street. Dr. Mortimer and Baskerville were still visible about two hundred yards ahead of us in the direction of Oxford Street.

'Shall I run on and stop them?'

'Not for the world, my dear Watson. I am perfectly satisfied with your company if you will tolerate mine. Our friends are wise, for it is certainly a very fine morning for a walk.'

He quickened his pace until we had decreased the distance which divided us by about half. Then, still keeping a hundred yards behind, we followed into Oxford Street and so down Regent Street. Once our friends stopped and stared into a shop window, upon which Holmes did the same. An instant afterwards he gave a little cry of satisfaction, and, following the direction of his eager eyes, I saw that a hansom cab with a man inside which had halted on the other side of the street was now proceeding slowly onward again.

'There's our man, Watson! Come along! We'll have a good look at him, if we can do no more.'

At that instant I was aware of a bushy black beard and a pair of piercing eyes turned upon us through the side window of the cab. Instantly the trapdoor at the top flew up, something was screamed to the driver, and the cab flew madly off down Regent Street. Holmes looked eagerly round for another, but no empty one was in sight. Then he dashed in wild pursuit amid the stream of the traffic, but the start was too great, and already the cab was out of sight.

Notice how Doyle makes Sherlock Holmes a man of sharp contrasts; for the first section of the novel he has appeared rather languid, reposing and reflecting in the Baker Street apartment, ruminating upon the facts surrounding the case. Now he springs into action, dashing out of the flat and glimpsing the mysterious man with a bushy beard. As with much of the early part of the story, Doyle is setting up mysteries, which will be explored further on; we will come across a man with a bushy black beard at Baskerville Hall and believe that he is the man behind the mystery, only to have this confounded, too.

DISCUSSION POINT

What clues does Doyle set up in the London section of the story that are later explored in the Devonshire settings?

'But what you are really looking for is the centre page of the Times with some holes cut in it with scissors. Here is a copy of the Times. It is this page. You could easily recognize it, could you not?'

'Yes, sir.'

'In each case the outside porter will send for the hall porter, to whom also you will give a shilling. Here are twenty-three shillings. You will then learn in possibly twenty cases out of

the twenty-three that the waste of the day before has been burned or removed. In the three other cases you will be shown a heap of paper and you will look for this page of the Times among it. The odds are enormously against your finding it. There are ten shillings over in case of emergencies. Let me have a report by wire at Baker Street before evening. And now, Watson, it only remains for us to find out by wire the identity of the cabman, No. 2704, and then we will drop into one of the Bond Street picture galleries and fill in the time until we are due at the hotel.'

This is a rare example of Holmes actually engaging in some real 'police work', the sort of hunting for clues that true-life detectives have to do. For much of the time, Holmes relies upon inspired guesswork – or 'deduction', as he calls it – but here we see him employing a man to track down the newspaper from which the letters on the threatening note were cut; a bit of a wild goose chase, perhaps, but nevertheless a tactic that might throw light on the case. We also see how Holmes benefits from the burgeoning 'telegram' system of communication – Victorian technology that he utilises frequently.

DISCUSSION POINT

Is it a problem for the modern reader that Holmes does so little 'real police work'? Or has Doyle successfully presented a world and a man who clearly has no need for such things? What is the effect here when Doyle does show us Holmes asking a servant to do some 'leg work'?

From Chapter V

'Seems to me they are playing me for a sucker in this hotel,' he cried. 'They'll find they've started in to monkey with the wrong man unless they are careful. By thunder, if that chap can't find my missing boot there will be trouble. I can take a joke with the best, Mr. Holmes, but they've got a bit over the mark this time.'

*'Still looking for your boot?'
 'Yes, sir, and mean to find it.'
 'But, surely, you said that it was a new brown boot?'
 'So it was, sir. And now it's an old black one.'*

Yet again we find Doyle introducing an apparently trivial mystery, which the reader and Holmes know will have vital significance later on. The pleasure comes from working out what the significance will be. Doyle shows how the mundane is actually sinister, but leaves us guessing as to why and how it is. In such a way, we see him deploying a very familiar theme that runs through all his stories: that murderous intent lurks behind apparently mundane mishaps and accidents. Ultimately, Doyle is concerned with appearance and reality; things that appear normal are in fact sinister.

DISCUSSION POINT

How does Doyle deploy the theme of appearance and reality throughout this story? Would it be true to say that Holmes is the agent who uncovers the hideous reality that hides behind apparently ordinary appearances?

'This case of yours is very complex, Sir Henry. When taken in conjunction with your uncle's death I am not sure that of all the five hundred cases of capital importance which I have handled there is one which cuts so deep. But we hold several threads in our hands, and the odds are that one or other of them guides us to the truth. We may waste time in following the wrong one, but sooner or later we must come upon the right.'

We had a pleasant luncheon in which little was said of the business which had brought us together. It was in the private sitting-room to which we afterwards repaired that Holmes asked Baskerville what were his intentions.

*'To go to Baskerville Hall.'
 'And when?'
 'At the end of the week.'
 'On the whole,' said Holmes, 'I think that your decision is a wise one. I have ample evidence that you are being dogged in London, and amid the millions of this great city it is difficult to discover who these people are or what their object can be. If their intentions are evil they might do you a mischief, and we should be powerless to prevent it. You did not know, Dr. Mortimer, that you were followed this morning from my house?'
 Dr. Mortimer started violently.
 'Followed! By whom?'
 'That, unfortunately, is what I cannot tell you. Have you among your neighbours or acquaintances on Dartmoor any man with a black, full beard?'
 'No – or, let me see – why, yes. Barrymore, Sir Charles's butler, is a man with a full, black beard.'
 'Ha! Where is Barrymore?'
 'He is in charge of the Hall.'*

Doyle has taken his time to establish Barrymore as a suspect, and this has the effect of making the reader who may be unfamiliar with the conventions of the detective genre think that he is probably the murderer. Of course, those who are familiar with the genre know that Barrymore is probably a 'red herring', a decoy, because he is so obviously implicated.

DISCUSSION POINT

Why does Doyle set up Barrymore as a 'red herring'?

Just before dinner two telegrams were handed in. The first ran: – ‘Have just heard that Barrymore is at the Hall. – BASKERVILLE.’ The second: – ‘Visited twenty-three hotels as directed, but sorry, to report unable to trace cut sheet of Times. – CARTWRIGHT.’
‘There go two of my threads, Watson. There is nothing more stimulating than a case when everything goes against you. We must cast round for another scent.’
‘We have still the cabman who drove the spy.’
‘Exactly. I have wired to get his name and address from the Official Registry. I should not be surprised if this were an answer to my question.’

The fact that Barrymore has been seen at the Hall does not necessarily rule him out, but it seems clear that he is not entirely under suspicion; this is a clever narrative twist created by Doyle, who always keeps us guessing in this story. Notice the ‘threads’ metaphor that Holmes uses; there is a sense that he himself is weaving a plot. As we have seen before, on one level we can read these detective stories as analogies of the creative process; Holmes is the creative artist trying to find a lucid story amidst the chaos of reality. Once he has solved a case it is as though the story has been resolved, finally written.

DISCUSSION POINT

To what extent do you think the Sherlock Holmes stories are metaphors for the creative process?

‘Oh, he mentioned his name, did he? That was imprudent. What was the name that he mentioned?’
‘Is name,’ said the cabman, ‘was Mr. Sherlock ‘olmes.’
Never have I seen my friend more completely taken aback than by the cabman’s reply. For an instant he sat in silent amazement. Then he burst into a hearty laugh.
‘A touch, Watson – an undeniable touch!’ said he. ‘I feel a foil as quick and supple as my own. He got home upon me very

prettily that time. So his name was Sherlock Holmes, was it?’
‘Yes, sir, that was the gentleman’s name.’
‘Excellent! Tell me where you picked him up and all that occurred.’
‘E ‘ailed me at ‘alf-past nine in Trafalgar Square. ‘E said that ‘e was a detective, and ‘e offered me two guineas if I would do exactly what ‘e wanted all day and ask no questions. I was glad enough to agree. First we drove down to the Northumberland ‘otel and waited there until two gentlemen came out and took a cab from the rank. We followed their cab until it pulled up somewhere near ‘ere.’
‘This very door,’ said Holmes.
‘Well, I couldn’t be sure of that, but I dare say my fare knew all about it. We pulled up ‘alf-way down the street and waited an ‘our and a ‘alf. Then the two gentlemen passed us, walking, and we followed down Baker Street and along –’
‘I know,’ said Holmes.
‘Until we got three-quarters down Regent Street. Then my gentleman threw up the trap, and ‘e cried that I should drive right away to Waterloo Station as ‘ard as I could go. I whipped up the mare and we were there under the ten minutes. Then ‘e paid up his two guineas, like a good un, and away ‘e went into the station. Only just as ‘e was leaving he turned round and ‘e said: ‘It might interest you to know that you ‘ave been driving Mr. Sherlock ‘olmes.’ That’s ‘ow I come to know the name.’
‘I see. And you saw no more of him?’
‘Not after ‘e went into the station.’
‘And how would you describe Mr. Sherlock Holmes?’

This is a fascinating and comic touch: the murderer calling himself by the great detective’s name. This highlights the moral ambivalence to Holmes; at times he seems to be as cold-blooded as the villains he pursues, and not particularly caring of the victims, who are merely fodder to be interrogated.

DISCUSSION POINT

What does Holmes have in common with the villains in the stories?

'About sending you. It's an ugly business, Watson, an ugly dangerous business, and the more I see of it the less I like it. Yes, my dear fellow, you may laugh, but I give you my word that I shall be very glad to have you back safe and sound in Baker Street once more.'

Critics have noted that, compared with the early stories, Holmes is rather more caring in *Hound*; here we see him genuinely worried about Watson's welfare. Nevertheless, for all his concern, he does send his closest friend and companion into danger.

DISCUSSION POINT

Where else do we find Holmes being more caring in this story?

From Chapter VI

'I will not bias your mind by suggesting theories or suspicions, Watson,' said he; 'I wish you simply to report facts in the fullest possible manner to me, and you can leave me to do the theorizing.'

'What sort of facts?' I asked.

'Anything which may seem to have a bearing however indirect upon the case, and especially the relations between young Baskerville and his neighbours or any fresh particulars concerning the death of Sir Charles. I have made some inquiries myself in the last few days, but the results have, I fear, been negative. One thing only appears to be certain, and that is that Mr. James Desmond, who is the next heir, is an elderly gentleman of a very amiable disposition, so that this persecution does not arise from him. I really think that we may eliminate him entirely from our calculations. There remain the people who will actually surround Sir Henry Baskerville upon the moor.'

'Would it not be well in the first place to get rid of this Barrymore couple?'

'By no means. You could not make a greater mistake. If they are innocent it would be a cruel injustice, and if they are

guilty we should be giving up all chance of bringing it home to them. No, no, we will preserve them upon our list of suspects. Then there is a groom at the Hall, if I remember right. There are two moorland farmers. There is our friend Dr. Mortimer, whom I believe to be entirely honest, and there is his wife, of whom we know nothing. There is this naturalist, Stapleton, and there is his sister, who is said to be a young lady of attractions. There is Mr. Frankland, of Lafter Hall, who is also an unknown factor, and there are one or two other neighbours. These are the folk who must be your very special study.'

'I will do my best.'

'You have arms, I suppose?'

'Yes, I thought it as well to take them.'

'Most certainly. Keep your revolver near you night and day, and never relax your precautions.'

Our friends had already secured a first-class carriage and were waiting for us upon the platform.

'No, we have no news of any kind,' said Dr. Mortimer in answer to my friend's questions. 'I can swear to one thing, and that is that we have not been shadowed during the last two days. We have never gone out without keeping a sharp watch, and no one could have escaped our notice.'

'You have always kept together, I presume?'

'Except yesterday afternoon. I usually give up one day to pure amusement when I come to town, so I spent it at the Museum of the College of Surgeons.'

'And I went to look at the folk in the park,' said Baskerville. 'But we had no trouble of any kind.'

'It was imprudent, all the same,' said Holmes, shaking his head and looking very grave. 'I beg, Sir Henry, that you will not go about alone. Some great misfortune will befall you if you do. Did you get your other boot?'

'No, sir, it is gone forever.'

'Indeed. That is very interesting. Well, good-bye,' he added as the train began to glide down the platform. 'Bear in mind, Sir Henry, one of the phrases in that queer old legend which Dr. Mortimer has read to us, and avoid the moor in those hours of darkness when the powers of evil are exalted.'

This chapter marks the end of the first phase of the novel, in which the mystery is expounded and a cast of suspects

is introduced. Doyle could have opened the story on Dartmoor but decides against this because he is so confident in the power of his narrative that he can introduce the mystery in a piecemeal fashion in London. This has the effect of creating an urban context in which the mystery is played out, giving us a sense that what happens in the small community of Dartmoor will ripple out into the wide world. Holmes's summary of the suspects and the essential mystery is excellent and a reminder that the story was written in serial form, which meant that the author couldn't rely on readers remembering various characters from week to week. Notice also that Holmes almost seems to believe in the legend of the Baskerville curse, giving it extra weight.

DISCUSSION POINT

Why do you think Doyle sends Watson onto Dartmoor without Holmes? Some critics have suggested that he was bored with Holmes at this point in his career and didn't want to write about him much. Might he have had other purposes?

'What is this, Perkins?' asked Dr. Mortimer.

Our driver half turned in his seat.

'There's a convict escaped from Princetown, sir. 'E's been out three days now, and the warders watch every road and every station, but they've 'ad no sight of 'im yet. The farmers about 'ere don't like it, sir, and that's a fact.'

'Well, I understand that they get five pounds if they can give information.'

'Yes, sir, but the chance of five pounds is but a poor thing compared to the chance of 'aving your throat cut. You see, it isn't like any ordinary convict. This is a man that would stick at nothing.'

'Who is he, then?'

'It is Selden, the Notting Hill murderer.'

I remembered the case well, for it was one in which Holmes had taken an interest on account of the peculiar ferocity of the crime and the wanton brutality which had marked all the actions of the assassin. The commutation of his death sentence had been due to some doubts as to his complete sanity, so atrocious was his conduct. Our wagonette had topped a rise and in front of us rose the huge expanse of the moor, mottled with gnarled and craggy cairns and tors.

Doyle now throws everything into the mystery; not only do we have all the issues explored in the first five chapters, but there is a homicidal maniac on the loose. We can see here why the story has been much parodied; it almost seems to be parodying itself with its tales of murderers on the bleak moors.

DISCUSSION POINT

Do you think Doyle increases the tension with the introduction of Selden?

Suddenly we looked down into a cup-like depression, patched with stunted oaks and firs which had been twisted and bent by the fury of years of storm. Two high, narrow towers rose over the trees. The driver pointed with his whip.

'Baskerville Hall,' said he.

Its master had risen and was staring with flushed cheeks and shining eyes. A few minutes later we had reached the lodge-gates, a maze of fantastic tracery in wrought iron, with weather-bitten pillars on either side, blotched with lichens, and surmounted by the boars' heads of the Baskervilles.

This is a classic description of a Gothic mansion with its 'maze of fantastic tracery' and 'boars' heads'; once again we have Doyle relying heavily on the conventions of the

Gothic genre in creating a heady atmosphere. Opening the story in London is particularly effective, as it does not lurch into ridiculous parody. This is a novel of contrasts – of the city and the country, the modern and the Gothic, the supernatural and the scientific, the rational and the irrational, the old and the young, of good and evil, of the clever and the stupid. We can also understand why Doyle has decided to remove Holmes from the story at this point; Watson is a much better character to have alone in such a place. With Holmes, we would have felt reassured that he wasn't under threat and he would not have had to do much detective work. Now we are wondering how well Watson will cope with trying to uncover the mystery, emphasising the tension in the narrative; we can feel his fear and anxiety. There is a real sense he is in jeopardy.

DISCUSSION POINT

How effective are Doyle's descriptions of the Dartmoor setting and Baskerville Hall?

From Chapter VII

The fresh beauty of the following morning did something to efface from our minds the grim and grey impression which had been left upon both of us by our first experience of Baskerville Hall. As Sir Henry and I sat at breakfast the sunlight flooded in through the high mullioned windows, throwing watery patches of colour from the coats of arms which covered them. The dark panelling glowed like bronze in the golden rays, and it was hard to realize that this was indeed the chamber which had struck such a gloom into our souls upon the evening before.

'I guess it is ourselves and not the house that we have to blame!' said the baronet. 'We were tired with our journey and chilled by our drive, so we took a grey view of the place. Now we are fresh and well, so it is all cheerful once more.'

'And yet it was not entirely a question of imagination,' I answered. 'Did you, for example, happen to hear someone, a woman I think, sobbing in the night?'

'That is curious, for I did when I was half asleep fancy that I heard something of the sort. I waited quite a time, but there was no more of it, so I concluded that it was all a dream.'

'I heard it distinctly, and I am sure that it was really the sob of a woman.'

'We must ask about this right away.'

The 'sobbing woman' in the night recalls the most famous Gothic narrative of all time: *Jane Eyre*. Doyle enjoys playing with this motif, creating real mystery around it with Barrymore's wife, making us think about Bertha Mason and Grace Poole in Charlotte Brontë's narrative – a text that would have been very familiar to his readers. However, notice the contrast between the heroes in these two different narratives: Jane Eyre tries to find out about the cries in the night, but this is not, apparently, central to the narrative since it is Jane's burgeoning love for Rochester which is the focus. However, Watson's sole purpose is to solve the mystery; there is, at this point, no deeper emotional layer to the story – although Doyle will soon introduce one when Henry falls in love with Miss Stapleton.

DISCUSSION POINT

How effective in creating mystery is the sobbing in the night?

He was a small, slim, clean-shaven, prim-faced man, flaxen-haired and lean-jawed, between thirty and forty years of age, dressed in a grey suit and wearing a straw hat. A tin box for botanical specimens hung over his shoulder and he carried a green butterfly-net in one of his hands.

'You will, I am sure, excuse my presumption, Dr. Watson,' said he, as he came panting up to where I stood. 'Here on the moor we are homely folk and do not wait for formal introductions.'

You may possibly have heard my name from our mutual friend, Mortimer. I am Stapleton, of Merripit House.'
'Your net and box would have told me as much,' said I, 'for I knew that Mr. Stapleton was a naturalist.'

Stapleton is an inspired characterisation in the novel; the most complex figure by far. An expert botanist, he appears to have all Holmes's intelligence and a villain's evil intentions and desires. Yet Doyle is successful in presenting him as a friendly person at this juncture in the story. His equipment, the 'net and box', is particularly apposite; we learn later he is an obsessively controlling man who locks up his wife and seeks to trap another woman into a bogus engagement. More than 50 years before John Fowles wrote *The Collector*, about a man who collects women like butterflies, Stapleton is the collector.

DISCUSSION POINT

What you think of the way Doyle presents Stapleton at this early stage in the story?

'That is the great Grimpen Mire,' said he. 'A false step yonder means death to man or beast. Only yesterday I saw one of the moor ponies wander into it. He never came out. I saw his head for quite a long time craning out of the bog-hole, but it sucked him down at last. Even in dry seasons it is a danger to cross it, but after these autumn rains it is an awful place. And yet I can find my way to the very heart of it and return alive. By George, there is another of those miserable ponies!'

Something brown was rolling and tossing among the green sedges. Then a long, agonized, writhing neck shot upward and a dreadful cry echoed over the moor. It turned me cold with horror, but my companion's nerves seemed to be stronger than mine. 'It's gone!' said he. 'The mire has him. Two in two days, and many more, perhaps, for they get in the way of going there in the dry weather, and never know the difference until the mire

has them in its clutches. It's a bad place, the great Grimpen Mire.'

'And you say you can penetrate it?'

'Yes, there are one or two paths which a very active man can take. I have found them out.'

'But why should you wish to go into so horrible a place?'

'Well, you see the hills beyond? They are really islands cut off on all sides by the impassable mire, which has crawled round them in the course of years. That is where the rare plants and the butterflies are, if you have the wit to reach them.'

'I shall try my luck some day.'

He looked at me with a surprised face.

'For God's sake put such an idea out of your mind,' said he.

'Your blood would be upon my head. I assure you that there would not be the least chance of your coming back alive. It is only by remembering certain complex landmarks that I am able to do it.'

'Halloa!' I cried. 'What is that?'

Here we can feel the author setting up another scenario that will become important; we can almost sense the author willing his villain into the depths of the mire. Once again Doyle deepens his characterisation of Stapleton with his intrinsic interest in the mire, his thirst for botanical discovery in its midst. Stapleton is fascinating because he is both controlling and endlessly curious, perhaps more interestingly curious even than Holmes. Whereas the great detective is only intrigued by mysteries and their solutions, there is a suggestion that Stapleton has a more broad-minded imagination, exploring flora and fauna for its own sake, inexorably drawn to it because he is a Baskerville, whose land it is. There is a sense that Stapleton, in exploring the mire, is discovering himself, traversing his own dark character.

DISCUSSION POINT

What does the setting of the Grimpen Mire add to the novel? What do you make of the characterisation of Stapleton?

A long, low moan, indescribably sad, swept over the moor. It filled the whole air, and yet it was impossible to say whence it came. From a dull murmur it swelled into a deep roar, and then sank back into a melancholy, throbbing murmur once again. Stapleton looked at me with a curious expression in his face.

'Queer place, the moor!' said he.

'But what is it?'

'The peasants say it is the Hound of the Baskervilles calling for its prey. I've heard it once or twice before, but never quite so loud.'

I looked round, with a chill of fear in my heart, at the huge swelling plain, mottled with the green patches of rushes. Nothing stirred over the vast expanse save a pair of ravens, which croaked loudly from a tor behind us.

'You are an educated man. You don't believe such nonsense as that?' said I. 'What do you think is the cause of so strange a sound?'

'Bogs make queer noises sometimes. It's the mud settling, or the water rising, or something.'

'No, no, that was a living voice.'

'Well, perhaps it was. Did you ever hear a bittern booming?'

'No, I never did.'

'It's a very rare bird – practically extinct – in England now, but all things are possible upon the moor. Yes, I should not be surprised to learn that what we have heard is the cry of the last of the bitterns.'

'It's the weirdest, strangest thing that ever I heard in my life.'

Of course, later on we learn that the legend has some basis in fact; it is the Hound of the Baskervilles, the dog that Stapleton owns and hides on the moor. Notice how Stapleton offers a number of explanations, all of them far fetched but imaginative; his comment that the cry is 'the last of the bitterns' is suggestive, a metaphor, perhaps, for how he feels about being an ignored, disinherited Baskerville.

DISCUSSION POINT

Sounds play an important part in the story – when and why?

I could not doubt that this was the Miss Stapleton of whom I had been told, since ladies of any sort must be few upon the moor, and I remembered that I'd heard someone describe her as being a beauty. The woman who approached me was certainly that, and of a most uncommon type. There could not have been a greater contrast between brother and sister, for Stapleton was neutral tinted, with light hair and grey eyes, while she was darker than any brunette whom I have seen in England – slim, elegant, and tall. She had a proud, finely cut face, so regular that it might have seemed impassive were it not for the sensitive mouth and the beautiful dark, eager eyes. With her perfect figure and elegant dress she was, indeed, a strange apparition upon a lonely moorland path. Her eyes were on her brother as I turned, and then she quickened her pace towards me. I had raised my hat and was about to make some explanatory remark, when her own words turned all my thoughts into a new channel.

'Go back!' she said. 'Go straight back to London, instantly.'

I could only stare at her in stupid surprise. Her eyes blazed at me, and she tapped the ground impatiently with her foot.

'Why should I go back?' I asked.

'I cannot explain.' She spoke in a low, eager voice, with a curious lisp in her utterance. 'But for God's sake do what I ask you. Go back and never set foot upon the moor again.'

'But I've only just come.'

'Man, man!' she cried. 'Can you not tell when a warning is for your own good? Go back to London! Start tonight! Get away from this place at all costs! Hush, my brother is coming! Not a word of what I have said.'

Perhaps the most poignantly drawn figure in the story is the conflicted, complicit Miss Stapleton, who has to hide her marriage to Stapleton, and who is clearly fearful for the fate of Baskerville. Her covert and mistaken intervention injects suspense and confusion into the narrative, giving us the sense that not even its main players are fully aware of what is going on. The absence of Holmes adds to the feeling of narrative confusion; Watson

is mistaken for Baskerville, the cries over the moors and in the house are unexplained, menace and foreboding leak into every crevice. Holmes often stabilises the narrative, bringing to it a sense of order and calm, while Watson is portrayed as rather at a loss – not as some films have suggested as incompetent, but puzzled, troubled, bemused.

DISCUSSION POINT

How does Doyle create a real sense of menace at this point in the narrative?

'Why, who do you think this is?'

'I imagine that it must be Sir Henry Baskerville.'

'No, no,' said I. 'Only a humble commoner, but his friend. My name is Dr. Watson.'

A flush of vexation passed over her expressive face. 'We have been talking at cross purposes,' said she.

'Why, you had not very much time for talk,' her brother remarked with the same questioning eyes.

'I talked as if Dr. Watson were a resident instead of being merely a visitor,' said she. 'It cannot much matter to him whether it is early or late for the orchids. But you will come on, will you not, and see Merripit House?'

A short walk brought us to it, a bleak moorland house, once the farm of some grazier in the old prosperous days, but now put into repair and turned into a modern dwelling. An orchard surrounded it, but the trees, as is usual upon the moor, were stunted and nipped, and the effect of the whole place was mean and melancholy. We were admitted by a strange, wizened, rusty-coated old manservant, who seemed in keeping with the house. Inside, however, there were large rooms furnished with an elegance in which I seemed to recognize the taste of the lady. As I looked from their windows at the interminable granite-flecked moor rolling unbroken to the farthest horizon I could not but marvel at what could have

brought this highly educated man and this beautiful woman to live in such a place.

'Queer spot to choose, is it not?' said he as if in answer to my thought. 'And yet we manage to make ourselves fairly happy, do we not, Beryl?'

'Quite happy,' said she, but there was no ring of conviction in her words.

The troubled lives of the Stapletons are now revealed, not in the interior of the house, which is wonderfully presented, but in the demeanour of its inhabitants and its location. Notice how Stapleton is almost able to second-guess Watson's thoughts, indicating his great intelligence. His rhetorical question to his wife is interesting because, on second reading, it's clear it has two layers. On the one hand, Stapleton is requesting that his wife puts on an act for Watson, but on the other, you realise that this insecure and troubled man is seeking reassurance.

DISCUSSION POINT

What does this scene at Merripit House reveal about its inhabitants? How significant do you think the name of 'Merripit' is?

From Chapter VIII

From this point onward I will follow the course of events by transcribing my own letters to Mr. Sherlock Holmes which lie before me on the table. One page is missing, but otherwise they are exactly as written and show my feelings and suspicions of the moment more accurately than my memory, clear as it is upon these tragic events, can possibly do.

Baskerville Hall, October 13th.

MY DEAR HOLMES, – My previous letters and telegrams have kept you pretty well up to date as to all that has occurred in this most God-forsaken corner of the world. The longer one stays here the more does the spirit of the moor sink into one's soul, its vastness, and also its grim charm. When you are once

out upon its bosom you have left all traces of modern England behind you, but on the other hand you are conscious everywhere of the homes and the work of the prehistoric people. On all sides of you as you walk are the houses of these forgotten folk, with their graves and the huge monoliths which are supposed to have marked their temples. As you look at their grey stone huts against the scarred hill-sides you leave your own age behind you, and if you were to see a skin-clad, hairy man crawl out from the low door fitting a flint-tipped arrow on to the string of his bow, you would feel that his presence there was more natural than your own. The strange thing is that they should have lived so thickly on what must always have been most unfruitful soil. I am no antiquarian, but I could imagine that they were some unwarlike and harried race who were forced to accept that which none other would occupy.

All this, however, is foreign to the mission on which you sent me and will probably be very uninteresting to your severely practical mind. I can still remember your complete indifference as to whether the sun moved round the earth or the earth round the sun. Let me, therefore, return to the facts concerning Sir Henry Baskerville.

If you have not had any report within the last few days it is because up to today there was nothing of importance to relate. Then a very surprising circumstance occurred, which I shall tell you in due course. But, first of all, I must keep you in touch with some of the other factors in the situation.

One of these, concerning which I have said little, is the escaped convict upon the moor.

Here we see Doyle using the ‘pathetic fallacy’ to great effect, showing the reader how the mood of the moor is reflective of the people who live there. Even the upbeat Watson is infected by its depressive qualities, its ‘grim charm’. Already, Doyle is painting a claustrophobic picture of life on the moor, a sense of its imprisoning qualities, the frightening obsessions of its inhabitants.

💡 DISCUSSION POINT

How well does Doyle paint a picture of an isolated society which is in conflict with itself?

One other neighbour I have met since I wrote last. This is Mr. Frankland, of Lafter Hall, who lives some four miles to the south of us. He is an elderly man, red-faced, white-haired, and choleric. His passion is for the British law, and he has spent a large fortune in litigation. He fights for the mere pleasure of fighting and is equally ready to take up either side of a question, so that it is no wonder that he has found it a costly amusement. Sometimes he will shut up a right of way and defy the parish to make him open it. At others he will with his own hands tear down some other man's gate and declare that a path has existed there from time immemorial, defying the owner to prosecute him for trespass. He is learned in old manorial and communal rights, and he applies his knowledge sometimes in favour of the villagers of Fernworthy and sometimes against them, so that he is periodically either carried in triumph down the village street or else burned in effigy, according to his latest exploit. He is said to have about seven lawsuits upon his hands at present, which will probably swallow up the remainder of his fortune and so draw his sting and leave him harmless for the future. Apart from the law he seems a kindly, good-natured person, and I only mention him because you were particular that I should send some description of the people who surround us. He is curiously employed at present, for being an amateur astronomer, he has an excellent telescope, with which he lies upon the roof of his own house and sweeps the moor all day in the hope of catching a glimpse of the escaped convict. If he would confine his energies to this all would be well, but there are rumours that he intends to prosecute Dr. Mortimer for opening a grave without the consent of the next-of-kin, because he dug up the Neolithic skull in the barrow on Long Down. He helps to keep our lives from being monotonous and gives a little comic relief where it is badly needed.

And now, having brought you up to date in the escaped convict, the Stapletons, Dr. Mortimer, and Frankland, of Lafter Hall, let me end on that which is most important and tell you more about the Barrymores, and especially about the surprising development of last night.

First of all about the test telegram, which you sent from London in order to make sure that Barrymore was really here.

While Mr Frankland frequently slips into caricature, a comedic grotesque worthy of Dickens, he is an excellent grotesque and as appropriate for our age as for Doyle's. His miserable, litigious nature, his obsessive voyeurism, his appalling self-righteousness are all very entertaining. There is never a sense that he is involved in the murders, although we realise he may know something important.

💬 **DISCUSSION POINT**

How successful is the characterisation of Mr Frankland?

Mrs. Barrymore is of interest to me. She is a heavy, solid person, very limited, intensely respectable, and inclined to be puritanical. You could hardly conceive a less emotional subject. Yet I have told you how, on the first night here, I heard her sobbing bitterly, and since then I have more than once observed traces of tears upon her face. Some deep sorrow gnaws ever at her heart. Sometimes I wonder if she has a guilty memory which haunts her, and sometimes I suspect Barrymore of being a domestic tyrant.

Watson's speculations about Mrs Barrymore turn out to be wrong, but they are fascinating nevertheless because, as we know, a theme of the narrative is the brutality of men against women: we see it in Hugo Baskerville's treatment of the maid before he is chewed up by the infamous hound, and we learn about it being a factor in Stapleton's marriage.

💬 **DISCUSSION POINT**

Why does Doyle focus upon men's brutal treatment of women in the story?

Barrymore was crouching at the window with the candle held against the glass. His profile was half turned towards me, and his face seemed to be rigid with expectation as he stared out into the blackness of the moor. For some minutes he stood watching intently. Then he gave a deep groan and with an impatient gesture he put out the light. Instantly I made my way back to my room, and very shortly came the stealthy steps passing once more upon their return journey. Long afterwards when I had fallen into a light sleep I heard a key turn somewhere in a lock, but I could not tell whence the sound came. What it all means I cannot guess, but there is some secret business going on in this house of gloom which sooner or later we shall get to the bottom of.

More mystery about Barrymore as Doyle revives our interest in him as a possible suspect, despite the fact that it is clear he wasn't in London when Henry Baskerville was threatened. His role is uncannily similar to that of Grace Poole in *Jane Eyre*: a watcher, a servant, a possible brute.

💬 **DISCUSSION POINT**

How successful is Doyle's characterisation of Barrymore?

From Chapter IX

Baskerville Hall, Oct. 15th.

MY DEAR HOLMES, – If I was compelled to leave you without much news during the early days of my mission you must acknowledge that I am making up for lost time, and that events are now crowding thick and fast upon us. In my last report I ended upon my top note with Barrymore at the window, and now I have quite a budget already which will, unless I am much mistaken, considerably surprise you. Things have taken a turn which I could not have anticipated. In some ways they have within the last forty-eight hours become much clearer and in some ways they have become more complicated. But I will tell you all and you shall judge for yourself.

Before breakfast on the morning following my adventure I went down the corridor and examined the room in which Barrymore had been on the night before. The western window through which he had stared so intently has, I noticed, one peculiarity above all other windows in the house – it commands the nearest outlook on the moor.

The mystery surrounding Barrymore deepens when it becomes clear he is addicted to looking at the moor. Notice how Watson seems to have recovered from his depression and appears to be in better spirits.

💬 **DISCUSSION POINT**

What do you think of the way Doyle presents Baskerville Hall in this section? How does he suggest that it is a mysterious house?

At this instant Sir Henry suddenly drew Miss Stapleton to his side. His arm was round her, but it seemed to me that she was straining away from him with her face averted. He stooped his head to hers, and she raised one hand as if in protest. Next moment I saw them spring apart and turn hurriedly round. Stapleton was the cause of the interruption. He was running wildly towards them, his absurd net dangling behind him. He gesticulated and almost danced with excitement in front of the lovers. What the scene meant I could not imagine, but it seemed to me that Stapleton was abusing Sir Henry, who offered explanations, which became more angry as the other refused to accept them. The lady stood by in haughty silence. Finally Stapleton turned upon his heel and beckoned in a peremptory way to his sister, who, after an irresolute glance at Sir Henry, walked off by the side of her brother.

This passage develops in significance on a second reading. At first, it feels as if Stapleton is just a rather possessive

brother, an oddball, with his botanist's net and quirky questions. But then you realise that he is genuinely disturbed and jealous, worried by his wife's developing affection for Henry Baskerville, and yet unable to fully articulate his concerns.

💬 **DISCUSSION POINT**

What do you think of Stapleton's behaviour here?

'Did he give any explanation of his conduct?'

'His sister is everything in his life, he says. That is natural enough, and I am glad that he should understand her value. They have always been together, and according to his account he has been a very lonely man with only her as a companion, so that the thought of losing her was really terrible to him. He had not understood, he said, that I was becoming attached to her, but when he saw with his own eyes that it was really so, and that she might be taken away from him, it gave him such a shock that for a time he was not responsible for what he said or did. He was very sorry for all that had passed, and he recognized how foolish and how selfish it was that he should imagine that he could hold a beautiful woman like his sister to himself for her whole life. If she had to leave him he had rather it was to a neighbour like myself than to anyone else. But in any case it was a blow to him, and it would take him some time before he could prepare himself to meet it. He would withdraw all opposition upon his part if I would promise for three months to let the matter rest and to be content with cultivating the lady's friendship during that time without claiming her love. This I promised, and so the matter rests.'

This explanation has elements of truth in it, of course, but we realise, on second reading, that Stapleton's insistence upon Baskerville waiting for three months has a very

sinister significance, because we perceive that he intends to kill Baskerville in that time.

DISCUSSION POINT

What do you think of the characterisation of Stapleton here?

'It is my doing, Sir Henry – all mine. He has done nothing except for my sake and because I asked him.'

'Speak out, then! What does it mean?'

'My unhappy brother is starving on the moor. We cannot let him perish at our very gates. The light is a signal to him that food is ready for him, and his light out yonder is to show the spot to which to bring it.'

'Then your brother is –'

'The escaped convict, sir – Selden, the criminal.'

'That's the truth, sir,' said Barrymore. 'I said that it was not my secret and that I could not tell it to you. But now you have heard it, and you will see that if there was a plot it was not against you.'

This, then, was the explanation of the stealthy expeditions at night and the light at the window. Sir Henry and I both stared at the woman in amazement. Was it possible that this stolidly respectable person was of the same blood as one of the most notorious criminals in the country?

'Yes, sir, my name was Selden, and he is my younger brother. We humoured him too much when he was a lad, and gave him his own way in everything until he came to think that the world was made for his pleasure, and that he could do what he liked in it. Then as he grew older he met wicked companions, and the devil entered into him until he broke my mother's heart and dragged our name in the dirt. From crime to crime he sank lower and lower, until it is only the mercy of God which has snatched him from the scaffold; but to me, sir, he was always the little curly-headed boy that I had nursed and played with, as an elder sister would. That was why he broke

prison, sir. He knew that I was here and that we could not refuse to help him. When he dragged himself here one night, weary and starving, with the warders hard at his heels, what could we do? We took him in and fed him and cared for him. Then you returned, sir, and my brother thought he would be safer on the moor than anywhere else until the hue and cry was over, so he lay in hiding there. But every second night we made sure if he was still there by putting a light in the window, and if there was an answer my husband would take out some bread and meat to him. Every day we hoped that he was gone, but as long as he was there we could not desert him.

In this segment, the mystery surrounding Barrymore and his wife is more or less resolved. The story illustrates a recurring theme in the book: ordinary people's loyalty to psychopaths. The Barrymores are devoted to Selden because he is a member of their family; Miss Stapleton is devoted to Stapleton for deeper, psycho-sexual reasons.

DISCUSSION POINT

In what way is the theme of devotion explored in the narrative?

From Chapter X

It is true that I have had only the one glance at him, and yet there are some things to which I am ready to swear. He is no one whom I have seen down here, and I have now met all the neighbours. The figure was far taller than that of Stapleton, far thinner than that of Frankland. Barrymore it might possibly have been, but we had left him behind us, and I am certain that he could not have followed us. A stranger then is still dogging us, just as a stranger dogged us in London. We have never shaken him off. If I could lay my hands upon that man, then at last we might find ourselves at the end of all our difficulties. To this one purpose I must now devote all my energies.

My first impulse was to tell Sir Henry all my plans. My second and wisest one is to play my own game and speak as little as possible to anyone. He is silent and distraught. His nerves have been strangely shaken by that sound upon the moor. I will say nothing to add to his anxieties, but I will take my own steps to attain my own end.

Doyle successfully creates a real sense of menace by suggesting that Watson is very agitated about this new stranger, a stranger who is physically imposing and clearly determined and clever. Watson suggests this by saying, 'We have never shaken him off'. Of course, it is ironic that it is Holmes himself, so that the sentence, 'If I could lay my hands upon that man, then at last we might find ourselves at the end of all our difficulties' is rather humorous when read retrospectively

DISCUSSION POINT

On first reading, what is the effect of the introduction of this new stranger? What is the effect when reading the story for a second time? What might Doyle be suggesting about Holmes here?

'I know why he was at the gate at that hour. It was to meet a woman.'
'To meet a woman! He?'
'Yes, sir.'
'And the woman's name?'
'I can't give you the name, sir, but I can give you the initials. Her initials were L.L.'
'How do you know this, Barrymore?'
'Well, Sir Henry, your uncle had a letter that morning. He had usually a great many letters, for he was a public man and well known for his kind heart, so that everyone who was in trouble was glad to turn to him. But that morning, as it chanced,

there was only this one letter, so I took the more notice of it. It was from Coombe Tracey, and it was addressed in a woman's hand.'

'Well?'

'Well, sir, I thought no more of the matter, and never would have done had it not been for my wife. Only a few weeks ago she was cleaning out Sir Charles's study – it had never been touched since his death – and she found the ashes of a burned letter in the back of the grate. The greater part of it was charred to pieces, but one little slip, the end of a page, hung together, and the writing could still be read, though it was grey on a black ground. It seemed to us to be a postscript at the end of the letter, and it said: 'Please, please, as you are a gentleman, burn this letter, and be at the gate by ten o'clock. Beneath it were signed the initials L.L.'

Doyle now introduces sexual intrigue into the scenario involving Sir Charles Baskerville's death, with the introduction of the burnt letter, and the mysterious initials, 'L.L.'. The begging tone of the letter – 'please, as you are a gentleman' – suggests that Sir Charles knew something compromising about the lady, or had himself compromised her. In such a way, we see Doyle increasingly shaping his narrative around sexual intrigue; there is a creeping sense that this case is not about greed or ambition, but motivated by disturbed sexual, buried desires.

DISCUSSION POINT

Why and how does sexual intrigue slip into the narrative?

'No,' said he. 'There are a few gipsies and labouring folk for whom I can't answer, but among the farmers or gentry there is no one whose initials are those. Wait a bit though,' he added

after a pause. 'There is Laura Lyons – her initials are L.L. – but she lives in Coombe Tracey.'

'Who is she?' I asked.

'She is Frankland's daughter.'

'What! Old Frankland the crank?'

'Exactly. She married an artist named Lyons, who came sketching on the moor. He proved to be a blackguard and deserted her. The fault from what I hear may not have been entirely on one side. Her father refused to have anything to do with her because she had married without his consent, and perhaps for one or two other reasons as well. So, between the old sinner and the young one the girl has had a pretty bad time.'

'How does she live?'

'I fancy old Frankland allows her a pittance, but it cannot be more, for his own affairs are considerably involved. Whatever she may have deserved one could not allow her to go hopelessly to the bad. Her story got about, and several of the people here did something to enable her to earn an honest living. Stapleton did for one, and Sir Charles for another. I gave a trifle myself. It was to set her up in a typewriting business.'

Again Doyle the feminist comes to the fore as Laura Lyons is painted as a pathetic, sad creature, the victim of masculine cruelty and neglect, but temporarily assisted by Stapleton and Sir Charles. Notice how Doyle cleverly provides clues to why she is in trouble again. His presentation of her is overwhelmingly that of a victim, and there are echoes of the narrative in her own story. She is like the helpless maiden who Hugo Baskerville dragged to the hall; she is as mysterious as Mrs Barrymore, a prisoner of poverty and the moor.

DISCUSSION POINT

What do you think of Doyle's presentation of Laura Lyons?



'Did you see him then?'

'No, sir, but the food was gone when next I went that way.'

'Then he was certainly there?'

'So you would think, sir, unless it was the other man who took it.'

I sat with my coffee-cup halfway to my lips and stared at Barrymore.

'You know that there is another man then?'

'Yes, sir; there is another man upon the moor.'

'Have you seen him?'

'No, sir.'

'How do you know of him then?'

'Selden told me of 'im, sir, a week ago or more. 'He's in hiding, too, but 'e's not a convict as far as I can make out. I don't like it, Dr. Watson – I tell you straight, sir, that I don't like it.' He spoke with a sudden passion of earnestness.

'Now, listen to me, Barrymore! I have no interest in this matter but that of your master. I have come here with no object except to help him. Tell me, frankly, what it is that you don't like.'

Barrymore hesitated for a moment, as if he regretted his outburst, or found it difficult to express his own feelings in words.

'It's all these goings-on, sir,' he cried at last, waving his hand towards the rain-lashed window which faced the moor. 'There's foul play somewhere, and there's black villainy brewing, to that I'll swear! Very glad I should be, sir, to see Sir Henry on his way back to London again!'

'But what is it that alarms you?'

'Look at Sir Charles's death! That was bad enough, for all that the coroner said. Look at the noises on the moor at night. There's not a man would cross it after sundown if he was paid for it. Look at this stranger hiding out yonder, and watching and waiting! What's 'e waiting for? What does it mean? It means no good to anyone of the name of Baskerville, and very glad I shall be to be quit of it all on the day that Sir Henry's new servants are ready to take over the Hall.'

'But about this stranger,' said I. 'Can you tell me anything about him? What did Selden say? Did he find out where he hid, or what he was doing?'

'E saw him once or twice, but 'e is a deep one, and gives nothing away. At first 'e thought that 'e was the police, but

soon 'e found that he had some lay of his own. A kind of gentleman 'e was, as far as 'e could see, but what 'e was doing 'e could not make out.'

'And where did he say that he lived?'

'Among the old houses on the hillside – the stone huts where the old folk used to live.'

Never content with one mystery where several will do, Doyle introduces the mysterious stranger, building up suspense about his intentions and purposes. The absence of Holmes is vital here, since the stranger is, in fact Holmes, and we are given a sense of Watson's floundering detective work in the context of so much going on.

DISCUSSION POINT

How is Selden presented at this point?

From Chapter XI

The first impression left by Mrs. Lyons was one of extreme beauty. Her eyes and hair were of the same rich hazel colour, and her cheeks, though considerably freckled, were flushed with the exquisite bloom of the brunette, the dainty pink which lurks at the heart of the sulphur rose. Admiration was, I repeat, the first impression. But the second was criticism. There was something subtly wrong with the face, some coarseness of expression, some hardness, perhaps, of eye, some looseness of lip which marred its perfect beauty. But these, of course, are after-thoughts. At the moment I was simply conscious that I was in the presence of a very handsome woman, and that she was asking me the reasons for my visit. I had not quite understood until that instant how delicate my mission was.

'I have the pleasure,' said I, 'of knowing your father.' It was a clumsy introduction, and the lady made me feel it.

'There is nothing in common between my father and me,' she said. 'I owe him nothing, and his friends are not mine. If it were not for the late Sir Charles Baskerville and some other kind hearts I might have starved for all that my father cared.'

'It was about the late Sir Charles Baskerville that I have come here to see you.'

The freckles started out on the lady's face.

'What can I tell you about him?' she asked, and her fingers played nervously over the stops of her typewriter.

'You knew him, did you not?'

'I've already said that I owe a great deal to his kindness. If I am able to support myself it is largely due to the interest which he took in my unhappy situation.'

'Did you correspond with him?'

The lady looked quickly up with an angry gleam in her hazel eyes.

'What is the object of these questions?' she asked sharply.

'The object is to avoid a public scandal. It is better that I should ask them here than that the matter should pass outside our control.'

She was silent and her face was still very pale.

Laura Lyons' beauty is shocking, in the context of the story, because of her impoverished circumstances: the reader has not expected such a lonely and troubled woman to be so attractive. But, like Miss Stapleton, her beauty shackles her to the desires and scheming of men. However, notice how Doyle describes her as having *'something subtly wrong with the face, some coarseness of expression, some hardness, perhaps, of eye, some looseness of lip which marred its perfect beauty'*. There is a sense in this that she lacks discipline, lacks strength in resisting the men who wish to take advantage of her beauty, which indeed proves to be the case. The dialogue grows in significance on second reading; it is ironic that Watson, in trying to avoid a public scandal with Lyons, may well be provoking one.

DISCUSSION POINT

How important are Doyle's description of faces in the novel in telling us about the characters' personas?

'That is a private matter. I cannot tell it.'

'You acknowledge then that you made an appointment with Sir Charles at the very hour and place at which he met his death, but you deny that you kept the appointment.'

'That is the truth.'

Again and again I cross-questioned her, but I could never get past that point.

'Mrs. Lyons,' said I, as I rose from this long and inconclusive interview, 'you are taking a very great responsibility and putting yourself in a very false position by not making an absolutely clean breast of all that you know. If I have to call in the aid of the police you will find how seriously you are compromised. If your position is innocent, why did you in the first instance deny having written to Sir Charles upon that date?'

'Because I feared that some false conclusion might be drawn from it and that I might find myself involved in a scandal.'

'And why were you so pressing that Sir Charles should destroy your letter?'

'If you have read the letter you will know.'

'I did not say that I had read all the letter.'

'You quoted some of it.'

'I quoted the postscript. The letter had, as I said, been burned and it was not all legible. I ask you once again why it was that you were so pressing that Sir Charles should destroy this letter which he received on the day of his death.'

'The matter is a very private one.'

'The more reason why you should avoid a public investigation.'

'I will tell you, then. If you have heard anything of my unhappy history you will know that I made a rash marriage and had reason to regret it.'

'I have heard so much.'

'My life has been one incessant persecution from a husband whom I abhor. The law is upon his side, and every day I am faced by the possibility that he may force me to live with him. At the time that I wrote this letter to Sir Charles I had learned that there was a prospect of my regaining my freedom if certain expenses could be met. It meant everything to me – peace of mind, happiness, self-respect – everything. I knew Sir Charles's generosity, and I thought that if he heard the story from my own lips he would help me.'

'Then how is it that you did not go?'

'Because I received help in the interval from another source.'

'Why then, did you not write to Sir Charles and explain this?'

'So I should have done had I not seen his death in the paper next morning.'

The woman's story hung coherently together, and all my questions were unable to shake it. I could only check it by finding if she had, indeed, instituted divorce proceedings against her husband at or about the time of the tragedy.

It was unlikely that she would dare to say that she had not been to Baskerville Hall if she really had been, for a trap would be necessary to take her there, and could not have returned to Coombe Tracey until the early hours of the morning. Such an excursion could not be kept secret. The probability was, therefore, that she was telling the truth, or, at least, a part of the truth. I came away baffled and disheartened.

This is one of the best 'interview scenes' in any Sherlock Holmes story because it is obvious that Lyons is telling the truth, and yet, along with Watson, we are 'baffled'. Unlike him we are not 'disheartened', but intrigued, because the mystery feels as if it has so many loose ends, we wonder how the writer will bring them together. The film version starring Basil Rathbone – the best screen adaptation of the novel – leaves out the sub-plot of Laura Lyons. And yet I believe it is crucial in crystallising the essential theme of the story, which is really about 'oppression' – oppression of women by men, of the present by the past, of man by nature, the oppression of desire and of family. The interview is so powerful because it offers a clear sense of Laura's oppression at the hands of her husband, but she remains mysterious in the midst of her misery.

DISCUSSION POINT

In what way is 'oppression' a key theme in the story?

The telescope, a formidable instrument mounted upon a tripod, stood upon the flat leads of the house. Frankland clapped his eye to it and gave a cry of satisfaction.

'Quick, Dr. Watson, quick, before he passes over the hill!'

There he was, sure enough, a small urchin with a little bundle upon his shoulder, toiling slowly up the hill. When he reached the crest I saw the ragged uncouth figure outlined for an instant against the cold blue sky. He looked round him with a furtive and stealthy air, as one who dreads pursuit. Then he vanished over the hill.

'Well! Am I right?'

'Certainly, there is a boy who seems to have some secret errand.'

'And what the errand is even a county constable could guess. But not one word shall they have from me, and I bind you to secrecy also, Dr. Watson. Not a word! You understand!'

'Just as you wish.'

'They have treated me shamefully – shamefully. When the facts come out in Frankland v. Regina I venture to think that a thrill of indignation will run through the country. Nothing would induce me to help the police in any way. For all they cared it might have been me, instead of my effigy, which these rascals burned at the stake. Surely you are not going! You will help me to empty the decanter in honour of this great occasion!'

But I resisted all his solicitations and succeeded in dissuading him from his announced intention of walking home with me. I kept the road as long as his eye was on me, and then I struck off across the moor and made for the stony hill over which the boy had disappeared.

Many of the scenes in the novel are about people being watched, observed, scrutinised, puzzled over. Here, Watson's pursuit of the 'urchin' makes us feel that, finally, he will begin to reveal the truth behind some of the mysteries.

DISCUSSION POINT

What do you think of Doyle's characterisation of Frankland? What are his essential motives?

Then once more the footsteps approached and a shadow fell across the opening of the hut.

'It is a lovely evening, my dear Watson,' said a well-known voice. 'I really think that you will be more comfortable outside than in.'

It is one of the most famous 're-appearances' in all literature, and an inspired narrative twist on Doyle's part – much imitated by thriller writers since the story was written. Once again we see how Doyle specialises in the 'red herring'; making us believe that the second stranger on the moor must be involved in the murder in some way.

DISCUSSION POINT

Why does Doyle bring Holmes back into the narrative at this point?

From Chapter XII

'Exactly.'

'Well done! Our researches have evidently been running on parallel lines, and when we unite our results I expect we shall have a fairly full knowledge of the case.'

'Well, I am glad from my heart that you are here, for indeed the responsibility and the mystery were both becoming too much for my nerves. But how in the name of wonder did you come here, and what have you been doing? I thought that you were in Baker Street working out that case of blackmailing.'

'That was what I wished you to think.'

'Then you use me, and yet do not trust me!' I cried with some bitterness. 'I think that I have deserved better at your hands, Holmes.'

'My dear fellow, you have been invaluable to me in this as in many other cases, and I beg that you will forgive me if I have seemed to play a trick upon you. In truth, it was partly for your own sake that I did it, and it was my appreciation of the danger which you ran which led me to come down and examine the matter for myself. Had I been with Sir Henry and you it is confident that my point of view would have been the

same as yours, and my presence would have warned our very formidable opponents to be on their guard. As it is, I have been able to get about as I could not possibly have done had I been living in the Hall, and I remain an unknown factor in the business, ready to throw in all my weight at a critical moment.'

'But why keep me in the dark?'

'For you to know could not have helped us, and might possibly have led to my discovery. You would have wished to tell me something, or in your kindness you would have brought me out some comfort or other, and so an unnecessary risk would be run. I brought Cartwright down with me – you remember the little chap at the express office – and he has seen after my simple wants: a loaf of bread and a clean collar. What does man want more? He has given me an extra pair of eyes upon a very active pair of feet, and both have been invaluable.'

'Then my reports have all been wasted!' – My voice trembled as I recalled the pains and the pride with which I had composed them.

Holmes took a bundle of papers from his pocket.

'Here are your reports, my dear fellow, and very well thumbled, I assure you. I made excellent arrangements, and they are only delayed one day upon their way. I must compliment you exceedingly upon the zeal and the intelligence which you have shown over an extraordinarily difficult case.'

Watson's frustration and anger with Holmes is quite poignant: *"Then my reports have all been wasted!"* – My voice trembled as I recalled the pains and the pride with which I had composed them.' Whereas Watson has appeared to be something of a buffoon, now he comes across as a fully rounded character who is hurt by Holmes's implicit lack of trust in him.

DISCUSSION POINT

Is Watson presented as a complex figure in the story or merely an ineffectual clown who blunders upon mystery after mystery?



'This is most important,' said he when I had concluded. 'It fills up a gap which I had been unable to bridge, in this most complex affair. You are aware, perhaps, that a close intimacy exists between this lady and the man Stapleton?'

'I did not know of a close intimacy.'

'There can be no doubt about the matter. They meet, they write, there is a complete understanding between them. Now, this puts a very powerful weapon into our hands. If I could only use it to detach his wife –'

'His wife?'

'I am giving you some information now, in return for all that you have given me. The lady who has passed here as Miss Stapleton is in reality his wife.'

'Good heavens, Holmes! Are you sure of what you say? How could he have permitted Sir Henry to fall in love with her?'

'Sir Henry's falling in love could do no harm to anyone except Sir Henry. He took particular care that Sir Henry did not make love to her, as you have yourself observed. I repeat that the lady is his wife and not his sister.'

'But why this elaborate deception?'

'Because he foresaw that she would be very much more useful to him in the character of a free woman.'

All my unspoken instincts, my vague suspicions, suddenly took shape and centred upon the naturalist. In that impassive, colourless man, with his straw hat and his butterfly-net, I seemed to see something terrible – a creature of infinite patience and craft, with a smiling face and a murderous heart.

'It is he, then, who is our enemy – it is he who dogged us in London?'

'So I read the riddle.'

'And the warning – it must have come from her!'

'Exactly.'

The shape of some monstrous villainy, half seen, half guessed, loomed through the darkness which had girt me so long.

Now Doyle introduces vital information about Stapleton, which more or less reveals that Stapleton is the murderer. Making Miss Stapleton his wife is an inspired plot device, showing us just how depraved Stapleton is: a man who is willing to use his wife as sexual bait.

DISCUSSION POINT

In which way does the information that Stapleton is married to Miss Stapleton change our perception of him?

'He has beaten us, Watson. We are too late.'

'No, no, surely not!'

'Fool that I was to hold my hand. And you, Watson, see what comes of abandoning your charge! But, by Heaven, if the worst has happened, we'll avenge him!'

Blindly we ran through the gloom, blundering against boulders, forcing our way through gorse bushes, panting up hills and rushing down slopes, heading always in the direction whence those dreadful sounds had come. At every rise Holmes looked eagerly round him, but the shadows were thick upon the moor, and nothing moved upon its dreary face.

'Can you see anything?'

'Nothing.'

'But, hark, what is that?'

A low moan had fallen upon our ears. There it was again upon our left!

Holmes's defeatism almost amounts to depression; he has disappeared for much of the narrative and now feels that he is beaten. Real suspense is now generated because we feel there is a real possibility that Holmes will 'lose'. Holmes's subdued, alienated mood is a match for the new century in which the story was written; we can feel the optimism of the Victorian era fading and being replaced by a darker pessimism that things could go wrong.

DISCUSSION POINT

What effect does Holmes's pessimism have on the reader?

'I am more to blame than you, Watson. In order to have my case well rounded and complete, I have thrown away the life of my client. It is the greatest blow which has befallen me in my career. But how could I know – how could I know – that he would risk his life alone upon the moor in the face of all my warnings?'

'That we should have heard his screams – my God, those screams! – And yet have been unable to save him! Where is this brute of a hound which drove him to his death? It may be lurking among these rocks at this instant. And Stapleton, where is he? He shall answer for this deed.'

'He shall. I will see to that.'

Here we see Holmes becoming aware of the fallibility of his methods; his quest for a 'well rounded and complete' case means that he could have 'thrown away the life' of Baskerville. Holmes is aware that there is a cold-blooded quality to what he does; that he lacks humanity in his quest for perfection.

DISCUSSION POINT

To what extent are Holmes's methods presented as being fallible in this story?

With feverish haste we had turned the body over, and that dripping beard was pointing up to the cold, clear moon. There could be no doubt about the beetling forehead, the sunken animal eyes. It was indeed the same face which had glared upon me in the light of the candle from over the rock – the face of Selden, the criminal.

Then in an instant it was all clear to me. I remembered how the baronet had told me that he had handed his old wardrobe to Barrymore. Barrymore had passed it on in order to help Selden in his escape. Boots, shirt, cap – it was all Sir Henry's.

More twists and turns! Doyle plays with the reader's expectations and snobberies. Because Selden is a murderous psychopath, we are not so sorry that he is dead and feel relief that Sir Henry is still alive and that Holmes's pride is intact.

💬 DISCUSSION POINT

What is the effect of the discovery of Selden's body?

He hurried past me and stooped over the dead man. I heard a sharp intake of his breath and the cigar fell from his fingers. 'Who – who – who's this?' he stammered. 'It is Selden, the man who escaped from Princetown.' Stapleton turned a ghastly face upon us, but by a supreme effort he had overcome his amazement and his disappointment. He looked sharply from Holmes to me. 'Dear me! What a very shocking affair! How did he die?' 'He appears to have broken his neck by falling over these rocks. My friend and I were strolling on the moor when we heard a cry.' 'I heard a cry also. That was what brought me out. I was uneasy about Sir Henry.' 'Why about Sir Henry in particular?' I could not help asking. 'Because I had suggested that he should come over. When he did not come I was surprised, and I naturally became alarmed for his safety when I heard cries upon the moor. By the way' – his eyes darted again from my face to Holmes's – 'did you hear anything else besides a cry?' 'No,' said Holmes; 'did you?' 'No.' 'What do you mean, then?' 'Oh, you know the stories that the peasants tell about a phantom hound, and so on. It is said to be heard at night upon the moor. I was wondering if there were any evidence of such a sound tonight.' 'We heard nothing of the kind,' said I. 'And what is your theory of this poor fellow's death?' 'I have no doubt that anxiety and exposure have driven him

off his head. He has rushed about the moor in a crazy state and eventually fallen over here and broken his neck.'
'That seems the most reasonable theory,' said Stapleton, and he gave a sigh which I took to indicate his relief. 'What do you think about it, Mr. Sherlock Holmes?'
My friend bowed his compliments.
'You are quick at identification,' said he.

The appearance of Stapleton is full of dramatic irony – we are aware that Holmes and Watson know about him, yet he is ignorant of their knowledge. The presentation of Stapleton as calm and rational is important here: he is almost Holmes-like in the way he immediately spots the detective. Notice how Watson is presented as being quite quick witted in his explanation of how Selden died, not revealing how they suspect Stapleton as being involved.

💬 DISCUSSION POINT

What is the effect of Stapleton's appearance here?

From Chapter XIII

'Good heavens!' I cried, in amazement. The face of Stapleton had sprung out of the canvas. 'Ha, you see it now. My eyes have been trained to examine faces and not their trimmings. It is the first quality of a criminal investigator that he should see through a disguise.'
'But this is marvellous. It might be his portrait.'
'Yes, it is an interesting instance of a throwback, which appears to be both physical and spiritual. A study of family portraits is enough to convert a man to the doctrine of reincarnation. The fellow is a Baskerville – that is evident.'
'With designs upon the succession.'
'Exactly. This chance of the picture has supplied us with one of our most obvious missing links. We have him, Watson, we have him, and I dare swear that before tomorrow night he will be fluttering in our net as helpless as one of his own butterflies. A pin, a cork, and a card, and we add him to the Baker Street collection!'

Throughout the story there is a repeated emphasis on the importance of faces: that their shapes and aspects reveal hidden personality. Here this theme comes to fruition when Holmes analyses the family portrait of Sir Hugo and recognises Stapleton.

💬 DISCUSSION POINT

Why does Doyle's narrative focus upon the importance of faces?

His plan of campaign was beginning to be evident. He would use the baronet in order to convince the Stapletons that we were really gone, while we should actually return at the instant when we were likely to be needed.

The narrative is beginning to make sense as Holmes's plans become evident. As we have seen before, Holmes is instrumental in shaping the narrative even when he is absent; he is the creator of action, the structure of action.

💬 DISCUSSION POINT

How much of the story is provided by Holmes's actions?

'His wife!' she said again. 'His wife! He is not a married man.' Sherlock Holmes shrugged his shoulders. 'Prove it to me! Prove it to me! And if you can do so –!' The fierce flash of her eyes said more than any words. 'I have come prepared to do so,' said Holmes, drawing several papers from his pocket.

This illustrates the power of Stapleton's attraction. Laura Lyons is clearly distraught when she realises that she has

been led into a sham engagement to Stapleton; we learn without doubt that Stapleton was obviously very attractive to her. Doyle hints at the underlying sexual tension in the story with the phrase, *'The fierce flash of her eyes said more than any words.'*

💬 DISCUSSION POINT

Laura Lyons has a small but important role in the narrative. What is that role?

'Our case becomes rounded off, and difficulty after difficulty thins away in front of us,' said Holmes as we stood waiting for the arrival of the express from town. 'I shall soon be in the position of being able to put into a single connected narrative one of the most singular and sensational crimes of modern times. Students of criminology will remember the analogous incidents in Godno, in Little Russia, in the year '66, and of course there are the Anderson murders in North Carolina, but this case possesses some features which are entirely its own. Even now we have no clear case against this very wily man. But I shall be very much surprised if it is not clear enough before we go to bed this night.'

The London express came roaring into the station, and a small, wiry bulldog of a man had sprung from a first-class carriage. We all three shook hands, and I saw at once from the reverential way in which Lestrade gazed at my companion that he had learned a good deal since the days when they had first worked together. I could well remember the scorn which the theories of the reasoner used then to excite in the practical man.

'Anything good?' he asked.

'The biggest thing for years,' said Holmes. 'We have two hours before we need think of starting. I think we might employ it in getting some dinner and then, Lestrade, we will take the London fog out of your throat by giving you a breath of the pure night air of Dartmoor. Never been there? Ah, well, I don't suppose you will forget your first visit.'

The re-appearance of Lestrade is interesting because Holmes greets him so agreeably. In the earlier stories Holmes treated him as a bit of a clown, but here he is greeted warmly. We never really learn quite why he is in the story, because Holmes could have completed the case easily without him. However, there is a sense that Doyle is trying to move with the times: the era of the enlightened amateur detective is drawing to a close – even Holmes needs the moral and logistical support of the police.

DISCUSSION POINT

What is the role of the police in the story?

From Chapter XIV

A hound it was, an enormous coal-black hound, but not such a hound as mortal eyes have ever seen. Fire burst from its open mouth, its eyes glowed with a smouldering glare, its muzzle and hackles and dewlap were outlined in flickering flame. Never 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 which broke upon us out of the wall of fog.

With long bounds the huge black creature was leaping down the track, following hard upon the footsteps of our friend. So paralyzed were we by the apparition that we allowed him to pass before we had recovered our nerve. Then Holmes and I both fired together, and the creature gave a hideous howl, which showed that one at least had hit him. He did not pause, however, but bounded onward. Far away on the path we saw Sir Henry looking back, his face white in the moonlight, his hands raised in horror, glaring helplessly at the frightful thing which was hunting him down.

But that cry of pain from the hound had blown all our fears to the winds. If he was vulnerable he was mortal, and if we could wound him we could kill him. Never have I seen a man run as Holmes ran that night. I am reckoned fleet of foot, but he outpaced me as much as I outpaced the little professional. In

front of us as we flew up the track we heard scream after scream from Sir Henry and the deep roar of the hound. I was in time to see the beast spring upon its victim, hurl him to the ground, and worry at his throat. But the next instant Holmes had emptied five barrels of his revolver into the creature's flank. With a last howl of agony and a vicious snap in the air, it rolled upon its back, four feet pawing furiously, and then fell limp upon its side. I stooped, panting, and pressed my pistol to the dreadful, shimmering head, but it was useless to press the trigger. The giant hound was dead.

Sir Henry lay insensible where he had fallen. We tore away his collar, and Holmes breathed a prayer of gratitude when he saw that there was no sign of a wound and that the rescue had been in time. Already our friend's eyelids shivered and he made a feeble effort to move. Lestrade thrust his brandy-flask between the baronet's teeth, and two frightened eyes were looking up at us.

'My God!' he whispered. 'What was it? What, in heaven's name, was it?'

'It's dead, whatever it is,' said Holmes. 'We've laid the family ghost once and forever.'

In mere size and strength it was a terrible creature which was lying stretched before us. It was not a pure bloodhound and it was not a pure mastiff; but it appeared to be a combination of the two – gaunt, savage, and as large as a small lioness. Even now, in the stillness of death, the huge jaws seemed to be dripping with a bluish flame and the small, deep-set, cruel eyes were ringed with fire. I placed my hands upon the glowing muzzle, and as I held them up my own fingers smouldered and gleamed in the darkness.

'Phosphorus,' I said.

'A cunning preparation of it,' said Holmes, sniffing at the dead animal.

Doyle saves his best for last. This fabulous, expressive description of the hound and its phosphorus coating is full of verbal energy and menace, providing a fitting climax for the story. In many ways, the hound represents the 'unconscious', the savage heart of nature, a pure manifestation of desire. He is 'gaunt', clearly 'starved' to make him even more murderous.

💬 DISCUSSION POINT

What do you think of the presentation of the hound here?

The room had been fashioned into a small museum, and the walls were lined by a number of glass-topped cases full of that collection of butterflies and moths the formation of which had been the relaxation of this complex and dangerous man. In the centre of this room there was an upright beam, which had been placed at some period as a support for the old worm-eaten baulk of timber which spanned the roof. To this post a figure was tied, so swathed and muffled in the sheets which had been used to secure it that one could not for the moment tell whether it was that of a man or a woman. One towel passed round the throat and was secured at the back of the pillar. Another covered the lower part of the face, and over it two dark eyes – eyes full of grief and shame and a dreadful questioning – stared back at us. In a minute we had torn off the gag, unswathed the bonds, and Mrs. Stapleton sank upon the floor in front of us. As her beautiful head fell upon her chest I saw the clear red weal of a whiplash across her neck. ‘The brute!’ cried Holmes. ‘Here, Lestrade, your brandy-bottle! Put her in the chair! She has fainted from ill-usage and exhaustion.’

She opened her eyes again.

‘Is he safe?’ she asked. ‘Has he escaped?’

‘He cannot escape us, madam.’

‘No, no, I did not mean my husband. Sir Henry? Is he safe?’

‘Yes.’

‘And the hound?’

‘It is dead.’

She gave a long sigh of satisfaction.

‘Thank God! Thank God! Oh, this villain! See how he has treated me!’

It is fascinating to see the contradiction between the Stapleton who we encounter in conversations – the

erudite, rational, questioning, quick-witted man – and his actions. We have witnessed the way he has trained the hound to be so murderous, and now we discover how he has imprisoned his wife as if she were one of the butterflies in his museum, bound and trussed to the pillar. Doyle hints at the man’s sexual savagery here.

💬 DISCUSSION POINT

What is the effect of Doyle’s description of Mrs Stapleton’s imprisonment?

On the morning after the death of the hound the fog had lifted and we were guided by Mrs. Stapleton to the point where they had found a pathway through the bog. It helped us to realize the horror of this woman’s life when we saw the eagerness and joy with which she laid us on her husband’s track. We left her standing upon the thin peninsula of firm, peaty soil which tapered out into the widespread bog. From the end of it a small wand planted here and there showed where the path zigzagged from tuft to tuft of rushes among those green-scummed pits and foul quagmires which barred the way to the stranger. Rank reeds and lush, slimy water-plants sent an odour of decay and a heavy miasmatic vapour onto our faces, while a false step plunged us more than once thigh-deep into the dark, quivering mire, which shook for yards in soft undulations around our feet. Its tenacious grip plucked at our heels as we walked, and when we sank into it it was as if some malignant hand was tugging us down into those obscene depths, so grim and purposeful was the clutch in which it held us. Once only we saw a trace that someone had passed that perilous way before us. From amid a tuft of cotton grass which bore it up out of the slime some dark thing was projecting. Holmes sank to his waist as he stepped from the path to seize it, and had we not been there to drag him out he could never have set his foot upon firm land again. He held

an old black boot in the air. 'Meyers, Toronto,' was printed on the leather inside.

'It is worth a mud bath,' said he. 'It is our friend Sir Henry's missing boot.'

'Thrown there by Stapleton in his flight.'

'Exactly. He retained it in his hand after using it to set the hound upon the track. He fled when he knew the game was up, still clutching it. And he hurled it away at this point of his flight. We know at least that he came so far in safety.'

But more than that we were never destined to know, though there was much which we might surmise. There was no chance of finding footsteps in the mire, for the rising mud oozed swiftly in upon them, but as we at last reached firmer ground beyond the morass we all looked eagerly for them. But no slightest sign of them ever met our eyes. If the earth told a true story, then Stapleton never reached that island of refuge towards which he struggled through the fog upon that last night. Somewhere in the heart of the great Grimpen Mire, down in the foul slime of the huge morass which had sucked him in, this cold and cruel-hearted man is forever buried.

Stapleton's apparent death in the mire is a fitting end for him; disappearing into the murky heart of Dartmoor, swallowed by the earth itself, the land that claimed so much of him.

DISCUSSION POINT

What do you think of this death scene? Why does Doyle leave it unclear as to whether or not Stapleton has died?

From Chapter XV

It was the end of November and Holmes and I sat, upon a raw and foggy night, on either side of a blazing fire in our sitting-room in Baker Street. Since the tragic upshot of our visit to Devonshire he had been engaged in two affairs of the utmost importance, in the first of which he had exposed the atrocious conduct of Colonel Upwood in connection with the famous

card scandal of the Nonpareil Club, while in the second he had defended the unfortunate Mme. Montpensier from the charge of murder which hung over her in connection with the death of her step-daughter, Mlle. Carere, the young lady who, as it will be remembered, was found six months later alive and married in New York. My friend was in excellent spirits over the success which had attended a succession of difficult and important cases, so that I was able to induce him to discuss the details of the Baskerville mystery. I had waited patiently for the opportunity, for I was aware that he would never permit cases to overlap, and that his clear and logical mind would not be drawn from its present work to dwell upon memories of the past. Sir Henry and Dr. Mortimer were, however, in London, on their way to that long voyage which had been recommended for the restoration of his shattered nerves. They had called upon us that very afternoon, so that it was natural that the subject should come up for discussion.

'The whole course of events,' said Holmes, 'from the point of view of the man who called himself Stapleton was simple and direct, although to us, who had no means in the beginning of knowing the motives of his actions and could only learn part of the facts, it all appeared exceedingly complex. I have had the advantage of two conversations with Mrs. Stapleton, and the case has now been so entirely cleared up that I am not aware that there is anything which has remained a secret to us. You will find a few notes upon the matter under the heading B in my indexed list of cases.'

'Perhaps you would kindly give me a sketch of the course of events from memory.'

'Certainly, though I cannot guarantee that I carry all the facts in my mind. Intense mental concentration has a curious way of blotting out what has passed. The barrister who has his case at his fingers' ends, and is able to argue with an expert upon his own subject finds that a week or two of the courts will drive it all out of his head once more. So each of my cases displaces the last, and Mlle. Carere has blurred my recollection of Baskerville Hall. To-morrow some other little problem may be submitted to my notice which will in turn dispossess the fair French lady and the infamous Upwood. So far as the case of the Hound goes, however, I will give you the course of events as nearly as I can, and you will suggest anything which I may have forgotten.'

'My inquiries show beyond all question that the family portrait did not lie, and that this fellow was indeed a Baskerville. He was a son of that Rodger Baskerville, the younger brother of Sir Charles, who fled with a sinister reputation to South America, where he was said to have died unmarried. He did, as a matter of fact, marry, and had one child, this fellow, whose real name is the same as his father's. He married Beryl Garcia, one of the beauties of Costa Rica, and, having purloined a considerable sum of public money, he changed his name to Vandeleur and he fled to England, where he established a school in the east of Yorkshire. His reason for attempting this special line of business was that he had struck up an acquaintance with a consumptive tutor upon the voyage home, and that he had used this man's ability to make the undertaking a success. Fraser, the tutor, died however, and the school which had begun well sank from disrepute into infamy. The Vandeleurs found it convenient to change their name to Stapleton, and he brought the remains of his fortune, his schemes for the future, and his taste for entomology to the south of England.

Holmes now becomes the master of the narrative, summarising the key points, explaining the history of Stapleton; notice how Stapleton is presented as being from an exotic heritage, and how his wife recalls shades of Bertha Mason in *Jane Eyre*. The important point here is that Doyle offers us closure with Holmes's summary of the events and causes. All loose ends are tied up. In such an ambiguous drama as this, the summary has the effect of comforting the reader that all is right with the world, that everything is under control.

DISCUSSION POINT

At this point, is Holmes's summary of events comforting at the end of this story?



'By the time that you discovered me upon the moor I had a complete knowledge of the whole business, but I had not a case which could go to a jury. Even Stapleton's attempt upon Sir Henry that night which ended in the death of the unfortunate convict did not help us much in proving murder against our man. There seemed to be no alternative but to catch him red-handed, and to do so we had to use Sir Henry, alone and apparently unprotected, as a bait. We did so, and at the cost of a severe shock to our client we succeeded in completing our case and driving Stapleton to his destruction. That Sir Henry should have been exposed to this is, I must confess, a reproach to my management of the case, but we had no means of foreseeing the terrible and paralyzing spectacle which the beast presented, nor could we predict the fog which enabled him to burst upon us at such short notice. We succeeded in our object at a cost which both the specialist and Dr. Mortimer assure me will be a temporary one. A long journey may enable our friend to recover not only from his shattered nerves but also from his wounded feelings. His love for the lady was deep and sincere, and to him the saddest part of all this black business was that he should have been deceived by her.

'It only remains to indicate the part which she had played throughout. There can be no doubt that Stapleton exercised an influence over her which may have been love or may have been fear, or very possibly both, since they are by no means incompatible emotions. It was, at least, absolutely effective. At his command she consented to pass as his sister, though he found the limits of his power over her when he endeavoured to make her the direct accessory to murder. She was ready to warn Sir Henry so far as she could without implicating her husband, and again and again she tried to do so. Stapleton himself seems to have been capable of jealousy, and when he saw the baronet paying court to the lady, even though it was part of his own plan, still he could not help interrupting with a passionate outburst which revealed the fiery soul which his self-contained manner so cleverly concealed. By encouraging the intimacy he made it certain that Sir Henry would frequently come to Merripit House and that he would sooner or later get the opportunity which he desired. On the day of the crisis, however, his wife turned suddenly against him. She had learned something of the death of the convict, and she

knew that the hound was being kept in the out-house on the evening that Sir Henry was coming to dinner. She taxed her husband with his intended crime, and a furious scene followed, in which he showed her for the first time that she had a rival in his love. Her fidelity turned in an instant to bitter hatred and he saw that she would betray him. He tied her up, therefore, that she might have no chance of warning Sir Henry, and he hoped, no doubt, that when the whole countryside put down the baronet's death to the curse of his family, as they certainly would do, he could win his wife back to accept an accomplished fact and to keep silent upon what she knew. In this I fancy that in any case he made a miscalculation, and that, if we had not been there, his doom would none the less have been sealed. A woman of Spanish blood does not condone such an injury so lightly. And now, my dear Watson, without referring to my notes, I cannot give you a more detailed account of this curious case. I do not know that anything essential has been left unexplained.'

'He could not hope to frighten Sir Henry to death as he had done the old uncle with his bogie hound.'

'The beast was savage and half-starved. If its appearance did not frighten its victim to death, at least it would paralyze the resistance which might be offered.'

'No doubt. There only remains one difficulty. If Stapleton came into the succession, how could he explain the fact that he, the heir, had been living unannounced under another name so close to the property? How could he claim it without causing suspicion and inquiry?'

'It is a formidable difficulty, and I fear that you ask too much when you expect me to solve it. The past and the present are within the field of my inquiry, but what a man may do in the future is a hard question to answer. Mrs. Stapleton has heard her husband discuss the problem on several occasions. There were three possible courses. He might claim the property from South America, establish his identity before the British authorities there and so obtain the fortune without ever coming to England at all; or he might adopt an elaborate disguise during the short time that he needed to be in London; or, again, he might furnish an accomplice with the proofs and papers, putting him in as heir, and retaining a claim upon some proportion of his income. We cannot doubt from what we know of him that he would have found some way out of the

difficulty. And now, my dear Watson, we have had some weeks of severe work, and for one evening, I think, we may turn our thoughts into more pleasant channels. I have a box for 'Les Huguenots.' Have you heard the De Reszkes? Might I trouble you then to be ready in half an hour, and we can stop at Marcini's for a little dinner on the way?'

However, the story closes on a dark note: 'the terrible and paralyzing spectacle which the beast presented' and 'the fog', and perhaps even more pertinently, Holmes's 'reproach' to his 'management' of the case. The mood is sombre. Even the closing line of Holmes's invitation 'for a little dinner' can't alleviate the sense that things very nearly ran out of control, that the case has weakened Holmes and possibly destroyed Sir Henry, who we learn has to be treated for his nervous reaction to the events. There is a sense of shock. The new century looms, the Victorian era is drawing to a close. The certainties of the earlier Sherlock Holmes stories have been replaced by the uncertainties of this one. Holmes is now living in a world where 'proof' before a jury is required, where brilliant detection is not enough. Entrapment is what is required.

DISCUSSION POINT

Why does Doyle end on this sombre note?

Glossary

Characterisation A literary term which encapsulates why and how an author presents a character through the use of dialogue, description, contrast to other characters

Dolichocephalic Long-headed

Dyspnoea Laboured breathing due to inadequate action of the heart

Genre Type of text

Imagery The poetical devices a writer uses such as metaphors, similes, personification

Litigious Prone to settle matters in the law courts

Metaphor A comparison which does not use 'like' or 'as'

Narrative A story

Presentation A literary term that encapsulates the way an author presents a character, issue, idea, or image

Supra-orbital development A disproportionate amount of skull about the eye

Symbol An object or thing that represents a larger concept or idea

Rapacious Grasping, greedy

Theme A dominant idea in a text

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