Forming and Protecting the Middle-Class Victorian Ideal: Holmes and Watson

Honors Project

In fulfillment of the Requirements for

The University Honors College

The University of North Carolina at Pembroke

By

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English, Theater and Languages

May 2, 2008

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Abstract

A critical literary evaluation of Sherlock Holmes, John Watson, and middle-class Victorian culture, this essay seeks to connect Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's detective fiction to the ideology of the Victorian middle classes. This study focuses on the ideological mindset of the Victorian middle classes and how a conflicted notion of the ideal often lead to values that were highly praised but rarely put into practice. This essay argues that, together, Sherlock Holmes and John Watson form and protect the ideals of the Victorian middle classes. Where one may fail, the other succeeds in maintaining values and stability. Holmes uses middle-class Victorian ideology to formulate his deductions and Watson creates a vital link between Holmes' eccentricities and the middle-class reader. It is for this reason that the connection between the middle-class Victorian audience and the stories' characters is so strong.

Forming and Protecting the Middle-Class Victorian Ideal: Holmes and Watson

Modern society has transformed Sherlock Holmes into quite an icon. Pictured best by today's audience as a detective of seemingly unlimited intelligence with a pipe, plaid coat, and loyal sidekick, Holmes' persona has become more or less representative of an individual whose intellect places him in a position above the rest of humanity. There is something about him more grandiose than the common man, something more to Sherlock than just an entertaining story. Regardless of how larger-than-life Holmes may appear today, for the Victorian middle classes a strong connection was developed between the audience and the characters of the stories, a bond even more profound than what readers may experience today.

When the Holmes stories first appeared in *The Strand* magazine, their popularity was astounding. An author who had at one time found it difficult to get magazines to publish his fiction, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle now found himself begged by the publishers of *The Strand* magazine for more stories related to his detective (Stashower 122). Though Doyle considered Sherlock Holmes to be the lesser of his fictitious creations, viewing historical fiction such as The White Company to be the greatest of his achievements, the Victorian people were in love with Holmes and fought with Doyle to keep the character alive (Stashower 110). Holmes' overwhelming popularity prompted Doyle to continue the stories for a second series, but after another string of tales Doyle resolved to kill off his detective. The stories were such a sensation that when Doyle tired of Holmes and decided to end his life in December 1893, Doyle received multitudes of heated letters, shaming the author for deciding to end such a beloved character (Stashower 149).

Holmes' death in *The Final Problem* provoked twenty thousand people to cancel their subscriptions to *The Strand* magazine (Stashower 149). What would create such a strong

attachment that the detective's demise would incite such a great mass of people to cast aside *The Strand*? As Stephen Knight suggests, "to become a best-seller like that a writer of crime stories has to embody in the detective a set of values which the audience finds convincing [...]" (368). Knight claims that Doyle created a detective who was "convincing" to the reader, but what was the "set of values" that created such a strong bond? What is known is that Doyle's detective stories had a huge following; difficult to pinpoint is an exact value system that the middle classes adhered to. This difficulty arises because, as Mary Poovey suggests in Uneven Developments, "the middle-class ideology we most often associate with the Victorian period was both contested and always under construction; because it was always in the making, it was always open to revision, dispute, and the emergence of oppositional formulations" (3). On the surface, the Victorian period seems to be an era that valued scientific discovery, fostered great progression, and upheld gentlemanly values, but when middle-class Victorian ideology is closely scrutinized, the continual development and "construction" that Poovey discusses becomes apparent. The issue is not that the middle classes failed to have a set of values, but that there was a stark contrast between the values that were idealized and those that were realistically put into practice. As the ideal was "always under construction", the Victorian middle classes were unable to make their ideals a reality; they were unable to put into practice the values they praised because the society was in a constant state of change.

The ideological base of the middle classes is extremely complex in multiple attributes, but perhaps the most definite opposition reveals itself in that the scientific discovery and intellect so highly idealized in Victorian middle-class society also cultivated doubt and anxiety. Perhaps the most prominent force to create anxiety within middle-class society was the conflict played out between scientific discovery and Christian tradition. T.W. Heyck points out that "one need

only think of the great impact of Darwin's theory of evolution, the struggle between science and theology and the growing acceptance of science's claims to jurisdiction in almost all the realms of human understanding to recognize the influence of scientific thought on Victorian ideas" (81). Darwin's theory created a conflict that is still played out today, but for the Victorians it was an immense shock to a world where the Christian God was placed in the center. Darwin's theory challenged the idea that human beings were superior to all other forms of life. His ideas suggesting that man was not a special, superior creation of God, intended to dominate all other life, but that humans were merely the most advanced beings due to chance. The idea that man was just a variation of all other animal life shocked and dislodged a populace immersed in a belief system that dictated that man was independent from the rest of creation. For man to be essentially just another type of animal meant that man must share animal characteristics, an idea that many were unable to accept. Scientific discovery forced Victorians to face new evidence that contradicted a belief system that was comfortable and secure.

Doubt is a powerful as well as painful thing, but science was not the only factor creating doubt in the minds of educated believers. Heyck further explains that "an ethical reaction to certain doctrines of orthodox Christianity; an increasing awareness and acceptance of historical criticism of the scriptures; and the assimilation of the assertions of natural science about the origins and nature of the world and man's place in it" (83) all contributed to the Victorians' questioning of religious doctrines. Though these other factors that fostered religious doubt in the educated community were of a more ethical and factual nature, they were indirectly linked to new scientific theory. Had science not been so highly valued in the society it would not have played so great a role. Though there were increasing doubts concerning Christianity, there was still a strong Evangelical presence that sought to preserve the Christian tradition. For a society

so engrossed with scientific discovery and progression there was still an underlying fear of the total rejection of the Christian principle that man was a special creation of God, independent from the rest of the animal world. The fear of change prompted some to become anti-intellectuals. Walter Houghton discusses "the frightened reaction which was bound to accompany the outburst of radical thinking. When the foundations of religious and political life were being shaken by new ideas, and Church and State seemed often in peril, the average citizen turned anti-intellectual out of sheer panic" (127). A society that idealized the intellectual and claimed to support new invention and discovery often found what was discovered threatened a secure existence. Radical thinking forced the middle classes to begin to reshape their views on both science and theology, forcing them to grapple with doubt and insecurity.

If the battle between science and theology wasn't enough, the Victorians also faced conflict in their ideas concerning women. Considered in earlier eras to be creatures of seduction and immorality in need of male control, ideas on women's roles changed considerably in the Victorian era. Now women were considered to be the people to "provide [their] famil[ies] with an uplifting refuge from the moral squalor of the working world" (Henderson 1020). The idea of woman had progressed from one of immoral nature to one of heightened morality within the home. The notion that predominated the time period was that men and women were born with an innate role and purpose. For Victorians, women "were not self-interested and aggressive like men, but self-sacrificing and tender" (Poovey 7). Under the belief that women were instinctively maternal and compassionate, they were placed as the focal point of the home, their role to spread morality and virtue to their husbands and children. This stated, motherly nature did not rule out a woman's capacity for immoral action. It was only in the domestic realm that women could realize their potential for spreading morality on to their family. With this view in mind, any

attempt for women to find a place for themselves outside of the domestic sphere was viewed as something unnatural to be feared. For a woman to desire to occupy a role outside of the home was in contradiction of her innate role as mother.

Due to this conflicting view, progression, though it did occur, was a slow and gradual process. Though the ideal of the middle classes was for women to stay in the home, the reality of the middle to late 1800's saw many reform bills passed that fostered female independence. In 1857 The Divorce and Matrimonial Causes Act was the beginning of London's civil divorce court; the drawback was that few women could actually afford the cost (Henderson 1021). More reforms would follow, such as The Married Women's Property Acts in 1870 and 1882 that gave women the right to the property they possessed before marriage as well as any income they received afterwards. The first colleges for women were also opened (Henderson 1021). Regardless of the reforms that came in the Victorian era, women were still cast as having innate roles that they were expected to uphold. For women to desire independence meant that they were not always "self-sacrificing and tender" as Poovey states, but that they wished to inhabit a typical male role, one that was "self-interested".

The reforms mentioned above all came in conflict with the domestic ideal that the middle classes clung to. There was the desire to be progressive, but not too much, too quickly. The question of a woman's place in society created new waves of anxiety and conflicted with other middle-class values that were centered on ideal home life. As women served, ideologically speaking, as moral leaders to their husbands, the virtue of married males was directly tied to the state of the home (Poovey 10). The prospect of middle-class women leaving the home to earn a wage clashed with the ideal in the first place. The ability for them to then keep their earnings

was a blatant disregard for the ideal as it implied that women could serve themselves not only the home.

The Victorian era was a time of so much reform partially because of the doctrine of work Thomas Carlyle espoused. In the first chapter of Chartism, he discusses the need for Victorians to stop discussing reform and to start putting it into action (Kauvar 123). "Work, for Carlyle, is a 'purifying fire, wherein all poison is burnt up, and of sour smoke itself there is made bright blessed flame'" (Keep 211). With this in mind, Victorians came to value work as an expression of virtue with work bringing out the best in people. "It was, of course, the means by which some of the central ambitions of a commercial society could be realized: money, respectability, and success. But it also became an end in itself, a virtue in its own right" (Houghton 243). Money, success and respectability were all things which work would, in theory, provide middle-class men. Work came to be considered a virtue because it was believed to produce virtuous men, men who were wealthy, successful, and respectable.

Not only did the middle classes value work as a "purifying" force, they also viewed work as a method for personal advancement. Walter Houghton further points out that "in the middle classes the passion for wealth was closely connected with another, for respectability" (184). Given this view, it would seem that respectability would be exactly equal to wealth, the wealthier the more respectable. This notion fails to be the case. Not only did one have to be wealthy, a man must also be a gentleman to be considered respectable (Houghton 185). "The concept of the gentleman was not merely a social or class designation. There was also a moral component inherent in the concept which made it a difficult and an ambiguous thing for the Victorians themselves to attempt to define" (Cody). Though wealth is something that can be quantified, the "moral component" that was required to be considered gentlemanly was reliant on the perception

of others. Social status tied in directly with this perception. Regardless of how difficult it may have been for the Victorian middle classes to identify the exact qualities of a gentleman and put them into practice, the image of what a gentleman should represent was something that was greatly valued. A gentleman should be dedicated to his family, should be hard working, should be law abiding, honest, and should, above all, be respectable.

As Mary Poovey made clear in Uneven Developments the ideology of the middle classes was in a constant state of change and revision. In discussing the ideology of such a vast group of people it is important to understand that middle-class Victorians may have had a collective ideal, but this ideal was not always, perhaps even rarely, the reality due to the nature of a transitioning ideological framework.

> Nothing characterizes Victorian society so much as its quest for self-definition. The sixty-three years of Victoria's reign were marked by momentous and intimidating social changes, startling inventions, prodigious energies; the rapid succession of events produced wild prosperity and unthinkable poverty, humane reforms and flagrant exploitation, immense ambitions and devastating doubts. (Henderson 1009)

In short, this was a group of people who seemed to want it all. They valued science, yet were forced to deal with the doubt it cast on Christian theology. They valued the idea of woman as the moral center of the home, yet the middle to late 1800's saw drastic movements toward female independence that would create further social unrest (Henderson). They sought to follow a doctrine that espoused the benefits of hard work, hoping that work would yield great wealth as well as virtuous mindsets, yet men had to face the fact that respectability required more than monetary acquisition.

With so much transition, progression, and conflicted feeling, it is no wonder that the connection between the characters of the Holmes fiction and the middle-class readers of the stories ran so deep. In his constant correctness, there is predictability in Sherlock Holmes' deductions. Both he and Watson provide stability in their combined virtue. The middle classes bonded with these characters because they provided a stability that their forever-changing reality could not. In a society conflicted with a sense of doubt, a lack of stability, and a conflicted set of values, the Holmes stories were profound in that Doyle's detective fiction upheld ideals that people of the middle classes could agree to admire.

Combined, Doyle's creations, Sherlock Holmes and John Watson, form a representational ideal for middle-class Victorian culture. Together, they are able to serve as a model for the middle-class gentleman Victorians themselves had so much trouble defining. As a society that was characteristically conflicted, the opposing viewpoints and lifestyles of these two characters appealed to the multiple sets of values held by the middle classes. They embody Victorian ideology through their thoughts and actions in relation to the issues of the time period. Not only do they come to represent the ideals and successes of middle-class Victorian culture, they also portray the failures of that ideology as well.

Before it can be postulated that Holmes and Watson are together representational of their respective society, it is necessary to determine whether Holmes functions within Victorian society or not. Throughout the stories there are many descriptions of Holmes that convey a sense of otherness about him, being part of a world outside of Victorian ideology. His animal-like qualities, his link to bohemianism, and his estrangement from society are all features that appear to place him outside of the Victorian middle-class social structure.

As a people who valued progression so highly, the Victorians considered themselves to be greatest of civilized culture. To have any quality associated with a culture outside of the Victorian society would be considered less civil. Holmes' description as having animal-like qualities places him in association with the uncivilized notion of the Orient. In *The Boscombe Valley Mystery* Watson describes the sudden change in Holmes' demeanor when he picks up on a vital clue. Watson says:

> Sherlock Holmes was transformed [...] His face flushed and darkened. His brows were drawn into two hard black lines, while his eyes shone out from beneath then with a steely glitter. His face was bent downward, his shoulders bowed, his lips compressed, and the veins stood out like whipcord in his long, sinewy neck. His nostrils seemed to dilate with a purely animal lust for the chase [...] a question or remark fell unheeded upon his ears, or, at the most, only provoked a quick, impatient snarl in reply (Doyle 250).

In referring to Holmes as "transformed", Watson implies a change from civilized awareness to primal instinct. In this passage, Holmes changes his appearance, movement, and communication to something more animal-like than human. As criminal action was generally equated with a lack of a civilized demeanor, Holmes must become an animal in order to catch one. These animal-like qualities further connect Holmes to a lifestyle outside of the sophisticated norm. The quality also relates him to Darwin's theory that challenged the belief that man was a superior creation outside the animal world. For Holmes to have animal-like characteristics is to imply that he is something more primal that a civilized society should accept.

Watson discusses Holmes' animal transformation, but he also often refers to Holmes as bohemian. In *A Scandal in Bohemia* Watson informs the reader early on that Sherlock Holmes

"loathed every form of society with his whole Bohemian soul" (Doyle 187). Describing Holmes as bohemian refers to an individual who is socially unconventional. This seems to be a fair observation of Holmes. He functions well within his society when he wants to, yet he is a unique entity from normal habits. He makes his profession even more unconventional than it already is by working separately from the London police force and conducting his investigations under his own terms. Holmes is also unmarried and never reveals any desire to be, a fact that separates him from the social importance placed on family life. Most striking is Holmes desire not to socialize when he can do it so well. He often has the inclination to withdraw from society all together.

In *The Greek Interpreter* Holmes accentuates his comfort in removing himself from society when he takes Watson to meet his brother Mycroft at the Diogenes Club. Mycroft himself was one of the club's founders. The Diogenes Club functions as a haven for those who wish not to interact with others. Verbal communication between the individuals in the club is not "under any circumstances, allowed" (Doyle 518-519). Holmes also informs Watson that "no member is permitted to take the least notice of any other one" (Doyle 518) and that he finds the club to be "a very soothing atmosphere" (Doyle 519). The fact that Holmes is so comfortable in a location where he can talk to no other person or be acknowledged by any other person speaks greatly of his desire for isolation.

Though Holmes may make several attempts to withdraw and isolate himself from society, he is unable to deny that he is a part of it. While Holmes' otherness would seem to isolate readers from his personality it draws them closer instead. There is something unique and mysterious about his persona that makes the reader want to know more about him. Holmes has qualities that mark him as other, yet it is interesting that there is still the strong connection with

the Victorian middle-class "set of values" that Stephen Knight alludes to. This is partially due to the fact that while Sherlock Holmes is described as having the qualities that would constitute otherness, he is more often juxtaposed to characters that are more obviously uncivilized in their otherness. This contrast sets Holmes apart as a Victorian gentleman. In *A Scandal in Bohemia*, the same story in which Watson describes Holmes as having a "Bohemian soul" (Doyle 187), Holmes' actions and mannerisms stand in stark contrast to those of the King of Bohemia. The King of Bohemia is a person both physically and socially from outside of the Victorian way of life. The King "sprang from his chair and paced up and down the room in uncontrollable agitation. Then, with a gesture of desperation, he tore the mask from his face and hurled it upon the ground" (Doyle 192). This type of uncontrolled emotion denotes a person who is uncivilized in a progressive, tamed world. The King is a slave to his emotional state rather than the master of his thoughts and actions as Holmes is. Holmes has anything but uncontrolled emotions. In fact, Watson often considers the possibility that, outside of that which he shows for the cases he solves, he has no emotion at all. Controlled emotion and rationality were values that the Victorians admired in Holmes' personality, as they were closely associated with gentlemanly behavior. Even when he is "transformed" in *The Boscombe Valley Mystery*, Holmes is still a rational being; he is able to channel and control his energy, emotion, and instinct in such a way that will allow him to solve the mystery.

In a comparison similar to the King of Bohemia, Holmes is starkly contrasted against the crazed and enraged Dr. Roylott in *The Adventure of the Speckled Band.* In this case, Holmes is cast as a calm and rational savior figure for the terrified Helen Stoner. "In conjunction with his contradictory class location, Roylott's links to the Orient encode him with multiple semes for otherness in over-determined opposition to the western, rational, middle-class Holmes"

(Hennessy 392). Holmes and Roylott are obviously on opposite ends of the spectrum in this story, but Holmes has an "otherness" as well. Roylott is characterized as having a distasteful sense of otherness. He is not only portrayed as animal-like in his uncontrolled fits of rage, but he willingly lives amongst exotic animals, a cheetah and a baboon. His close proximity to these animals implies a sense of similarity between them. Where other stories would have Holmes' separation from the Victorians realized, the difference between he and Roylott rests in the fact that Holmes is able to become a part of society when he wants to; Roylott will always be separate. Holmes steps into the role of Helen's protector, acting out his gentlemanly duty as savior from a stepfather so removed from civilized society that he is willing to sacrifice his stepdaughters for monetary gain. In this instance, as in *A Scandal in Bohemia*, Holmes is most definitely characterized as a Victorian gentleman rather than an outsider.

Sherlock Holmes is most definitely a man straddling the fence. Though he is described as having a sense of otherness in some stories, he is characterized more often as a Victorian hero. He is continually trying to remove himself from a society of which he is a part and shares values with. He is unable to truly be outside of society because he acts and lives within a framework of conventional Victorian rules and practices. Watson claims that Holmes "loathe[s] every form of society" (Doyle 187), yet his actions contradict that. If Holmes truly hated Victorian middle-class society, he wouldn't have the desire that he does to protect the culture's values. Actions that would be considered unacceptable from the Victorian middle-class standpoint are viewed as such by Holmes as well. This is especially true where Holmes is placed in comparison to characters such as Dr. Roylott. The crimes in early Holmes stories are based on crimes of middle-class morality, crimes that upset the norms and values of Victorian society (Knight 370).

Often money is a major conflict in these stories as it was integral part of middle-class life, but it also was considered as having the possibility to corrupt.

A duty to uphold societal expectations is honored in Holmes' worldview, but he is also able to switch between this duty and his otherness.

> Holmes' fluctuations from langorous musicianship to blood-hound like energy [...] imply a protean ability to hold disparate aspects of experience in easy connection with each other: to that extent it is like the power of disguise which he exploits in other stories. And again, as with his antagonists here and elsewhere, it is precisely this *doubleness* which constitutes "his singular character" (Priestman 319).

Holmes has some of the same features as the antagonists he confronts; yet he has a duality about him that allowed the middle-class audience to claim him as a person whose values they could admire. Holmes can move in and out of his society with a relative ease that makes it possible for him to connect with those readers who considered themselves to fit the ideal as well as those readers who did not. Because of his "doubleness" Holmes is able to function well within his culture, but he can also choose to isolate himself from it as well. Not only does his duality allow him to connect to a greater audience, the nature of Holmes' detective work forces him to embody both of these aspects in order successfully complete an investigation. He must use his intelligence and rationality, both traits admired by the middle classes, in order to assess the situation he is presented with, but he must also use his otherness to step outside of society and observe how the society works in order to come to the problem's solution. In doing this he is able to put together the puzzle that has been presented to him and he is able to do so by relying on middle-class ideological assumptions.

It is important to determine Holmes' relationship in terms of his societal connections first as the correctness of his deductions are so greatly dependent upon the assumed infallibility of middle-class Victorian stereotypes, expectations, and assumptions. "Wherever [his] deductions touch on matters of social relationship there are always some very large-scale assumptions about unbreakable social rules implicit in them" (Priestman 320). As Priestman suggests, for the deductions of Sherlock Holmes to continually be accurate, ideological assumptions regarding individual relationships in his society must always hold true. The ideal must always be a reality for Holmes to be able to count on its validity so often. It is this presumption that connects Holmes most securely to a culture that he initially appears to be so separate from.

In *The Red-Headed League*, Holmes is able to divulge who true culprit of the story is because of overarching class distinctions and the assumed relationship between class and intellect. Watson establishes the stereotype first when he first describes Mr. Wilson. He says, "Our visitor bore every mark of being an average commonplace British tradesman, obese, pompous, and slow" (Doyle 207). The assumption that tradesmen were overweight, arrogant, and unintelligent is a very specific stereotype, but Holmes does not disagree with Watson. Because Mr. Wilson fits so nicely in middle-class society's view of a tradesman, he can be duped by the façade of a Red-Headed League. Vincent Spaulding is revealed to be John Clay, a notorious crook, primarily because, as an assistant, he does not fit the Victorian stereotype. Holmes is able to figure out who the culprit is not because he has a great number of facts to go on but because the people in the story do or do not fit their stereotypical role. In Holmes eyes, Spaulding cannot be an assistant because he is too intelligent for the tradesman position. After a brief meeting with Spaulding, Holmes tells Watson: "Smart fellow [...] He is, in my judgment, the fourth smartest man in London, and for daring I am not sure that he has not a claim to be

third. I have known something of him before" (Doyle 216). This statement should stand out to Watson as Holmes has already alluded to the fact that he knows Spaulding to be more than what he seems, but Holmes has not figured out the actual crime. He knows that Spaulding is the criminal, but he has not yet concluded what the man has done. Spaulding must be more than what he appears; a man of his intelligence must have some other reason for working with Mr. Wilson. It is in this manner that Holmes uses assumption to arrive at the correct conclusion, that Vincent Spaulding is in fact John Clay and has duped Mr. Wilson for financial gain. Had Vincent Spaulding really been all that he claimed to Mr. Wilson, Holmes would have had no clue to go on, no where to begin his search for answers.

In *The Adventure of the Blue Carbuncle* Holmes demonstrates his superior deductive methods to Watson by drawing the conclusion, from observing a hat, that the owner's wife has stopped loving him. "The most striking fact [...] is proved by collating the hat's singularly unbrushed state with collateral general evidence of marriage" (Priestman 320). As Priestman observes, Holmes is able to formulate his conclusions by drawing on the middle-class ideal of marriage as well as the function, the duty, of a loving wife toward a husband. As it is assumed that it is a woman's instinctive calling to always exact careful attention and care on those they love, Holmes equates an "unbrushed" hat to proof that there is no affection between the husband and wife. If the wife really loved the husband, he would be at the center of her world and his hat, therefore, would always be tidy. Holmes says to Watson, "Here is my lens. You know my methods" (Doyle 293). Holmes "lens" is the ideology of middle-class Victorians like himself. Everything he sees must work in positive relation to that ideology for Holmes' deductions to ring true.

His ideologically based deductions do not end at class and marital assumptions. In *A Case of Identity*, Holmes also uses Victorian assumptions regarding women as a framework for deducing what has happened to his female client, Miss Mary Sutherland. Before she even arrives at Baker Street to relate her case to Holmes, he evaluates her demeanor as he observes her through the window. After observing the fact that "her body oscillated back ward and forward", he explains to Watson what has happened to her.

> This is one of my clients, or I am much mistaken. [...] I have seen those symptoms before. Oscillation upon the pavement always means an affaire de coeur [love affair]. She would like advice, but is not sure that the matter is not too delicate for communication. [...] When a woman has been seriously wronged by a man she no longer oscillates, and the usual symptom is a broken bell wire. Here we may take it that there is a love matter, but that the maiden is not so much angry as perplexed, or grieved (Doyle 226-227).

Here Holmes delves deep into gender absolutes. According to his ideology, *all* women will show their emotions physically because they have the same innate nature. This pattern of "symptoms" which Holmes has seen before is so predictable to him because it is a set of actions uniquely correlated with the ideal of woman. This gender stereotype radiates from the assumption that women are far less stoic than men, unable to control or hide their emotional state. Holmes observes that Miss Sutherland is not angry because she is able to control her emotion just enough not to break the Baker Street bell wire. An angry, wronged woman would not have the emotional control to avoid this type of action.

The ideological "lens" with which Holmes uses to give meaning to seemingly arbitrary facts works well for him as Holmes has only really failed once, when faced with a character that

acted outside of middle-class Victorian conventions and norms. Only Irene Adler in *A Scandal in Bohemia* is able to defeat the otherwise considered infallible Holmes. Adler not only outwits Holmes by breaking out of the societal ideology that he uses to formulate his conclusions, she forces him to consider other alternatives. In outwitting Holmes, a feat that no other man or woman is able to achieve throughout the stories, Adler functions as his ultimate foil, a woman who beat a man at his own game.

Adler fails to fit the middle-class Victorian stereotype of woman, making her an entity that is both bohemian and unpredictable. As she acts outside of his realm of deduction, Holmes is unable to accurately predict her every move. Initially aloof and unconcerned with the King of Bohemia's problem, Holmes believes that the acquisition of the scandalous photograph will be a simple matter as he is up against a simple creature, a woman. Acting on the notion that women are compassionate beings, Holmes disguises himself and pretends to be injured in order to gain admittance into Adler's home. His plan to uncover where she keeps her precious photograph is a success, but he fails because he never considers the possibility that she might figure out what he is doing. In this case, Holmes' use of the ideological base, that a woman is always beneath a man's intelligence level, to formulate his conclusions has been his undoing.

It is not only the fact that Holmes devises his deductions by relying on the assumed ideal that creates a strong connection to Victorian values, but it is also that he acts as a watchdog and protector of middle-class stability. "Broadly speaking, [the crimes] deal with disorders in the respectable bourgeois family. There are various threats to established middle-class order, but they come from within the family and the class, not from enemy criminals" (Knight 370). For all of the problems that Knight describes, Holmes acts as protector of middle-class values in acting as both judge and jury for unscrupulous characters. Often this judgment as well as punishment

on the accused is based on the same rules and expectations that have been broken in the first place. With Holmes in this role, the stories themselves almost begin to act as parables for how the middle-class ideal should be in reality.

The Adventure of the Blue Carbuncle is a prime example of how Holmes chooses to act as savior figure rather than a condemner to the criminal in question. When it is revealed that the head attendant at the Hotel Cosmopolitan, James Ryder, has stolen the jewel, Holmes reprimands the boy, but eventually lets him go. He informs Watson that he is:

> Not retained by the police to supply their deficiencies. If Horner were in danger it would be another thing; but this fellow will not appear against him, and the case must collapse. I suppose that I am committing a felony, but it is just possible that I am saving a soul. This fellow will not go wrong again; he is too terribly frightened. Send him to jail now, and you make him a jail-bird for life. Besides, it is the season of forgiveness (Doyle 306).

Holmes goes above the law to speak on behalf of society. Society benefits more from Holmes' decision as he is endowed with the ability to speak for Ryder's future actions. Because Holmes has the ability to remove himself from societal offices, the police force, to observe and make his decisions, according to Holmes, Ryder "will not go wrong again" (Doyle 306). Through his reasoning, middle-class society and its values have been protected from further criminal activity on Ryder's part and Holmes has been able to salvage the "soul" of an individual who serves the middle classes as a part of the working classes. Holmes has made the decision to bestow a second chance on someone who he believes deserves it.

As seen in *The Adventure of the Blue Carbuncle*, Holmes acts as protector for middle-class social well being, but he also acts as protector for those who, according to the ideal, are

unable to protect themselves: women. In *A Case of Identity* Holmes takes it upon himself to enact the punishment of Mr. Windibank since, as he exclaims, "the law cannot, as you say, touch you [...] yet there never was a man who deserved punishment more. If the young lady has a brother or a friend, he ought to lay a whip across your shoulders" (Doyle 237). Holmes makes the move to actually whip the man, but Windibank is able to quickly escape punishment. The law, according to Holmes, is not on the right side. Holmes protects the values of the middle classes because he answers to no one except his own morality.

Mr. Windibank's only real crime has been one of social immorality. His greed has enabled him to disregard the valued family ideal and disrupt the "established middle-class order" (Knight 370) that is constantly being attacked in the Holmes fiction. As Stephen Knight further suggests: "the quest for money is a manifest cause of an irresponsibility that leads to disgrace, crime, social breakdown" (Knight 371). For the Victorians money was a difficult issue. They saw such a great influx of it and most sought to advance their status through it, but they also recognized its power for corruption. This corruption is what drove James Windibank to disguise himself and have his stepdaughter fall in love with him. By disappearing, Windibank hoped to break Miss Mary Sutherland's heart so badly that she would never leave home and he would be able to claim her wealth. With Miss Sutherland still at home, her inheritance would continue to go into his pockets. He has fallen into a trap of greed that allows him to forgo family values in favor of monetary gain.

Windibank has exploited for monetary expansion the emotional well being of his stepdaughter, an innocent incapable of her own defense. This is where Holmes is necessary as a watchdog and protector. In his scolding of Windibank, Holmes claims that the crime was "as cruel and selfish and heartless a trick in a petty way as ever came before me" (Doyle 235). The

greatest crimes to Holmes are those where the defenseless are exploited. As protector of the presumed weaker sex, Holmes feels he must defend Miss Sutherland from both the physical culprit as well as further emotional pain. It is for this reason that Holmes makes the additional decision not to tell the woman of her stepfather's treachery.

Like Windibank, Dr. Roylott in *The Adventure of the Speckled Band* presents a similar problem in relation to middle-class family values, morality, and the issue of greed. Roylott is separate from Windibank, however, in that he is so far removed from society that he is capable of the murder of his own stepdaughters in order to acquire the wealth that he desires. "The narrative [...] presents Holmes as woman's protector, rescuing her from the villainous patriarch's domination and defending her right to control over her own property and person" (Hennessy 391). In protecting Helen Stoner, Holmes is defending her from an individual who fails to follow through with societal expectations and responsibilities. He is also helping to maintain the reforms of the late 1800's that gave women rights to their own property. As punishment for Roylott's cruel intentions, Holmes enacts a chain reaction that ends with the quick death of Dr. Roylott. The very snake Roylott intended to deliver death to Helen serves out the justice.

In both *A Case of Identity* and *The Adventure of the Speckled Band*, Holmes comes up against men who have entered the home as stepfathers; men who are a part of the family, but who are outsiders to the responsibility that comes along with maintaining the sacredness associated with the ideal middle-class family unit. In Roylott's case, the maternal figure of the home has died. As the wife ideally was meant to provide the moral stability within the home, Roylott's total break from morality can also be equated with marital values and assumptions. In Windibank's case it is suggested that the mother is in on the plot to dupe Miss Sutherland. This

contrivance on the mother's part suggests that she is not the moral center of the home that she should be and is unable to be the moral agent to right Windibank.

Though Sherlock Holmes is entwined with the ideology of the middle classes, he alone is unable function as a representational figure for that society. He cannot stand-alone because he does not always represent the ideal. Just as he forms a bond with society through his methods of deduction and his heightened role as protector of middle-class values, he is, in many ways, also bonded to a sense of otherness. Holmes' duality allows him to be a hero and protector as well as an interesting outsider, but while middle-class readers may have liked Holmes' character it is unlikely that they were able to completely identify with him for this reason. When the middle-class audience found themselves unable to identify with Holmes, they could find their likeness in Watson. As Gian Paolo Caprettini stresses, "both characters represent a reconciliation of opposites: Holmes alternates an indomitable energy with periods of apathy, stressed by cocaine, and Watson alternates quiet family ménage and work to often dangerous adventures which keep him away from his daily world" (334). While both characters alone are unable to present a rounded depiction of basic Victorian values, together, one is able to represent that which the other lacks. As opposites, Holmes and Watson are able to encompass a set of values that were always in transition, values that were constantly modified, redefined, and even at times in conflict.

What is clear is that neither Holmes nor Watson could ever completely live up to the Victorian ideal. Not only was the ideal constantly being refashioned to support progression, but also neither character on his own connected in full to the preconceived notion of what constituted a gentleman. In discussing middle-class life, Mike Huggins states: "there is plenty of evidence that much middle-class life was relatively sober, hard working, law abiding and pious" (586).

Given the description of the middle-class life that Huggins provides, separately neither Holmes nor Watson ever represents normal middle class life. Holmes is not always sober because he is an addict, neither is he always law abiding. Both Holmes and Watson work, but because Watson is always depicted away from his job when he is assisting Holmes, Holmes is represented as the harder worker of the two as he is always engaged in his occupation.

A crucial opposition between these two characters centers on the issue of drug use, specifically, the use of drugs derived from opium. Drugs derived from opium such as morphine and cocaine were a major issue in Victorian society in the mid to late 19th century. As Christopher Keep discusses, "by the mid-1880s, British medical journals were overflowing in their praise of cocaine's medicinal properties and Conan Doyle, himself a practicing physician at the time, is also known to have experimented with the drug" (209). Though Doyle may have experimented with the drug, he presents Holmes' drug use as a negative element within the stories. Doyle's negative portrayal is probably due to the fact that by the 1890s the drug was beginning to be understood as a highly addictive substance and that its use, because of a similar deteriorative effect, became equated with the use of opium (Keep 209). For many physicians of the age, morphine and cocaine were the new wonder drugs. With so much praise for cocaine earlier in the century, the use of the drug was frequent in the medical field, but it also found its way into commercial products as well. "The alkaloid was added to wines, sherries, ports, teas, lozenges, and soda drinks" (Keep 209). With the substance being present in so many products, it is understandable how addiction would come to present itself as such a problem. What is interesting about the way in which Doyle discusses drug use in the Holmes stories is that he places Holmes and Watson in opposition to each other, depicting Holmes as an addict and Watson as the voice of reason against the drug. *A Scandal in Bohemia* opens with Watson

describing how his marriage has separated him from Holmes, leaving his good friend at Baker Street "buried among his old books, and alternating from week to week between cocaine and ambition, the drowsiness of the drug, and the fierce energy of his own keen nature" (Doyle 187). The fact that Holmes returns to the drug week after week implies how strong his addiction is to both his work and to the drug. He must be able to utilize his senses in order to do what he loves to do, solve cases, but he cannot break his ties to a drug that makes him continually languorous either.

Watson only briefly mentions Holmes' drug use in *A Scandal in Bohemia*, but in Doyle's earlier work, The Sign of Four, Watson's opposition to Holmes' addiction is made blatantly obvious. Watson confronts Holmes concerning the issue in the novel's opening and leaves little room to question that Holmes is an addict. Watson describes Holmes as he:

> Took his bottle from the corner of the mantelpiece, and his hypodermic syringe from its neat morocco case. With his long, white, nervous fingers he adjusted the delicate needle and rolled back his left shirtcuff. For some little time his eyes rested thoughtfully upon the sinewy forearm and wrist, all dotted and scarred with innumerable puncture-marks. Finally, he thrust the sharp point home, pressed down the tiny piston, and sank back into the velvet-lined armchair with a long sigh of satisfaction. Three times a day for many months I had witnessed this performance, but custom had not reconciled my mind to it [...] from day to day I had become more irritable at the sight, and my conscience swelled nightly within me at the thought that I had lacked the courage to protest. [...] I suddenly felt that I could hold out no longer. "Which is it to-day," I asked, "morphine or cocaine?" (Doyle 99).

As this passage suggests, Holmes is no light user of the drug as his arms are covered with proof of his addiction. The fact that Holmes has scars further suggests long-term use. Though Watson has observed his "performance" for several months, he cannot bring himself to accept the practice. Watson's opposition to the use of morphine and cocaine may be contributed to his observations of Holmes as well as his examination of how opiate addiction negatively affected middle-class stability.

As seen in *The Man with the Twisted Lip*, opiate use has the power to destroy the home life valued as so sacred by the middle classes. Though the detective story really begins when Watson encounters Holmes in the opium den, Watson is sent to the den in the first place to retrieve Isa Whitney. As Whitney's wife has not seen him in days, she goes to Watson and his wife for help. When Watson does find Isa Whitney, the gentleman is unable to recollect how long he has been away from his family, but presumes that it has only been a couple of hours. Here, as in The Sign of the Four, Watson is the person who must scrutinize the situation, acting as the voice of reason. He says, "I tell you that it is Friday, man. Your wife has been waiting this two days for you. You should be ashamed of yourself" (Doyle 275). Watson's reprimand of Whitney clearly places him in a position to uphold middle-class family values. The position of a gentleman carried with it a set of values and expectations, even if not always clearly defined. Yet men like Isa Whitney who are considered to be gentlemanly leave their wives, duties, and expectations behind them because of their addictions. Though Whitney is the person Watson is initially sent to find, he is not the only gentleman Watson finds in the opium den and questions. Holmes also lingers in the den, disguised. Though it is assumed that Holmes is in the den because of a case, when Watson asks him as to his reasons for being there, Holmes fails to give him a definite answer.

For all of the drug use presented in *The Man with the Twisted Lip*, the main conflict of the story turns out not to be the social conflict that arises from addiction, but the social crime of begging. Neville's disguise as Hugh Boone, a professional beggar with "orange hair, a pale face disfigured by a horrible scar" (Doyle 280), presents an interesting problem. Though Neville St. Claire, in his disguise, is put in jail for his own disappearance, he would rather sit in jail separated from his family than acknowledge that he is a gentleman who is also a professional beggar. When Holmes reveals him, he exclaims, "it was not the wife; it was the children [...] God help me, I would not have them ashamed of their father. My God! What an exposure! What can I do?" (Doyle 288). According to Watson, drug addiction can "wreck and ruin a noble man" (Doyle 273), but what appears to be presented as the greater evil is a gentleman who begs instead of working to earn his money. While Holmes especially sees begging as the greater of the two evils, both addiction and begging in *The Man with the Twisted Lip* upset the middle-class domestic sphere in the same way. Both Isa Whitney and Neville St. Claire separate themselves from their families, forcing panic stricken wives to seek aid from both Watson and Holmes. Also similar is the fact that both men fail to heed the advice of their wives, individuals charged with being the moral grounding in the home. Kate Whitney must send Watson as he has a greater moral influence over her husband and Holmes remarks to St. Claire, "you would have done better to have trusted your wife" (Doyle 288). Not only do these men break out of the realm of respectability, they choose not to heed the moral guidance their wives provide. Other respectable men, Holmes and Watson, must rebuke their immorality and set them back onto the path of respectable gentlemanly behavior.

Though both Whitney and St. Claire forsake family values, the conflict that addiction creates seems to be overwhelmingly overlooked by everyone but Watson. This is one way in

which both Holmes and Watson are necessary to provide a balanced representation of middle-class society. Without Watson, the family stability disrupted by Whitney's drug problem would never have been resolved. Even if Whitney is doomed to repeat the behavior at least he has been reprimanded for his negligence to his duty as husband and father. Holmes cannot function in this role because he himself abuses opiates. Holmes' and Watson's ability to uphold and protect an ever-changing value system is dependent on Watson's capacity to make up for Holmes's failings and vice versa. Because both characters are present, both societal wrongs, addiction and begging, can be righted or at least reprimanded.

Unlike Neville St. Claire, both Holmes and Watson work for their earnings, Holmes as a detective and Watson as a physician. Both professions provide financial stability, but more importantly, their respective careers serve the society. As a doctor, Watson serves the public in helping them to maintain physical wellness while Holmes serves the public in promoting moral wellness, righting societal wrongs and bringing criminals to justice. Holmes especially is depicted as a man truly dedicated to hard work. Watson describes him in *The Adventure of the Speckled Band* as "working as he did rather for the love of his art than for the acquirement of wealth" (Doyle 307). Holmes is depicted as a gentleman in that his hard work is not driven solely by the prospect of monetary gain. While both professions may provide a financial stability, Watson's profession can be seen as more commonplace than Holmes'. Watson's career dictates that he must follow conventional medical practices while in contrast Holmes is enabled to act outside of conventional societal practices. To be a detective is unique enough, but, to add to this extraordinary calling, Holmes also acts as a detective independent from Scotland Yard. This independence enables him to call all of the shots in his investigations. As discussed previously, his separation from London's established law enforcement allows him to make

judgments outside of the law. Holmes punishes criminals according to his own moral standards, standards that may or may not follow the law, but do uphold the ideological mindset of the middle classes. Where Watson is always law abiding when he is not assisting Holmes, Holmes' profession places him in a position where he can bend the rules to either solve the case presented to him or set right the person found guiltily in the case's solution.

Not only do Holmes and Watson differ in their opinions on drug use and in their professions, they are also distinctive in their personalities, Watson being a social person while Holmes would prefer to live more like a recluse. Watson is capable of maintaining successful relationships, a trait that Holmes seems to lack and, even more so, not to want. In terms of maintaining functioning relationships, Watson and Holmes are two very different types of people. Holmes, though he upholds middle-class ideals and uses ideological assumptions to solve cases, is in some ways removed from Victorian society. He is distinctive from his culture in the sense that he can separate himself from interaction with people within his society that does not deal with a specific case. He also maintains the ability to step back and observe social practices, often finding peace in seclusion.

Watson diverges from his companion's nature in that he is totally immersed in the social practices of his society and seeks out new relationships with people rather than attempt to remain in solitude. When audiences first meet the duo in A Study in Scarlet Watson is exuberant at the thought of having a roommate because he would "prefer having a partner to being alone" (Doyle 8). He has no desire to separate himself from social interaction. Watson is at the very beginning of the Holmes series depicted as a person who enjoys companionship while Holmes himself "is not a man that it is easy to draw out, though he can be communicative enough when the fancy seizes him" (Doyle 9). Because Holmes is a difficult person to read and divulge information

from, Watson is always surprised to uncover particulars about his close friend. Holmes aversion to disclosing information about his life and family is seen in the opening section of *The Greek Interpreter* where Watson says regarding Holmes:

> I found myself regarding him as an isolated phenomenon, a brain without a heart, as deficient in human sympathy as he was preeminent in intelligence. His aversion to women and his disinclination to form new friendships were both typical of his unemotional character, but not more so than his complete suppression of every reference to his own people. I had come to believe that he was an orphan with no relatives living; but one day, to my very great surprise, he began to talk to me about his brother (Doyle 517).

Watson, the man who may know Holmes the best, learns that he has a sibling many years after they first meet. In a society where family was held in such high esteem, this is just further evidence of how Holmes may seek to uphold and protect these values in the lives of others, yet finds it contradictory to his nature to put these values into practice in his own life. Holmes cannot represent the family ideal. Watson must step in to serve as the realized representation of that ideal. As seen with Holmes' late disclosure of his family ties, Watson is only let into the loop if it is important to Holmes' larger plan to do so. Here Watson characterizes Holmes as a person so removed that he seems to be constantly enshrouded in a veil of secrecy. As the person who has witnessed Holmes' actions and qualities as a roommate, a biographer, and a friend, Watson's characterization of Holmes has significant weight, but his depictions are not the only places were Holmes' ability to maintain relationships is called into question.

Though it is evident in the way that both men treat social and moral crimes that they respect middle-class family values, Watson is the only one who marries. Holmes is never

characterized as a man in want of a family of his own, his work being what he is truly dedicated to. According to Watson, the only woman whom Holmes holds in any esteem is Irene Adler, but Watson quickly informs the reader that "it was not that he felt any emotion akin to love for Irene Adler. All emotions, and that one particularly, were abhorrent to his cold, precise but admirably balanced mind" (Doyle 187). Holmes' lack of an intimate female relationship stands in stark opposition to the importance that the middle classes placed on the family unit. Again, Holmes alone is unable to adequately present the family standard that the middle classes idealized. Where Holmes falls short, Watson stands to fulfill the ideal of family life as a representation of a married man who places family first. Holmes is never depicted in any kind of romantic relationship and as he also confronts difficulties in maintaining the relationships that he does have, Watson is his only faithful companion throughout the stories.

As Holmes does not readily communicate with others for pleasure or leisure, it is surprising that he and Watson are able to become such close companions in the first place. Watson is not just an individual whom Holmes can manage to cohabitate with; instead he often becomes an important agent in the cases. Watson is allowed to participate because he has utility for Holmes as his unofficial biographer. In *The Red-Headed League* Holmes addresses Watson's love for his adventures directly stating:

> I know, my dear Watson, that you share my love of all that is bizarre and outside the conventions and humdrum routine of everyday life. You have shown your relish for it by the enthusiasm which has prompted you to chronicle, and, if you will excuse my saying so, somewhat embellish so many of my own little adventures (Doyle 206).

Because Watson does enjoy to "chronicle" Holmes' adventures, Holmes often calls on him to assist in his cases for biographical purposes such as in *The Boscombe Valley Mystery*, *The Adventure of the Speckled Band*, and *The Final Problem,* just to name a few. In *A Scandal in Bohemia* Watson attempts to leave when he learns that one of Holmes' clients is on his way. Holmes replies: "stay where you are. I am lost without my Boswell" (Doyle 190), Holmes here referring to James Boswell the biographer of Samuel Johnson. To refer to Watson as a biographer of such great importance suggests that Watson is meant to portray Holmes in a glorified light. As Holmes stated in *The Red-Headed League*, Watson changes the "real" story of Holmes to make both the adventure and the man more appealing to the audience. Sherlock is "embellish[ed]", through Watson's personal perceptions of him.

As the biographer, Watson not only presents Holmes as his own perception paints him, but also places Holmes in an intellectual position that is obviously superior to his own. When Holmes is organizing his notes from previous cases in *The Musgrave Ritual* he says to Watson, "yes, my boy, these were all done prematurely before my biographer had come to glorify me" (Doyle 462). Holmes is lost without his biographer because he needs Watson to accent his greatness, both in his narration as well as in his contrasting characteristics.

> Watson's need must be therefore understood in many respects: first of all, he makes possible a hierarchical articulation of knowledge, in which he obviously occupies the humblest position. On the other hand, there would he no right solution by Holmes without wrong ones by Watson: not good master looks as such if not confronted with a bad student (Caprettini 332).

Holmes often admits that his observing power is nothing more than a mastered parlor trick, but with Watson in the background, dumbfounded and telling the tale, Holmes' diamond-sharp wit is

heightened even further. Even Sir Arthur Conan Doyle made fun of Watson's utility as the "bad student" contrasted to Holmes, the "good master". In *The Field Bazaar*, one of Doyle's parodies of the Sherlock Holmes stories, Holmes says to Watson:

> A most characteristic question of yours, Watson [...] You will not, I am sure, be offended if I say that any reputation for sharpness which I may possess has been entirely gained by the admirable foil which you have made for me. Have I not heard of debutantes who have insisted upon plainness in their chaperones? There is a certain analogy (Doyle 671).

The analogy that Doyle has Holmes describe in *The Field Bazaar* was vital to the success of the stories. Watson's plainness, his position as average, was crucial to the development of the bond middle-class audiences shared with both Holmes and himself.

Holmes is intellectually above everyone else, including the audience. What's more, he is well aware that he occupies the highest intellectual position. In *The Musgrave Ritual* he says, "well, at least I knew that if Brunton could do it, I could also" (Doyle 470). Brunton, the servant who aims to find the Musgrave treasure, is not a man of limited intelligence. In fact, Holmes remarks early on in the story that he was of great intelligence, but Holmes never has a doubt that he still has the higher intellectual rank. For Watson to hold the position of narrator means that the audience has someone to intellectually identify with. After all, Watson is never the person to arrive at a case's solution and neither is the reader. That right is reserved for Holmes, the only character able to see society from the inside and the outside, observe, and then formulate the conclusion. Middle-class audiences occupied the same position that Watson did. In addition to this, had Holmes been the narrator of his own story, the middle classes would not have been able to fully understand his intricacies and seemingly eccentric behavior. But Holmes is not the teller

of his own tale, Watson is. His narration provides the opportunity for explanation of Holmes behavior. Often the Holmes stories open with Watson's observation of Holmes' personality, his virtues as well as his vices. For a middle-class audience to be able to understand Holmes meant that they also gained the opportunity to see in him some of their own values and characteristics. Holmes' friendship with Watson may be his most functional relationship. As such, Watson is able to bridge the gap between the audience and Holmes' less than inviting personality. Because Watson has already formed a bond with Holmes, the middle-class audience, in their identification with Watson, was able to take part in that connection as well.

No matter how conflicted the Victorian middle classes may have been, readers of *The Strand* magazine found some resemblance of esteemed virtue in Sherlock Holmes and John Watson. Not only did Holmes' ability to formulate solutions to cases uphold and protect middle-class values, he also relied heavily on middle-class ideological assumptions to arrive at his respective conclusions. Though Holmes may have some attributes that appear to separate him from society, rendering him unable to represent the ideal, Watson's character is able to step up to fill Holmes' inadequacies. The Victorian middle classes did not develop a bond with these characters solely because they played out an entertaining story. The stories' resonance with the Victorians rests in Holmes and Watson, companions who together presented characteristics that the middle classes, in all their diversity, could agree to admire.

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