EDITOR’S INTRODUCTION

An Adventure, A Magic Door and The Detective: An Invitation to Sir Arthur Conan Doyle’s Wide-Ranging Œuvre

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“Conan Doyle…. Doyle…. Isn’t that the guy who wrote the series with Benedict Cumberbatch in it?”
When one encounters such a response from a group of upper-level English students who have enrolled in my class on “Jack the Ripper & Co: Neo-Victorian Narratives of Crime,” it rather deflates the enthusiasm. Once I convinced them that in fact “the guy” was Sir Arthur Conan Doyle who had, in fact, written the “series” of stories about the detective, Sherlock Holmes, and his faithful doctor friend, Doctor Watson, I was able to reach back through history to the nineteenth century and introduce them to the original, marvelous texts. I boldly asserted that “the guy” had, in addition, written many, many other narratives in other genres that were absolutely worth reading. But alas, they did not feature Cumberbatch.

The purpose of this special issue is to give a nod to the modern adaptations of Conan Doyle’s work, but to investigate via a series of essays his other works that seem too often to get left behind in the race after the cases of Holmes and Watson. Now to the man himself; Arthur Ignatius Conan Doyle was the eldest son and third of nine children born into the Irish Catholic family of Mary née Foley (1838-1921) and Charles Altamont Doyle (1832-1893) on 22 May 1859 in Edinburgh, Scotland. At the age of seven, he was sent to Newington Academy in Edinburgh; later, to continue his education and due to the difficulties the family encountered because of his father’s growing alcoholism and later mental illness, Conan Doyle’s wealthy uncles sent him to a Jesuit Boarding and Prepatory school, Hodder Place at Stonyhurst, from 1868-1870, then on to Stonyhurst College for five years. He then matriculated in 1875 from London University. After a visit to his uncles in London, it is decided he should attend a Jesuit College, Stella Matutina, in Austria for a time to improve his German language skills. In 1876, at the age of seventeen, Conan Doyle began his studies at the University of Edinburgh Medical School. During his third year, just after his first short story, “The Mystery of Sasassa Balley” appeared in Chamber’s Edinburgh Journal on 6 September 1879, the young man was looking for an adventure. Conan Doyle left to take the post of ship’s surgeon for six months in 1880 on a whaling ship, the SS Hope, headed for the Arctic Circle. When the voyage returned, he finished medical school in 1881 graduating with his MB CM later that year; in 1890, he decided to study ophthalmology in Vienna and, when finished, he again went to sea from October 1881 to July 1882 to act as ship’s surgeon on vessel heading for West Africa, afterword returning to Portsmouth, followed by London, to open a practice in 1891.
Conan Doyle had a robust, active lifestyle even when writing and publishing; a lover of cricket, Conan Doyle joined J. M. Barrie’s cricket team, the “Allahakberries,” then played with the Marylebone Cricket Club going on to play football with the Portsmouth Association Football Club, in addition to hiking, riding, hunting, and skiing.

On 6 August 1885, age twenty-six, Conan Doyle married Louisa née Hawkins (1857-1906) with whom he had two children, Mary Louise (1889-1976), and Arthur Alleyne Kingsley (1892-1918).

In his early twenties, he had his first success writing short stories that were based in the mysterious and the uncanny such as “My Friend the Murderer” (1882) or "J. Habakuk Jephson's Statement" (1884), and his interest in the short form would dominate his fictional writing with dozens in his oeuvre. Conan Doyle greatly admired Guy de Maupassant and Jules Verne, believing their tales grounded in realistic detail, contemporary technology and science, but his favourite role model was Edgar Allan Poe. In his book on writing, Through the Magic Door (1907), Conan Doyle explains how stories need “strength, novelty, compactness, intensity of interest, [to create] a single vivid impression on the mind” (114) and that the “first requisite [of a writer] is to be intelligible. The second is to be interesting. The third is to be clever” (in Durdin 96).

After many rejections, the author received twenty-five pounds for Study in Scarlet in 1886 from Ward, Lock & Co. with a promise to publish it in Beeton’s Christmas Annual in 1887. Conan Doyle certainly proves himself capable of his own three criteria; it is the moment when the detective, Sherlock Holmes (based on his intuitive, intellectual medical mentor, Dr. Joseph Bell), and his faithful friend, Doctor Watson (named after a class colleague), enter into the canon of English mysteries and forever change what follows. The Sign of Four is published in Lippincott’s Magazine in February 1890, then the serialization of the Holmes stories begins in July 1891 in The Strand Magazine under the editorship of H. Greenhough Smith and leads to their later collection as The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes (1892). The popularity of the stories was so demanding of Conan Doyle’s attention that he often lamented he might plot to kill Holmes off. Indeed, his desire to do away with the detective leads to the creation of his arch nemesis, Professor James Moriarty, and leads to the supposed
death of Holmes at the Reichenbach Falls in “The Final Problem” in the Strand in December of 1893, then published in Memoirs of Sherlock Holmes (1893). Conan Doyle’s own mother decried this move and the general public nearly cast in mourning for the loss of the detective. The outcry is so strong that Conan Doyle agrees to write again of Holmes and Watson; Holmes is revived in The Hound of the Baskervilles (1902) in a case that predates his demise, but Conan Doyle then begins a second series of Holmes tales, again in the Strand, later to be collected in The Return of Sherlock Holmes (1905). In the end, there would be four novels, fifty-six stories of the duo and their adventures in the high society and underworlds of England.

While pursuing – or being pursued by – Holmes and Watson’s popularity, Conan Doyle wrote many pieces of fiction and non-fiction of which a modern audience may not be aware. Conan Doyle was a well respected public intellectual who weighed in with articles and newspaper pieces with erudition on divorce law reform, the Congo, military matters and later, spiritualism, and including an Operetta Jane Annie; or the Good Conduct Prize (1893 with J. M. Barrie and Ernest Ford). Later novels like Valley of Fear (1915) or His Last Bow (reflect his concerns for the people of the world’s suffering and the brutal, increasing violence of the modern world. His historical novels, like Micah Clarke (1889) and The White Company (1891) plus several others, are joined by the publication of a novel, short stories, poetry, plays or non-fiction each year. His portrait of a vain but valiant Napoleonic Hussar, Brigadier Etienne Gerard, and his exploits as he comes up through the ranks appears in comedic short stories first published in The Strand from December of 1894 to September 1903, later collected into The Exploits of Bridgadier Gerard (1896) and its follow-up, The Adventures of Gerard (1903). It was during this time that the family moved to Undershaw in Surrey with the hope of his wife’s better health; after several journeys to Switzerland and even a trip to the Nile in Egypt, Louisa’s very long illness of thirteen years caused her death of tuberculosis on 4 July 1906. A devoted family man, Conan Doyle’s devastation was tempered by his belief in spiritualism, and the fact that in 1897, before the death of his wife, Conan Doyle had met, admired and fell in love with Jean Leckie (1874?-1940); although their relationship remained platonic out of his sense of duty, when Louisa died, he married her in 1907, welcoming three more children, Denis Percy (1909-1955), Adrian Malcolm (1910-1970) and Jean Lena (1912-1997). Shortly thereafter he published his discussion of the importance of reading the
great authors, the companionship of books, and the pleasure of the written word – including his own favourite author and words – in his Through the Magic Door.

Conan Doyle had not been a practicing medical man since 1891 when he felt confident enough to devote himself entirely to his craft and his opinions on many medical, social and cultural issues of the day. Willing to always serve his country, at the apex of the Boer War in 1900, Conan Doyle proudly volunteered for service as a field surgeon with the army in South Africa; when he returned, he wrote extensive non-fiction works of history, including The Great Boer War (1900), The War in South Africa: Its Cause and Conduct (1902), The Crime of the Congo (1909) and the six-volume The British Campaign in France and Flanders (1916-1920). In 1902, Conan Doyle was made Knight Bachelor by King Edward VII; Conan Doyle believed the honour was given for services and writing during the Boer Wars, but he perhaps just as much deserved the knighthood for the virtues he held close: work, happiness of “time well filled,” “men who do their duty” and whose books are full of honour, duty, courage and heart. His ongoing interest in politics culminated with two unsuccessful runs as a Liberal Unionist for Parliament, one in Edinburgh and one in Hawick Burghs. He spoke out against the atrocities by Belgium in the Congo, involved himself in issues of social justice (against the unjust imprisonments of George Edalji in 1906 and Oscar Slater in 1910), and wrote about other causes he felt he could champion. With the breakout of World War I, Conan Doyle again tried to enlist but was refused at the age of fifty-five.

Conan Doyle created more adventures with Professor George Edward Challenger and Professor Summerlee who appear in The Lost World (1912), The Poison Belt (1913) and The Land of Mist (1926). These novels fall into the categories of male adventure tales and science fiction, or what Conan Doyle calls “a Rider Haggardy kind of book […] dedicated to all the naughty boys of the Empire, by one who sympathizes with them” (in Dirda 33). With a mix of adventure and humour, the first the protagonist discovers dinosaurs roaming in the Amazon, and in the second, Challenger must deal with the cosmic gas that threatens human extinction while the third demonstrates Conan Doyle’s own intense interest in Christian Spiritualism and shifts the story to Summerlee’s daughter, Enid. In these novels, Conan Doyle confronts issues of the time including racism, evolution, and atavism with a strong, inquiring, philosophical
interest in dualities as well as – though perhaps not intentional – an acute perspective on the building of Empire as well as the colonial project.

With the death of his wife, then his son Kingsley at the end of World War I from pneumonia after being wounded during the Battle of the Somme, his own brother Brigadier General Innes Doyle in 1919, and further deaths of two brothers-in-law and two nephews, Conan Doyle continued his earlier questioning on the concept of faith begun during in his medical school days that had culminated in the renunciation of Roman Catholicism. He became a believer in Christian Spiritualism after reading of American Spiritualism that resulted in his joining the British Society for Psychical Research – along with Philosopher William James, future Prime Minister Arthur Balfour and other public figures – that investigated psychic and paranormal phenomenon as well as thought transference. On several occasions, Conan Doyle and his second wife hosted séances to contact his son and other family members, but he claimed to converse with writer Joseph Conrad and the explorer, Cecil Rhodes amongst others. Conan Doyle’s interest in the supernatural included his belief in the existence of fairies; when two Yorkshire girls, Elise Wright and Frances Griffiths, claimed to have taken pictures of fairies in a garden (now known as the fraudulent Cottingley Fairies), he produced The Coming of the Fairies (1922) that extended his theories on such matters. Ultimately, Conan Doyle gave up his love of writing fiction to focus on such activities, writing twenty books on the subjects including the two-volume The History of Spiritualism (1926), and a variety of lectures in the 1920s across the Commonwealth and America. He became the Honorary President of the International Spiritualist Congress in Paris as an outcome of his understanding of psychics, mediums, materializations and telepathy, but he leaves the legacy of the last Holmes and Watson tales to appear in The Casebook of Sherlock Holmes (1927). Perhaps his autobiography, Memories and Adventures (1924-1930), is his most important book; therein, Conan Doyle leaves us the story of his own life as a writer and as an explorer before its end of a heart attack in his garden at his home, Windlesham Manor, East Sussex on 7 July 1930. He was seventy-one.

In an œuvre that reaches over twenty novels, one hundred and fifty plus short stories, volumes of poetry, letters, essays, article, pamphlets and other non-fiction, it is no wonder that Conan Doyle’s non-Sherlockian writing has not yet all been thoroughly
explored. For this reason, the essays included here have a broad range of foci in an intentional widening of the sphere, just as the participants chosen have a wide range of experience(s) that they bring to the reading of the Conan Doyle works; aside from academics, our contributors include a lawyer and a journalist not used to working in this form but who bring much to the discussion inherent in the collection. In this special issue, essays were selected from each corner of Conan Doyle to extend the understanding of his works beyond the extensive reach of Sherlock Holmes to lesser known and/or lesser read texts, or the influence of his text(s) on other authors as well as alternate media to which they have been adapted.

Journalist Peter Calamai’s “From the Willing Suspension of Disbelief to the Embracing of Pretence: Doyle’s Use of the Press to Create a Primordial Version of Virtual Reality” focuses on the influence of journalism and serial publication on Conan Doyle’s work. Calamai argues that “virtual reality” is apparent in Conan Doyle’s work largely due to the influence of the newspaper and further suggests that rapid expansion in mechanization, industrialization, along with an elevated literacy level, and an expanded lower-middle class, afford Conan Doyle a large audience with both the capacity to read as well as the time to do so. Some of the ways in which Conan Doyle’s background and contacts in the field of journalism helped his various forms of literature include advertisement and serial publication. Journalism also had a more direct impact on Conan Doyle’s style. Calamai argues the use of precise, factual information was likely influenced by a journalistic approach with an “emphasis on concise prose, personal interviews and facts, facts and more facts,” which “dovetailed neatly with Doyle’s approach to story-telling.” Calamai provides several examples of specific stories within which the press and newspaper articles are used as a sort of literary device, to reveal factual information is believable to the reader due to Conan Doyle’s ability to create a narrative, and the style he chose to employ. The stories of Sherlock Holmes are concerned with the law and various forms of crime; however, Conan Doyle does not have an interest or concise knowledge regarding the laws of his time but that the information about specific crimes and their associated laws, as well as police procedure and protocol, are typically revealed in the press or newspaper articles. Calamai concludes that Conan Doyle’s ability as a
writer, and the factual, journalistic style that he employs, create what he calls an “intermediate world” in the imagination of the reader.

Clifford S. Goldfarb, a lawyer and enthusiast, contributes here “Conan Doyle on Napoleon: Hero or Scoundrel?” wherein he refutes the claim that Conan Doyle is a hero-worshipper of Napoleon; although there is hero-worship apparent Uncle Bernac (1897), exemplified by the character of Gerard, according to Goldfarb, the conception that Conan Doyle is a hero-worshipper arises as a result of the reader’s projection of Gerard’s hero-worship onto the author. To project the ideas and feelings of characters onto the writer of a literary work is to suggest that the work is not fictional. Doyle’s work on Napoleon is entirely fictional, and his position with regard to the character of Napoleon is, quite accurately, ambiguous because of the nature of Napoleon himself. On the question of whether the nature of Conan Doyle’s preoccupation with Napoleon can be considered obsessive or not, Goldfarb determines that Conan Doyle was fascinated with Napoleon, but he was not obsessed with him, or obsessive about his studies. Goldfarb indicates that Conan Doyle was a “busy man with numerous other interests” but chose to study him voraciously and write about him on a relatively consistent basis.

Lena Wanggren’s article “The Doctors of Hoyland’: Gender and Modernity in Conan Doyle’s Medical Stories” demonstrates Conan Doyle’s modern perspective of the capability of woman to exceed the performance of man in fields traditionally designated for men. In “The Doctors of Hoyland” (1894), a doctor moves into town who has excellent credentials and a first-rate history of medical training. The current and only doctor in town is a male, and he assumes that the new doctor is also a male. He is wrong. In the beginning, the male doctor is in utter disbelief; however, when his patients begin to prefer her over him he begins to realize that she is an excellent doctor; therefore, Conan Doyle’s story demonstrates that the gender or sex of the individual does not determine their intelligence or capabilities in the work force. During this time period, women who rivaled men in their respective fields were often considered “mannish,” “masculine”, or “unsexed” as a reminder to the patriarchy and the entire society to continue to believe they were a superior gender. Conan Doyle’s story demonstrates that a woman does not have to exhibit any of these traits to be successful in her field and may keep her “sweet, womanly nature” while
exceeding man in the highly respected field of medicine. Wanggren discredits the conception that Conan Doyle satirizes the female doctor; rather, she argues that Conan Doyle intentionally creates Verrinder Smith as a woman who is not “hyperfeminised nor masculinsed” which indicates that her sexuality does not influence her professionalism as one who acts with dedication to her field to demonstrate that she has both “legitimate authority and skill.”

Danny Sexton’s “Professor Challenger and Masculine Romance in The Lost World” examines the role of traditional masculinity in relation to freedom, heroism and exploration in South Africa where the adventure affords Challenger, Malone, Mr. Summerlee and Lord Roxton the opportunity to solidify their maleness. Sexton argues “Edwardian England has lost the ability to believe in strong masculinity.” When they reach South American they encounter dangerous “ape-men” who intend to kill them; however, they convinced a group of Indians to become allies, and eventually overthrow the “ape-men.” Upon their return to England, their triumph in battle does not carry over into a successful conviction of their masculinity in spite of the fact that Challenger brings home a pterodactyl as an undeniable symbol of their expedition. Sexton asserts that “The Lost World allows for the success of the masculine plot because Malone rejects marriage for male adventure with Lord Roxton.” Rather than the Petrarcan conception of the male lover who is active, assertive, and dominant in relation to a woman who is passive and submissive, Conan Doyle’s The Lost World advocates an alternate form of adventurous, courageous masculinity wherein the bond between masculine men holds intrinsic value.

Christophe Gelly’s “The Hound of the Baskervilles Revisited: Adaptation in Context” compares the 2012 BBC adaptation and the 1988 Granada version with the original or “Doylian” text, The Hound of the Baskervilles. Gelly discusses the implementation of technological devices in the 2012 adaptation as a form of “modernization” of the original. Two contrary visions of Holmes emerge from the 1988 and 2012 adaptations. In 1988, Sherlock is presented as an extremely intelligent, stable, consistent, and reliable detective while in 2012, Holmes becomes a more inconsistent, fragmented and unstable individual because he becomes filled with doubt. Gelly argues that an “anguish-ridden era was bound to produce maybe just that sort of a detective.” In the BBC adaptation the character of Holmes seems to make intentional and clever
references to Conan Doyle’s original works. The use of intertextuality, and the manipulation of verbatim citations (placing them out of context or in different episodes) results in the manifestation of a character with the awareness that he is a vision of Conan Doyle’s original character. Gelly argues that the “21st century version looks upon its older 19th C counterpart with dismay.” The emergence of a new, modernized Sherlock in the BBC adaptation calls attention to avid fans of the original Holmes by making specific references to Conan Doyle’s original works, while simultaneously creating a modernized character to appeal to a larger audience.

Kristopher Mecholsky’s “Colonial Echoes: Political Noise in The Valley of Fear and its Adaptations” is concerned with the relationship between original narratives, and “re-narrativizations” or adaptations. Mecholsky argues that an inevitable critical analysis takes place in the process of adaptation. Through an examination of adaptations of selected works written by Conan Doyle, Mecholsky submits that Conan Doyle has a conflicted or “complicated understanding of colonialism and nationalism.” The conflict arises from Conan Doyle’s ambiguous cultural perspective because of his “complex relationship to Ireland and the British Empire.” Conan Doyle’s struggle between Irish nationalism and British imperialism has been variously expressed in adaptations of The Valley of Fear. In the novel, an American group called “the Mollies” emerges; Mecholsky argues that the struggles of this group – agricultural, economic, political, and religious – mirror the struggles of the Irish. In his words, “the same problems that plagued the Irish in Britain, followed them to America.” The argument is that Conan Doyle’s political affiliation is largely ambiguous due to the variety of interpretations or “re-narrativizations” of his work. The adaptation process is significant because it allows for scholarly debate and criticism but is problematic because through the process of adaptation or “re-narrativizations,” the adaptations become distanced from the original text; as each new adaptations emerges it reflects and represents previous adaptations, rather than Conan Doyle’s original works.

Charlotte Beyer’s “Sherlock Holmes Reimagined: An Exploration of Selected Short Stories from A Study in Sherlock: Stories Inspired by the Holmes Canon” explores five different short stories from the collection published in 2011 to demonstrate a variety of contemporary strategies used to recreate Conan Doyle’s popular fictional
character, Sherlock Holmes. Beyer examines Tony Broadbent’s short story pastiche, “An Exact Knowledge of London” that she concludes plays with past and present conceptions Conan Doyle’s characters and relies on preconceived knowledge of Conan Doyle’s original and authentic creation of Holmes, while simultaneously presenting an alternatively original and authentic perspective. Gayle Lynds and John Sheldon’s “A Triumph of Logic” and Lee Child’s short story “The Bone-Headed League,” what Beyer calls “Hard-Boiled Recastings,” demonstrate the problems with recreating an individualized version of Holmes. Child’s short story uses intertextuality in the title when it calls attention to a work by Conan Doyle called “The Red-Headed League,” while the title itself sets up an interaction or “interplay between original and adaptation.” As the title suggests, “The Bone-Headed League” is a humorous adaptation where an “Americanized,” individualized detective without a partner attempts to be like Holmes, then ends up at the opposite side of the criminal/detective or right/wrong spectrums by landing himself in jail. In “A Triumph of Logic,” Beyer argues that the lines between right and wrong are similarly crossed. An individualized detective in Lynds’ and Sheldon’s story questions the rationality of Holmes’ exaggerated emphasis on logic by demonstrating that emotion holds an equal role in solving crime. The discussion of individualized detectives continues with Winspear’s “A Spot of Detection” and Lippman’s “The Last of Sheila-Locke Holmes” that contain child detectives. In “A Spot of Detection,” a boy falsely assumes the position of detective because of his “imaginative engagement” with Sherlock Holmes. Despite the fact that the young boy uses Holmes’ deductive methods, he does not solve the crime (since there is no crime to be solved). The desire to solve crime, and the method of crime-solving are called into question, and even mocked by a police officer who suggests “‘been reading a bit of old Sherlock, have we, son’” (Winspear 377). “The Last of Sheila-Locke Holmes” is concerned with identity and gender; rather than a mystery, both stories examine the perplexity of the childhood imagination. Beyer suggests that the commonalities found between Sheila and her mother demonstrate the patriarchal power of evaluating and devaluing certain qualities and characteristics, such as beauty and domesticity, and use the character of Sherlock Holmes to develop questions of identity and gender.
A few final thoughts; while the pleasure of recently rereading the Sherlock Holmes stories cannot be overstated, it was Sir Arthur Conan Doyle’s *Through the Magic Door* that left me entranced when I read,

Come through the magic door with me, and sit here on the green settee,
where you can see the old oak case with its untidy lines of volumes […]
Would you care to hear me talk of them?  (3)

The invitation to explore was there for the taking. I must say that when the ever gracious and enthusiastic David Charles Rose asked me to edit this special edition for OScholars, I was gleeful at the prospect of working on Sir Arthur Conan Doyle; long a quiet reader of his narratives, it has been a wonderful opportunity to connect with scholars and others interested in not just Sherlock Holmes and things Holmesian, but with his extensive ouevre. It is our hope that you will find something new in Conan Doyle to pursue in your reading hours.

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**Works Cited**


1 For this special issue, "Conan Doyle" has been used by the editor and publisher, but individual authors therein have chosen whether to use "Doyle" or "Conan Doyle" as each saw fit. I have chosen the more well-known "Conan Doyle" for ease of understanding.