

**Being Vicariously Criminal: Sherlock Holmes' Dualistic Nature as a Placebo for  
Degeneracy**

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Table of Contents

Introduction – A Brief Overview of a Degenerative Genre.....4

Chapter One – The Aesthetic of Crime: Becoming Vicariously Criminal.....12

Chapter Two – Detective Fiction’s Placebo Effect.....46

Conclusion – The Continuation of an Era.....70

### **Introduction: A Brief Overview of a Degenerative Genre**

*“[W]hen looking into any matter, one’s usual first move should be to go where it all started and have a look around.” – Zach Dundas*

During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, a fear of degeneracy, or breakdown of social, cultural and moral understandings, was spreading through late-Victorian England. With the rise of a growing middle class in late-Victorian England, and the increased opportunities for self-improvement, the distinct class lines that separated the upper class from the middle and lower classes in society started to break down. As the class boundaries that had been in place for so long were dissolving, the criminal activities that had previously been relegated to the lower classes were spreading across those increasingly blurred class lines. Many citizens felt that the perceived rise in crime and abnormal behavior stemmed from the pervasive effect of the changing class boundaries.

Theories of the degeneracy of late-Victorian social classes arose, according to William Greenslade, as “an enabling strategy by which the conventional and respectable classes could justify and articulate their hostility to the deviant, the diseased and the subversive” (qtd. in Arata 2). Some in the upper class believed that the perceived rise in crime and abnormal behavior stemmed from the pervasive effect of the crumbling social constructs, and degeneracy theories allowed the upper classes to develop a method of separating people groups they did not deem respectable from themselves: “It was an effective means of ‘othering’ large groups of people by marking them as deviant, criminal, defective, simple, hysterical, diseased, primitive, regressive, or just dangerous” (Arata 16-17). East London, especially, seemed to become a cesspool for what the middle and upper classes thought criminal, and where people could easily succumb to their own degenerate tendencies. One could find slums, drugs, tattoo parlors, gambling, and all

manner of “loose” living that had previously been relegated to the lower classes, but was now finding its way across to the other social classes.

The concept of degeneracy was perceived and classified based on outward appearances and actions. This idea of degeneracy was not always easy to recognize or identify outside of known criminals and their haunts because it was a term for diagnosing someone’s actions, rather than the internal decay. “Diagnosing” the spread of degeneracy and how it manifested itself became much more difficult when dealing with the internal effects it had on people – not everyone was aware of his capacity for degenerate tendencies, or chose to address them. An individual’s nature can include degenerate tendencies, which can then be either suppressed or manifested in his actions. Anyone could face the effects of decay within himself, or just as easily ignore them. Arata notes that “the self could no longer be imagined as immutable. Instead it was riven by history, sedimented by innumerable strata of earlier lives and fates, molded into its present shape by an ineluctable and almost unimaginably distended past” (22). A new understanding arose of how someone’s past actions can have an effect on his or her present decisions and actions, and the actions of previous generations can also affect him or her; individual degeneracy was thought to be inescapable, even for respectable members of the public. The detective genre, specifically Sir Arthur Conan Doyle’s Sherlock Holmes adventures, became a way of providing a release for the emotional tension people were facing as a result of the changing social structures, first on an individual level, and then on a national level, as Conan Doyle’s writing gained national attention.

Detective literature became a way of reflecting society’s perception of the growth of criminal tendencies in the upper classes. Even though class barriers were changing across the nation, literature that reflected degeneracy was able to transcribe identity from a national to an

individual level, allowing readers to understand and recognize it better. As individual identity and the degeneration of morals became the center of focus, literature that reflected this degeneracy grew as a means of exploring how the concept of identity was changing. Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes stories, especially, became increasingly popular and were published throughout the nation. As the famed detective stories grew in popularity, they further explored the idea of a criminal identity, and affected popular expressions and understanding of the aesthetic of crime that was growing as well. Literature reflected what was enjoyable or pleasing to many readers during the time period, i.e., crime.

Along with the use of the term "degeneration" in the nineteenth century, the development of an aesthetic of crime played a role in the history of detective fiction as well. Morals began to be detached from the way people viewed crime; instead, the form of a crime became the center of focus as people pieced together to piece together the events leading up to the crime. The emergence of detective fiction brought with it the possibility of disregarding moral considerations in order to view crime as an aesthetic form. The aesthetic way of viewing crime was a result of the perception of degeneration in late-Victorian society, and in turn affected the dualistic nature detectives had in literature.

In detective fiction, the reader is able to provisionally assume the identity of the detective and attempt to solve the crime before the detective does. The reader is also able to, in some ways, put on the mask of the criminal. The way an author tells a story in order to lead back to the original crime is important in keeping the reader's interest as he or she alternates between assuming the identity of the detective or the criminal. The structure detective fiction writers use contributes to the way the public perceives and understands this crime aesthetic. As the detective story developed, and especially with the emergence of Sherlock Holmes as its most recognizable

figure, crime and aesthetic were more frequently related than moral considerations and aesthetic subject matter. The *beauty* of the crime – its ingenuity, order, and sometimes diabolical purse as revealed in the investigation – suddenly became quite appealing to the reader.

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle witnessed the way society perceived the breaking down of social barriers, the spread of criminal tendencies into the upper classes, and the way it dreaded its effects on the disintegrating state of society during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. His Sherlock Holmes stories provide a character (Holmes) with the mind of both a detective and a criminal, while at the same time providing his readers with a desired experience of closure, permitting them to figure out the solutions to various crimes afflicting a degenerating middle class. This thesis will explore the way Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes stories reflect the fears of societal degeneration in the late-Victorian era, the effect they had on understandings of the changing class structures, the rise of a crime aesthetic, and how the same understanding of a deteriorating society and the degeneration theories that arose are still prevalent in modern detective stories.

The character of Sherlock Holmes was first introduced to the public with the publication of "A Study in Scarlet" in *Beeton's Christmas Annual* in 1887. At the same time, the detective genre first began to receive serious attention. However, it was not until later, with the publication of "A Scandal in Bohemia" in *The Strand* magazine in 1891 that the famed detective started to gain popularity in England. "A Scandal in Bohemia" gave Conan Doyle's byline so much power that *The Strand* would sell "an extra 100,000 copies" (Dundas 40) whenever a Holmes story was published, and Holmes quickly became "a household word and almost a public institution" (qtd. in Dundas 41). The tall, lean man with piercing eyes, hawk-like nose, and prominent chin who spent his time playing the violin or taking cocaine or helping Scotland Yard with its cases

eventually became so popular in late-Victorian culture that people soon began to believe Holmes was a real person.

Both Edgar Allan Poe, who is widely credited with writing the first official detective story “Murders in the Rue Morgue” (although the question of what the first detective story was is still under debate) and Conan Doyle “could write fiction which many people took for absolute truth,” but where Poe wrote realistic fiction with the intent to trick the public, Conan Doyle “was only trying to entertain” (Carr 40). While Conan Doyle wrote his Sherlock Holmes adventures purely for entertainment, the belief that Holmes was a real person has carried into the twenty-first century, with two camps of Holmesian and Doylian fans of the literature: fans of Conan Doyle’s work either believe that Holmes was a real person, or that he was a fictional character based on one of Conan Doyle’s own teachers, Dr. Joseph Bell. The latter is the true story.

While Sherlock Holmes is known worldwide, his creator was not as enthralled with Holmes as his readers were. He often debated killing the famous sleuth, because “[Holmes] takes my mind from better things” (Doyle qtd. in Carr 66). Doyle had higher aspirations for his literary career, and wanted to be done writing about Sherlock Holmes because he wanted to be known as more than a “penny dreadful” writer. His main pursuit was writing historical novels. He published *The White Company* (1891), a novel about chivalry during Edward the Third’s reign. He also wrote *Micah Clarke* (1889), a bildungsroman set in 1865. “With [Conan Doyle’s] thoughts preoccupied with history, philosophy, and religion, it is not surprising to see the direction they took” (Carr 51). Conan Doyle’s detective stories might have been more popular than his historical novels, but his detective fiction still provides insight into the time period he lived in, making them considered historical detective fiction today.

As often as Conan Doyle thought of killing Sherlock Holmes, he was as equally often

persuaded otherwise, either by his mother, his first wife Touie, and his second wife Jean, or the editors of *The Strand* magazine. One of Conan Doyle's mother's suggestions for a Holmes story turned into "The Adventure of the Copper Beeches." Eventually, when Conan Doyle did kill off Holmes in "The Final Problem," there was a national uproar, and many people went into mourning for the great, fictional detective. A few people were so upset that Holmes was dead that they attempted to murder his creator.<sup>1</sup> It is possible that part of the public's outrage at Holmes's death is because "[l]ike a scapegoating ritual, crime fiction identifies and expels the abnormal; in proving someone guilty, it proves everyone else not guilty, and so is engaged...in 'producing a social innocence'" (Kerr 138). When Conan Doyle killed Holmes, he also killed society's scapegoat. In the Victorian era, literature played an important social role in allowing readers to project their emotions onto the characters and the story, and to allow the resolution of the crime to feed the feeling that they themselves are innocent of any wrongdoing. The degenerate, criminal tendencies that seemed to be infiltrating the upper classes needed an outlet, and detective fiction provided that outlet, particularly through the dualistic nature of the stories' protagonist.

Detective fiction provided a kind of dualism in the construction of the main character. The detective, while solving crimes on behalf of his fellow middle-class citizens, was not without fault himself, and his own degenerate traits enabled readers to choose to either don the identity of the detective, or the criminal. This dualistic nature of the protagonist is one of the conventions of the detective story that was created by Edgar Allan Poe, but codified and made popular by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. "[T]he classic detective story is usually said to be 'about'

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<sup>1</sup> There are conflicting sources on this theory. Newspapers berated Conan Doyle in their columns, and fans sent the writer angry letters, but the "Adventure of the Phantom Armbands," as Zach Dundas calls it in his book *The Great Detective*, seems to have started "with John Dickson Carr's 1949 biography of Conan Doyle" (118). The case itself seems to require further investigation.

nothing beyond the logic of detection. The genre represents itself as a ‘form without ideological content,’ concerned only with ahistorical questions of epistemology and rationality” (Arata 133). Conan Doyle’s detective, Sherlock Holmes, certainly views his cases purely in a logical fashion, but the stories themselves reflected a larger issue: “Far from being the celebrations of middle-class mores they are often taken for, the Holmes stories comprise a series of startling indictments of ‘everyday life.’ In them criminality is seldom portrayed as deviance. Instead it is shown to be systemic, a byproduct of the way we live now” (Arata 144).

During the late-Victorian era, crime was perceived to be growing more rampant as lower class behavior spread into the upper classes, and when Conan Doyle was beginning to write about Sherlock Holmes, he was aware of the ways the police fell short in capturing criminals, and tried to think of what he would do as a detective. The detective needed to be able to reconstruct a crime scene as if he had been there, and be able to study minute details in order to give an exact description of criminals and their motives. Conan Doyle could not possibly have known that his detective and his doctor friend would eventually become two of the most famous characters in literary history, nor did he hope that they would be more successful than the characters in his other novels. One possible reason for Holmes’ and Watson’s popularity is because their adventures reflected the society in which they were placed.

Chapter 1 of this thesis will further explore the aesthetic of crime fiction and how Conan Doyle’s stories contribute to the criminal aesthetic movement. Harpham identifies what are considered the essential elements of a criminal aesthetic: “the detached judgment of a criminal observer, the suspension of moral considerations, the preoccupation with the criminal rather than the victim, the replacement of any interest in the effects of a crime by an appreciation of its form, and – as a result of all of these – the delight in the titanic criminal” (126). This development of a

crime aesthetic had a significant impact on the two natures of detective and criminal being brought together, a combination that is most apparent in the dualistic figure of Sherlock Holmes.

Chapter 2 will discuss the placebo effect detective literature had on the societal degeneracy facing the bourgeoisie. While the literature provided a cathartic release for society's emotional tension over its growing fears of spreading crime, it did not eradicate any of its underlying problems. If anything, the proliferation of detective fiction *contributed* to the degenerating society. As Stephen Arata points out, "the detective story is wholly unsuited to addressing systemic problems in any sustained way. At best, it only translates them into problems of *individual* transgression" (143). A large part of the detective genre's appeal is in the cathartic effect it has on those who read it. They are able to take on the role of either the detective or the criminal, but the problems in the detective story are so closely intertwined with problems in society that the detective story acts like a placebo: it removes one crime, while never fully eradicating a problem, and instead leads to the proliferation of an endless supply of more detective stories. The conclusion will bring each of the main chapters together and solidify the way in which fears of social degeneration and attempts to neutralize such threats connects them all.

### **Chapter One: The Aesthetic of Crime: Becoming Vicariously Criminal**

*“Detection is, or ought to be, an exact science and should be treated in the same cold and unemotional manner. You [Watson], have attempted to tinge it with romanticism, which produces much the same effect as if you worked a love-story or an elopement into the fifth proposition of Euclid.” (Holmes, “The Sign of Four”)*

During the nineteenth century, the development of an aesthetic of crime played a significant role in the history of detective fiction. In detective fiction, the reader is encouraged to adopt the identity of detective and attempt to solve the crime before the detective does. The reader is also able to, in some ways, don the mask of the criminal. This duality of roles is especially evident in Conan Doyle’s Sherlock Holmes stories, particularly in Holmes’ and Moriarty’s relationship in “The Final Problem.” Before delving into the two characters, however, it is first important to understand how a criminal aesthetic connects to theories of degeneracy in the nineteenth century.

Detective fiction became popular among the “late-Victorian world of imperialism and degeneracy theories, purity crusades and the New Woman, materialist medicine and its opponents” (Spencer 198), as part of Urban Gothic and Romantic literature. The two genres reflected, and attempted to repair, society’s anxiety about eroding boundaries between key distinctions that had been in place for centuries: “between male and female, natural and unnatural, civilized and degenerate, human and nonhuman. At issue, finally, underneath all these distinctions, is the ground of individual identity, the ultimate distinction between self and other” (Spencer 203). Conformity was an important practice during the late Victorian era, but the clear distinctions between roles were becoming blurred just as quickly as the aristocracy and upper middle class tried to hold on to them. Kathleen L. Spencer explains the struggle besetting the

upper middle classes in Victorian society best:

[T]he leadership of the group is precarious or under dispute, and the roles within the groups ambiguous or undefined. Because no one person or faction has sufficient authority to stabilize the situation, the struggle for leadership prompts what we might call “purity competitions”: who is most vigilant at ferreting out enemies, especially those disguised enemies lurking within the society itself? In other words, the struggle for power and stability under these social conditions leads inevitably to scapegoat rituals...For the Victorians, neither traditionalist nor “rebel” forces could take complete command: the traditionalists had the numbers and most of the worldly power, but the rebels tended to be educated and articulate, many were influential, and all had ready access to a public forum in the wide-open periodical market of the 1880s and ‘90s. (207-08)

As the boundaries between the social classes were breaking down, a national sense of identity among the upper classes was dissolving as well. Identity was at the core of a number of the internal struggles in late Victorian England, both on an individual and national level. Degeneracy theories became common as “[Benedict-Augustin] Morel’s definition of degeneration as a morbid deviation from an original and thus normative type” (Arata 15) became popular and forced the questions of what constituted such norms and types. Degeneration theory became a way to “provide a continuum between biological and social thought that makes nonsense of the usual efforts to distinguish between them, and was so culturally useful that it could explain persuasively all the pathologies from which the nation suffered” (Robert Nye qtd. in Arata 15). Enter literature.

Two literary movements made up the majority of the late-nineteenth century: Urban Gothic, and the Romance Revival. The “romance revival” of literature in the late nineteenth

century introduced what became known as “character analysis” novels that embodied the changing identity constructs of society and gave readers the opportunity to observe and interpret human motives. These “character analysis” authors did face some opposition from their critics because the writers did not focus as deeply on plot, and “had chosen to adopt the ‘heartless’ methods of science...treating their characters with no sympathy or decorum, dissecting them in public” (Spencer 201-02). As the genre developed and naturalist novels began to appear, critics were became further upset because of the kinds of characters the works were introducing. The naturalist writers “persistently tried to introduce moral, middle-class readers to the kinds of persons – prostitutes, criminals, beggars, and other ‘undeserving’ or unappealing poor people – whom they had no desire to meet” (Spencer 202).

Middle-class readers were opposed to the “unappealing” characters in naturalism, and eventually detective fiction, because the characters in the literature embodied what society feared as the crumbling class walls gave way to the rise of lower-class criminal activities in the middle and upper classes. As degenerate or criminal tendencies became more prevalent in the middle class, the idea of identity began to change as citizens realized that their natures were more corrupt than they believed. Detective literature in the late nineteenth century quickly became popular because it identified and put forth the prevalent problems citizens were facing as the concept of identity among the social classes was changing. Detective fiction authors reflected the perception of worldviews common throughout England, and the changes that imperialism had on many of the citizens.

A degenerating sense of identity was a growing concern among the middle-class Victorians. Citizens were under pressure to conform to societal expectations, but at the same time those very constructs were breaking down as “[i]n the last twenty years of the century, an

intense debate developed between those who sought to shore up the old crumbling distinctions and those demanding change” (Spencer 207). The imperialistic worldview that was common throughout England during the nineteenth century affected this national sense of identity. Those who left England for foreign countries were unable to reassimilate back to their accustomed lives as smoothly as they expected when they returned to England. As Samuel Beckett points out, the spirit of degeneracy sweeping through the growing late Victorian middle class demanded literature that reflected what was going on in society – not an inaccurate portrayal that was “sane, undisturbed, and undisturbing” (qtd. in Riquelme 587). Writers during the rising Romantic movement portrayed these themes of imperialism in their writing, and drew from “contemporary interests for their characters, settings, and themes: the exotic reaches of the empire – Africa, Egypt, India, Australia – as well as such regions as China, the South Pacific, and South and Central America” (Spencer 203). Writers such as Conan Doyle embraced popular interests, like imperialism and the characteristics of exotic places, and portrayed them in their work.

Conan Doyle’s “The Sign of Four,” “The Speckled Band,” “A Study in Scarlet,” “The Five Orange Pips,” and “The ‘Gloria Scott’” all include characters with a dualistic nature of genial colonials against degenerate aristocrats that becomes apparent when the colonials return to their native England. In each of these Holmes stories, Conan Doyle portrays the colonial figures as men who have committed a heinous crime outside of the country, but cannot escape the consequences of their actions when they return. To most, each such character appears individually as “a bearer of traditional values and an agent of an inherited order, like the aristocracy, but he is not portrayed as a profligate in the way the aristocracy frequently is in English writing of the nineteenth century. He is, in a sense, the efficacious double of the degenerate aristocrat” (Siddiqi 237-38). In Conan Doyle’s stories, each of these returned colonial

figures participate in some form of nefarious activity, and their past always catches up to them after they return to their native England. This reflection of criminal individuals exemplifies the pervasive nature of societal decline. Conan Doyle participated in the Boer War, which gave him an intimate knowledge of how other cultures affected his fellow citizens, and how those citizens' actions affected their attempts at re-assimilating into their original society. Conan Doyle's portrayal of the dualistic nature in his colonial characters allows readers to analyze the underlying themes of unrest that were prevalent in the society around him.

“The Sign of Four” is one of the four novel-length Sherlock Holmes stories that Conan Doyle penned, and is about English colonials who could not return to their aristocratic lives as peacefully as they expected. Mary Morstan visits Holmes and Watson in Baker Street, asking them to accompany her as she attempts to find out who has been sending her pearls, and who wants to meet her in order to help her receive justice for being wronged. The group soon learns that Major Sholto, an old army friend of Miss Morstan's father, died right before she began receiving pearls in the mail. One of his sons, Thaddeus Sholto, is the one who has been sending Miss Morstan pearls. His father, Major Sholto, did not tell anyone when Captain Morstan accidentally died in front of him, and felt extremely guilty that he “concealed not only the body but also the treasure and that I have clung to Morstan's share as well as my own” (Conan Doyle 103). Morstan and Sholto found the location of a hidden treasure from four convicts, and when they found it, kept it for themselves. Jonathan Small, one of the four convicts, and his accomplice, tracked down the treasure in the Sholtos' home, and stole it from where it was hidden in the attic. In the process, they killed Bartholomew Sholto, Thaddeus's brother. Eventually, Holmes and Watson find the men who stole the treasure, but they are unable to recover the treasure itself. Even though the men Morstan and Sholto stole from were convicts,

they military men were not pardoned from their own crimes, and they inevitably were forced to face the consequences of their actions after they returned to their native England.

Dr. Grimesby Roylott of Stoke Moran in Conan Doyle's "The Adventure of the Speckled Band" is a brutish man of the gentry who, upon his return to England from Calcutta, India, revealed his wicked nature to his stepdaughters. Roylott is different from Bartholomew Sholto in "The Sign of Four," however, because while Roylott represents the dominant masculinity that many people feared was spreading through the middle class as a form of "hooliganism," Sholto represents the more effeminate character traits. "The hooligan's masculine assertiveness was widely seen as a conscious reaction against the perceived effeminacy of contemporary life" (Arata 13). "The Sign of Four" was published in 1890, and "The Sign of Four" was published in 1892. Conan Doyle was clearly aware of the way society viewed the impact imperialism had on the colonials who left and returned to England, and his literature reflected the "bourgeois 'ambivalence towards the hooligan [as it] reflected the subtle ideological role he had come to perform'" (Greenslade qtd. in Arata 13). The hooligan nature, and the want of restraint that came with it both in literature and society, "indicated a falling away (though in different directions) from bourgeois norms of proper behavior" (Arata 13). The imperial colonial characters in Conan Doyle's stories, whether through their effeminate sensuality or hooliganism, reflect the way imperialism impacted societal degeneracy in the late Victorian era.

After the Roylott family became settled in the country,

[i]nstead of making friends and exchanging visits with our neighbours, who had at first been overjoyed to see a Roylott of Stoke Moran back in the old family seat, he [Dr. Roylott] shut himself up in his house and seldom came out save to indulge in ferocious quarrels with whoever might cross his path. Violence of temper approaching to mania

has been hereditary in the men of the family...he became the terror of the village, and the folks would fly at his approach, for he is a man of immense strength, and absolutely uncontrollable in his anger. (Conan Doyle 260)

Julia and Helen Roylott, Dr. Roylott's stepdaughters, were afraid of their guardian and wanted to leave his house as soon as possible. When Julia Roylott became engaged, her stepfather did not object to her marriage, but she mysteriously died two weeks before the wedding. If the two women marry, their mother's estate would be split between them, and the doctor would be left with very little, providing him with motive to kill the two girls. Holmes uses his understanding of Roylott's past and his degenerate nature to determine his actions and prevent another unnecessary murder.

However, in the process of solving the case, Dr. Roylott dies when the snake he has been using to attempt to kill his stepdaughters becomes angry and turns on its owner. Roylott's degenerate nature pervades his life and affects what he surrounds himself, and eventually his choices backfire on him, leading to his demise. Each of the colonials in Conan Doyle's stories that return to England are unable to adjust back to the life they had before; instead, they are either haunted by their past, or continue to live in the same manner when they return. The men in the stories have a dualistic nature of colonial and aristocrat, but cannot reconcile the two natures together. Their inability to reconcile their criminal past with their aristocratic lives is representative of the criminal tendencies spreading across the crumbling class boundaries that the upper classes in late Victorian England could not escape.

In "A Study in Scarlet," multiple characters possess corrupt qualities that lead them to commit murder. Enoch J. Drebber and Joseph Strangerson are two men from Utah who murder John Ferrier because he refuses to force his daughter to marry one of them. When John Ferrier

and his daughter Lucy are rescued by the Mormons in the desert, they are told that in order to stay with their rescuers they must adopt and follow Mormon doctrine. Ferrier agrees, but the one religious point he does not agree with is the stance on marriage; “[h]e had to seal his mouth on the subject, however, for to express an unorthodox opinion was a dangerous matter in those days in the Land of the Saints” (Conan Doyle 62). Anyone who breathed a word of discontent was more than likely to receive a harsh punishment, because “[t]he victims of persecution [Mormons] had now turned persecutors on their own account, and persecutors of the most terrible description” (Conan Doyle 62). Ferrier is eventually killed while he and Lucy are trying to escape with the help of Jefferson Hope, who is engaged to Lucy. While Drebber and Strangerson are in London, Hope finds them and murders them. As the police investigate the murders and attempt to find out who killed the two men, they learn that Drebber was “coarse in his habits and brutish in his ways...and could hardly ever be said to be sober” (Conan Doyle 44). As Hope pursues the two men, his mind takes on “a hard, unyielding nature, and the predominant idea of revenge had taken such complete possession of it that there was no room for any other emotion” (Conan Doyle 75). Drebber, Strangerson, and Hope are all representative of the “hooligan” nature that came about as a response to the effeminacy in the middle class. In each of the men in “A Study in Scarlet” as well, their religion or circumstances have so deeply impacted their natures that their sense of morality degenerates to the point that they have a capacity for murder.

Holmes’ client in “The Five Orange Pips,” John Openshaw, comes to the detective because he fears that he will meet the same untimely death as his uncle and father did. Openshaw’s father and Uncle Elias were fairly well-to-do members of society, and Elias had traveled to America as a young man to become a planter. While in America, Elias Openshaw fought under Jackson during the Civil War before returning to his plantation. Even though he had

made a significant fortune for himself, he had an “aversion to the negroes, and his dislike of the Republican policy in extending the franchise to them” (Conan Doyle 219). Openshaw was “fierce and quick-tempered, very foul-mouthed when he was angry, and of a most retiring disposition” (Conan Doyle 219). When he returned to England, Openshaw purchased an estate and attempted to live his life in England in peace. However, his American past does not let him escape so easily. One morning, he receives an envelope with the letters “K.K.K.” on the inner flap, and five dried orange pips inside. When Openshaw receives the letter, he cries, “My God, my God, my sins have overtaken me!” (Conan Doyle 220). While in America, Elias Openshaw was an active member of the K.K.K., and when he returned to England he brought a box full of “Letters, memoranda, receipts, and a register” (Conan Doyle 221) from the organization back with him. Other members of the K.K.K. were not pleased with his absence, and followed him across the ocean to kill him as punishment for leaving. Even though Elias Openshaw attempted to return to English culture and his family, and to live his life as though nothing terrible had happened in America, he could not escape his past, and the consequences of his crimes followed him to his death, and to the death of his brother and nephew.

“The ‘Gloria Scott’” was Sherlock Holmes’ first case<sup>2</sup>, and focused on an aristocratic man who could not escape his past in a foreign country. Holmes’ only college friend Victor Trevor invited him for a visit during a school holiday. Trevor’s father, “Old Trevor,” was “a man of little culture, but with a considerable amount of rude strength, both physically and mentally... Yet he had a reputation for kindness and charity on the countryside” (Conan Doyle 375). Despite Old Trevor’s strong appearance, when Holmes deduces that he had “been most intimately associated with someone whose initials were J.A., and whom you afterwards were

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<sup>2</sup> “The ‘Gloria Scott’” was not the first published Holmes case (see introduction). As the case opens, Holmes shows Watson the note that caused Old Trevor to go into an apoplectic shock. He tells Watson that the paper is from the case that started his career as a private consulting detective.

eager to entirely forget” (Conan Doyle 375), the man fainted. Old Trevor’s nature changes somewhat throughout his life. In the past that he was trying to escape (as revealed later in the narrative), Trevor represented the hooliganism that was growing in the late Victorian era. When he returned to England, he attempted to adopt the more effeminate, sensualist nature of the aristocracy. Both hooliganism and sensualism were modes of deviation or decline, and Trevor is unable to escape his past, and his true nature. During Holmes’ visit, a strange man named Hudson arrives, which shocks Old Trevor; however, he gives Hudson a job on his estate. Eventually, Hudson’s stay takes such a toll on Old Trevor that Holmes’ friend calls him the devil because the old man’s health has fallen so drastically while Hudson is there. One day, Victor Trevor insults Hudson, and refuses to apologize for it, despite his father asking him to make amends.

Because Holmes’ friend will not apologize, Hudson decides to leave to go see Mr. Beddoes, someone else from Old Trevor’s past, and soon Old Trevor receives a note from Beddoes that, when decoded, says “The game is up. Hudson has told all. Fly for your life” (Conan Doyle 380). Upon reading the note, Old Trevor goes into a nervous shock and soon dies. When Holmes and his friend found the papers that the old man left, explaining everything, they realized that Old Trevor’s real name used to be James Armitage, and that he had been involved in a bloody mutiny on board the *Gloria Scott*, a prison vessel that he was on after getting arrested for embezzling money. Hudson was one of the crewmembers on the ship who survived, and threatened to expose Old Trevor’s secret unless he gave him a job. Even though Old Trevor gave in to Hudson’s demands, he still could not rid himself of the guilt and shock that Hudson caused him, and eventually died from the weight of the crimes that followed him home. The adventures that Conan Doyle wrote that deal with imperialism and hooliganism were a large impact on the

sense of identity, both on a national and individual level, in the late nineteenth century's rapidly changing middle class.

Communities and nations are strongly connected by the stories that are told and passed down through generations, as the stories reflect common themes and concepts of identity as they change. National pride is instilled in citizens at a young age, which has an impact on how they act when they leave for new, foreign places. During the nineteenth century, which was a time of colonialization for England as its citizens left for regions in India and Africa, they took the values and stories they adopted growing up with them. As society in England continued to develop through the changing social classes, and become modernized, stories were not only told, they were also written down. These stories represented the building blocks for religion, superstition, behavior, and education.

According to new historicists, literature serves an active role in creating history: “[L]iterature does not simply reflect relations of power, but actively participates in the consolidation and/or construction of discourses and ideologies, just as it functions as an instrument in the construction of identities, not only at the individual level – that of the subject – but on the level of the group or even that of the national state” (Bertens 156). Written works, such as detective fiction, are not only a way for people to respond to events in their communities – they also help *shape* what is happening, and individual and national levels. James K.A. Smith makes note of society's habitus, or “our most fundamental orientations to our world... embedded in our bodies” (94): “[O]ur actions as citizens are based, not primarily on cognitive deliberation or even on our ‘perspectives,’ but for the most part on acquired habits, unconscious desires, and pre-intellectual dispositions” (8). In the late Victorian era, literature played a large part in the breakdown of class boundaries, and Conan Doyle's writing is a specific example of literature

that played a large part in this trend towards what was referred to as societal degeneration.

As the perception of the spread of criminal and degenerate tendencies was growing because of the movement of lower-class behavior to the upper classes, literature that reflected this degeneracy spread as well. Literature became a way to identify degeneracy, and an attempt to solve it; the “degenerate text [was] at once symptomatic, infectious, and disturbingly mimetic” (Arata 14). The literature became a way of representing the problems that were a part of society, and the degeneracy of individuals on multiple levels, which allowed readers to better recognize and understand their own inherent degenerate qualities. Samuel Beckett notes that “seeing, that is, recognizing, the ill around and within us requires and enables a mode of saying, or writing, that reflects the illness rather than pretending to be sane, undisturbed, and undisturbing” (qtd. in Riquelme 587). The perception people in society had of their own degeneracy required literature that reflected the crumbling middle class morality instead of trying to cover it up. The texts that reflected this moral degeneracy are symptomatic of late-Victorian England because they capture the “gross reality” spreading through the middle class. Concern with purity, relationship boundaries, and cultural and gender distinctions was growing, and the changing notions of identity as a result of these concerns on individual and national levels were being represented in literature more often.

Holbrook Jackson categorized the nineteenth century into two sections: “The first half...was ‘remarkable for a literary and artistic renaissance, degenerating into decadence; the second for a new sense of patriotism degenerating into jingoism’” (qtd. in Arata 5). Indeed, with authors like Kate Chopin, Wilkie Collins, Rudyard Kipling, Oscar Wilde, Jules Verne, and Arthur Conan Doyle publishing new works, literature, particularly fiction, was also helping the way people understood degeneration as it was reflected in the text, especially in the second half

of the century. Fiction in late Victorian England helped “shape and give voice to contemporary problems, as well as...attempt to resist ideological structures” (Arata 5). Fiction was both a way of exposing the decay in society, and of providing a solution. Conan Doyle understood the crumbling sense of identity, in all its forms, in his society, as well as its connection to aesthetics and the growing aesthetic of crime, and portrayed both in his detective stories.

Thomas De Quincey, in his essay “On Murder Considered as One of the Fine Arts,” writes of murder has having two opposite considerations: moral and aesthetic. Criminal study was becoming increasingly popular, and “[a]s the study of ‘the criminal’ as a distinct human category took root in the newly established disciplines of phrenology, psychiatry, and evolutionary biology, crime came to be seen not as an occasional slippage by normal persons, but as the expression of an aberrant characteristic in the nature of the criminal” (Harpham 129). A criminal nature was seen as an inherent part of an individual’s character. Arata notes that the self was “riven by history, sediment by innumerable strata of earlier lives and fates, molded into its present shape by an ineluctable and almost unimaginably distended past” (22). If someone has a criminal nature, he cannot separate himself from it or prevent it from affecting his life. His identity is connected to his society, through cultural and social norms, and if society is breaking down around him, both at a local and national level, his own degeneration is inescapable.

The societal degeneration Conan Doyle portrayed in his writing can be linked to Immanuel Kant’s definition of “aesthetic,” which leads to the rise of an aesthetic of crime. Kant defined something that is beautiful or pleasing as “that which pleases *immediately*, and *without concepts*” (Scruton 19). According to Kant, there are no morals attached to beauty, only an appeal to the immediate senses. Yet Kant never saw crime as “a proper object of aesthetic regard: human actions were always, for him, moral – that is, morally accessible” (Harpham 122).

Looking at crime's beauty or thinking of it as beautiful is not the primary problem with viewing crime aesthetically, since aesthetic refers primarily to form. The problem is deciding whether crime is beautiful at all. Scruton notes that "we experience beauty when we see how the function of a thing generates and is expressed in its observable features" (18). Detective fiction's function is to portray the criminal traits late Victorian society saw spreading through the middle class, and to attempt to provide a solution for the problem. The structure and form of the detective genre became what made Conan Doyle's stories so appealing to the bourgeois who purchased *The Strand* in order to read the Sherlock Holmes adventures. Detective fiction is formulaic, and Conan Doyle's stories followed this strict structure, which made them appeal to and satisfy readers, despite some of their gruesome subject matter. As the detective genre developed, and especially with the emergence of Sherlock Holmes as its most recognizable figure, criminal and aesthetic form became more frequently intertwined. Eventually, a movement known as "the aesthetic of crime" arose, and Conan Doyle's stories became prime examples of the "criminal aesthetic" elements because of the strict formula he followed. The finished crime, specifically, and the methods used to retrace the criminal's steps, were where readers recognized the aesthetic appeal of criminal acts.

Before the creation of Sherlock Holmes, literary detectives often shared more in their thinking with the criminals than the rest of society did: "When the detective reappeared in literature in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, he did so... 'not as a hero, but as, at worst, a villain and, at best, a suspect and ambiguous character'" (Ian Ousby qtd. in Harpham 121). When Poe "inaugurated the modern era of detective fiction" (Harpham 121) with "The Murders in the Rue Morgue," the literary detective's nature changed. Instead of being villains, or having ambiguous natures, they were "for the most part wellborn and intellectual, and had no

criminal past. But even though they were no longer criminals, these detectives did retain an almost unseen understanding with those who transgressed the law” (Harpham 121). The detective’s slightly criminal nature made it possible to read detective fiction from either a detective or criminal standpoint – sometimes, the reader could do both. With the rise of an aesthetic of crime, the *beauty* of the crime – its ingenuity, order, and sometimes diabolical purpose as revealed in the investigation – suddenly became possible. The detective genre made it possible for crime to be experienced primarily as an artistic expression by disregarding moral considerations in evaluating an aesthetic scene, an attitude especially evident with Conan Doyle’s character Sherlock Holmes.

The growing fear of degeneracy among a growing Bourgeois class had a strong impact on the way individuals in society understood morality as well. As the middle-class ideals that had been considered normative began to change, so too did the moral considerations of the time. Arata connects degeneracy to “any aesthetic or political problem...disruptive of middle-class ideals: degenerative practices ‘mean the end of an established order, which for thousands of years has satisfied logic, fettered depravity, and in every art matured something of beauty’” (32). As crime began to be viewed from an aesthetic point of view, concepts of morality began to change as well. The removal of moral ties from crime in late-Victorian England through “[i]nvocations of degenerative paradigms are invariably tied up with concerns about the decline and fall of the bourgeoisie. Indeed, though degeneration theory is overtly concerned with the Other, it covertly expresses the anxieties of a middle class worried about its own present status and future prospects” (Arata 32). The growing popularity of an aesthetic appreciation of crime, and its manifestation in detective literature, contributed to the disruption of moral ideals that encouraged, until this point, some restraint on depravity.

During the late nineteenth century, the lens through which people viewed morality shifted from Kantian moralism to consequentialist moralism, which was also cause for anxiety among those in the late-Victorian bourgeoisie. Kant's definition of moralism focused on the action itself, which he required be universalizable. Rather than focusing on isolated events, Kantian moralism required a shift in focus to universally coherent laws. This requirement would ignore both the circumstances around the action and the actor's character. Kant was also unconcerned with the effects to which the action leads. Kantian moralism implied that "actions be inspired by the right intentions, which he understood to be a respect for persons...respect means treating people as ends in themselves and not merely as means to our own enjoyment" (Terjesen 96). An action's intentions are the motives behind what happens, which ignores "questions of rectification: what is required of a person of good will when a morally corrupt person is unchanged and unchecked by either moral or civic law" (Rozema 27).

Applying Kantian moralism to detective fiction, and ignoring the character of the individuals committing crimes is not helpful because for Kant, the focus is the intention behind the individual action, not the character's intentions. When using Kantian moralism, detective fiction readers cannot consider whether a crime is truly "bad," or whether or not a detective is truly "good." In Kant's mind, crime is bad, therefore there are no moral questions connected to it. Another flaw in applying Kantian moralism to detective fiction is that detective fiction transcribes general concerns to individual ones, while Kant's view moves the other direction. This flawed system of reading detective fiction led to the adoption of consequentialist morality.

Consequentialist moralism "appeals to the consequences of our actions to determine their right or wrongness" (Terjesen 96). Consequentialism is based on inductive reasoning, which cannot fully provide certainty in any given situation. The future is incomplete, which means that

any given outcome of an action, regardless of an individual's character, is also uncertain.

Judging actions as good or bad requires definite certainty about every outcome.

Consequentialism's need for predictability in order to have a moral stance on a subject ensures that "[t]he higher the unpredictability of the outcome, the lower the reliability of the judgment" (Rozema 28). The application of consequentialism to detective fiction does not fare much better than Kantianism because analyzing the results of a crime and the events leading up to them leads to a study of the person who performed a crime, and an evaluation of whether he is good or bad. Consequentialism is, by necessity, holistic, where detective fiction is narrow; therefore, consequential moralism is not an apt choice for interpreting detective fiction because it cannot possibly account for all the outcomes of a crime. In detective fiction, the one solving the case reveals to the reader who the criminal is and why his actions are morally wrong.

Consequentialism works better than Kantianism when reading detective fiction, but it demands some form of rectification for actions. For rectification to occur, there must be a clear right and wrong in a situation so that the wronged party can receive justice.

In detective fiction, the detective reveals to the reader who the criminal is and why his actions are morally wrong. However, moral motivations are not the focus of a criminal study until the resolution of the entire case. As the story of the crime unfolds, morality and ethics represent grey areas – no one, not even the victim, is innocent. There are constant grounds for suspicion of everyone, caused by the crumbling class lines and morals in society, and the detective's job is to reason out the story of what happened, rather than let his moral concerns and emotions dictate his response. Applying virtue ethics to detective fiction serves a better purpose than both Kantian moralism and consequentialist moralism, because it "allows for degrees of goodness and evil: a person could be more or less virtuous or vicious in relation to the two

extremes of complete virtue and complete vice” (Rozema 29). Virtue ethics takes an individual’s character into account, as well as how it affects his or her actions. One of Howard Haycraft’s aspects of the detective story is the “deduction by putting oneself in another’s position (now called psychology)” (12), and is found not only in Conan Doyle’s writing, but in modern detective fiction as well, particularly Rex Stout’s Nero Wolfe mysteries, and Agatha Christie’s Hercule Poirot cases.

In “A Study in Scarlet,” Holmes is able to analyze the nature and intentions of the criminal he chases. While Holmes constantly puts aside morals, and asks Watson to do the same, there is a certain part of detection that requires him to, in order to fully be able to understand and solve crime, “in some fashion put himself in the place of – or empathize with – the murderer, thief, or victim” (Taliaferro and Le Gall 140). Holmes does not hold prejudices or preconceived notions; he follows wherever the facts lead him. However, Holmes has to be able to understand the person or persons that he chases, and a complete lack of ability to empathize or put himself in their shoes would significantly hamper his detective skills. He must use his deduction skills by putting himself in another’s position. Holmes explains his reasoning to Watson when he first sets up a trap to find the murderer in “A Study in Scarlet:”

Now put yourself in that man’s place. On thinking the matter over, it must have occurred to him that it was possible that he had lost the ring in the road after leaving the house. What would he do then? He would eagerly look out for the evening papers in the hope of seeing it among the articles found. His eye, of course, would light upon this. Why should he fear a trap? There would be no reason in his eyes why the finding of the ring should be connected with the murder. He would come. You shall see him within an hour. (Conan Doyle 38)

Holmes’s understanding of the criminals he pursues allows him to accurately deduct what their

next move will be, and how to counter it. Holmes relies on his scientific methodologies as part of his investigation, but he is not oblivious to the fact that he must be able to interpret and understand human emotion as well as facts.

Nero Wolfe, like Holmes, is also able to use “deduction by putting one’s self in another’s position” (Haycraft 12) in Stout’s *And Be A Villain*. One of the biggest clues that Wolfe gets is when the two men from the Hi-Spot company, who are directly connected with Madeline Fraser’s radio program, want to pay him because they do not want any further connection with the investigation. Their sudden withdrawal makes Wolfe realize that he was missing something important, so he put his brain to work to figure out what he was missing:

I considered every possible circumstance and all conceivable combinations...I brought to bear what I knew of you – your position, your record, your temperament, and your character. At the end only one suspicion wholly satisfied me. I concluded that you had somehow become convinced that someone closely connected with that program, which you were sponsoring, had committed the murders, and that there was a possibility that that fact would be discovered. (Stout 143-44)

The more conversations Wolfe has with those connected to the murders, the more questions he has, and the higher his chances of discovering the murderer are. When he uncovers the clues that lead him to the killer, he does not immediately share them with Goodwin or the police. He keeps them to himself until he is sure that he is on the right track.

In Agatha Christie’s *Curtain*, Hastings is the Watson to Poirot’s Holmes, and often points his “finger of just suspicion” (Haycraft 12) at his fellow guests, but he is just as often without any real reason or proof for suspecting them. Throughout *Curtain*, Hastings is struck by wild thoughts about the other people in the house, and relates to Poirot his observations of

“suspicious” behavior and conversations, believing that any one of the others could be the elusive “X,” who Poirot believes intends to kill someone at the inn where they are staying. After Colonel Luttrell accidentally shoots his wife, Hastings at first suspects that it was intentional. When he relates the events to Poirot, however, he changes his mind and decides that it was an accident. Hastings is often quick to jump to conclusions, and just as quick to change his mind. Often, Hastings changes his perspective because of something that Poirot tells him, or reminds him of, because he relies so heavily on his friend’s powers of deduction and reasoning. At one point in the narrative, Hastings even suspects the Belgian detective of falsehood: “Was the whole story of X a fabrication? Had Poirot come to Styles because he feared a tragedy in the Franklin ménage? Had he come to watch over Judith? Was *that* why he had resolutely told me nothing? Because the whole story of X was a fabrication, a smoke screen?” (Christie 245). Hastings’ suspicion of his friend does not last long, however, and he moves on with his search for the truth of “X”’s identity.

Both Hastings and Poirot fall under Haycraft’s element of “deduction by putting one’s self in another’s position” (12), although Poirot has more successful results than his friend does. Hastings is constantly trying to put himself in his fellow guests’ shoes to determine whether any of them could be a killer. Poirot does the same, but with more success than Hastings, though he chooses not to share his information. Rather than a focus on following physical clues to catch a murderer, as Holmes does, Poirot is similar to Wolfe in his reliance on psychological analysis of the killer, and looking into his or her human nature. The more Hastings reflects on the case, the more he realizes how X, the murderer he is to try to prevent, “never had a motive. That was the strength of his position. It was that, and that only, that was holding us up. And yet, at any minute, that tiny flash of illumination might come” (Christie 226). Using virtue ethics with detective

fiction is helpful because it allows readers to understand both the criminal, and the detective, who occasionally exhibits criminal tendencies that are excusable in the context of the investigation.

The effect an aesthetic of crime had on the perception of crime in society, and its connection to the crumbling sense of morality among the middle class, had a significant impact on the dualistic nature of the detective and criminal Conan Doyle portrayed in his writing. Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes adventures contain the essential elements for a criminal aesthetic: "the detached judgment of a criminal observer, the suspension of moral considerations, the preoccupation with the criminal rather than the victim, the replacement of any interest in the effects of a crime by an appreciation of its form – and as a result of all of these – the delight in the titanic criminal" (Harpham 126). These elements, when combined, create a sensationalist story that attracts readers and keeps them engaged. Each of the criminal aesthetic elements are evident in all of Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes stories, and significantly contribute to the detective story's widespread popularity in the late nineteenth century.

In several of the Sherlock Holmes stories, such as "The Adventure of the Copper Beeches" and "A Study in Scarlet," Holmes frequently admonishes Watson for "sensationalizing" the cases instead of presenting only the facts. However, in "The Adventure of the Blanched Soldier," one of the few Sherlock Holmes stories told from Holmes' point of view rather than Watson's, Holmes admits that "the matter must be presented in such a way as may interest the reader" (Conan Doyle 49). Where Holmes had previously ridiculed Watson for "pandering to popular taste instead of confining himself rigidly to facts and figures" (Conan Doyle 49), Holmes was forced to realize that in order for any audience to want to read about his activities, he could not explain or point out every detail as the plot progressed. The form of the

detective story, and how the solution is revealed, allow the detective to be morally distanced from the crime and able to appreciate different aspects of the crime that lead to an overall admiration of the crime itself.

Conan Doyle's "The Final Problem" is one of the best examples that depicts the dualism of detective and criminal. The relationship between Holmes and Moriarty is also important, because, according to Harpham, "the identity between these characters [Holmes and Moriarty] is not precisely that of a criminal to a criminal, or of a criminal to a detective, or even of a detective to a criminal, but of an artist to a criminal, an identity that discovers the artistry in crime and the criminality in art" (140). Both Holmes' dual role as both detective and criminal and the connection between Holmes and Moriarty in "The Final Problem" further demonstrate the effect of a criminal aesthetic on detective writing and how Conan Doyle's writing continued to endorse this crime aesthetic.

The first element that Harpham gives as part of the criminal aesthetic, "the detached judgment of a criminal observer" (126), is readily apparent in Conan Doyle's "The Final Problem." An observer is one who obeys certain rules and customs, and who watches and takes notice of what transpires around him; Sherlock Holmes exemplifies both aspects of an observer. He both partakes in various criminal activities, either to aid him in his pursuits or for his own pleasure, and he observes criminal activity and uses it to his advantage when solving cases. In "The Final Problem," Holmes is an observer who has been watching and following Professor Moriarty's criminal career for several years.

When Holmes visits Watson at home, readers get their first glimpse of Professor Moriarty, as Holmes relates to Watson that "what I am telling you now is what I have myself discovered" (Conan Doyle 471). Holmes has "continually been conscious of some power behind

the malefactor, some deep organizing power which forever stands in the way of the law, and throws its shield over the wrong-doer” (Conan Doyle 470). Moriarty has been at the center of every London criminal web, and Holmes is never able to discover who or where he is, much less how he is controlling London’s crime until “at last the time came when I seized my thread and followed it, until it led me, after a thousand cunning windings, to ex-Professor Moriarty, of mathematical celebrity” (Conan Doyle 471). Holmes admits that after deducing Moriarty’s organization, he “devoted [his] whole energy to exposing and breaking up” (Conan Doyle 471) his web of crime. It is commonly known that Holmes, while devoted to apprehending the various criminals he pursues, is not opposed to creating any small deception or misleading hints in order to achieve his end. He is also often willing to ask Dr. Watson to disregard moral considerations in order to make progress on a case.

Holmes’ own inattention to traditional morality, his ability to distance himself from personal influences, and the ease with which he assumes other people, specifically Watson, will assist him in his investigations, are all evidence of the second element of a criminal aesthetic: a suspension of moral beliefs for an unspecified length of time. Holmes, and as a result Watson, to a large extent ignores morals and personal motives in order to solve crimes – he merely follows the facts of a case wherever they lead him so that he can trace his way back to the original perpetrator. His methods of tracking and finding Professor Moriarty are not fully explained in “The Final Problem,” but one can assume that they were not all fully “above board” based on his various schemes and plans in other Conan Doyle’s stories. In “A Scandal in Bohemia,” Holmes recruits Watson to help him find a way inside Irene Adler’s house by admitting that their methods will not be above suspicion:

‘By the way, Doctor, I shall want your cooperation.’

‘I shall be delighted.’

‘You don’t mind breaking the law?’

‘Not in the least.’

‘Nor running a chance of arrest?’

‘Not in a good cause.’

‘Oh, the cause is excellent!’

‘Then I am your man.’ (Doyle 169-70)

After the two partners decide on their plan of attack, and Holmes is inside, Watson throws “an ordinary plumber’s smoke-rocket, fitted with a cap at either end to make it self-lighting” (Conan Doyle 170). Holmes is also willing to give himself a false identity and risk causing damage to Irene Adler’s home in order to locate one photograph.

Holmes also sees no problem with keeping his companions in the dark as to his investigations; often, Watson, Lestrade, and the rest of the police force are not aware of the full scheme of his plans until the moment they are needed. In “The Red-Headed League,” Holmes is asked to discover why Mr. Jabez Wilson was offered a strange job copying encyclopedias for several weeks, and then all of a sudden the job is taken away. Holmes’ investigation leads him to Mr. Wilson’s pawnbroker’s shop, where he asks his assistant for directions. Later that night, Holmes asks Watson, Mr. Jones of Scotland Yard, and Mr. Merryweather, the chairman of directors of the London banks, to join him in a late-night rendezvous in the “Coburg branch of the City and Suburban Bank[’s]” (Conan Doyle 185) basement, but does not tell them specific details until they arrive. He does share vague details with them, telling them that they “will play for a higher stake to-night than you have ever done yet, and that the play will be more exciting. For you, Mr. Merryweather, the stake will be some £30,000; and for you, Jones, it will be the

man [John Clay] upon whom you wish to lay your hands” (Conan Doyle 186). Holmes further specifies why they are in the basement of the bank, and what the criminals’ motive is for tunneling from Mr. Jabez Wilson’s shop to the basement of the bank, while the group of men is waiting to apprehend John Clay and his associates.

“A Study in Scarlet” is another case in which Holmes’ withholds his plans to capture the criminal from his associates. Holmes appears to take pleasure in withholding information from the Scotland Yard inspectors and Dr. Watson. He even refuses to tell them the murderer’s name, much less his plan to trap him. He tells them that he would rather tell them all of the information at once, and that knowing the criminal’s name is a small matter compared to capturing him. Holmes had made arrangements to capture the man, but did not want to share them “for we have a shrewd and desperate man to deal with, who is supported, as I have had occasion to prove, by another who is as clever as himself” (Conan Doyle 50). A few moments later, a cab arrives for Holmes, and he asks the cabman to help him with his portmanteau:

‘Gentlemen,’ he cried, with flashing eyes, ‘let me introduce you to Mr. Jefferson Hope, the murderer of Enoch Drebber and of Joseph Strangerson.’

The whole thing occurred in a moment – so quickly that I [Watson] had no time to realize it. I have a vivid recollection of that instant, of Holmes’s triumphant expression and the ring of his voice, of the cabman’s dazed, savage face, as he glared at the glittering handcuffs, which had appeared as if by magic upon his wrists” (Conan Doyle 51).

Watson, Gregson, and Lestrade had no inkling of what Holmes’ plan was to catch the murderer, nor did they know he was planning on going on a trip, as he seemed to be when one of Holmes’ Baker Street Irregulars announced the cab driver.

In “The Case of the Greek Interpreter,” Holmes forces open a window so that he, his

brother Mycroft, Watson, and Inspector Gregson can enter a house in Beckenham to apprehend a group of kidnappers. The inspector, observing Holmes' methods, remarks that "[i]t is a mercy that you are on the side of the force, and not against it, Mr. Holmes" (Conan Doyle 445).

Regardless of Holmes' methods to apprehend the various criminals he pursues, Conan Doyle's readers are never asked to pass judgment on anything he does as he follows the clues of the case. They are given the clues as the clues are presented, and merely follow along with Watson and Holmes in their pursuit of the criminal(s). As detective fiction progressed and developed throughout the next centuries, writers continued to portray detectives with criminal tendencies who are willing to ignore various aspects of the law in their investigations, and two of the more modern detective story writers are Rex Stout and Agatha Christie.

As detectives pursue the criminals they are chasing, they often have no concern with creating deceptions or misleading both their associates and the suspects they are investigating. In Rex Stout's *A Nero Wolfe Mystery: And Be A Villain*, his main character, Nero Wolfe, fulfills the element of Howard Haycraft's detective story archetypes "the staged ruse to force the culprit's hand" (12), as he follows his own inclinations as he pursues both the information he needs, and the criminals. Along with Conan Doyle, Rex Stout's writings also represent the middle class's lack of morality. There are significant links between Stout and Conan Doyle's characters. Stout's Nero Wolfe is a combination of Conan Doyle's Sherlock and Mycroft Holmes. Nero Wolfe is not exactly like Sherlock because while he has an incredible wealth of knowledge, he rarely leaves the house for a case, much as Mycroft Holmes, Sherlock's brother, rarely leaves his Diogenes Club. Mycroft, in Conan Doyle's writing, does not exert himself to solve cases because he assists the government, while Wolfe assists the police and his clients who are part of the middle class. Wolfe's assistant Archie Goodwin is quite similar to Dr. Watson in that he

documents all of Wolfe's cases, and often misses the significance of facts that Wolfe notices and uses to flush out the criminals. Goodwin has a more active role in Stout's work than Watson does in Conan Doyle's, however, because he acts as Wolfe's eyes, ears, and feet on cases; Wolfe will send Goodwin out to interview suspects, gather information, deliver messages, and anything else that needs to happen. Wolfe and Goodwin are not necessarily friends, though they do get along, but Goodwin is instead a paid assistant who does whatever Wolfe cannot or will not do on his own. Goodwin is most useful to Wolfe in his ability to remember and transcribe conversations verbatim, and his skills in bringing people to the brownstone for Wolfe to interrogate.

When Nero Wolfe begins to collect information about Cyril Orchard's murder, he attempts to persuade Nancylee Shepherd to give him information that she has been hiding from the police. In order to do so, however, he talks to her for an extended length of time, "skating around the edges, getting her used to his voice and manner and to hearing him ask any and every kind of question...soon I noticed that he was circling in toward the scene of the crime" (Stout 55). Eventually, Wolfe leads Nancylee to the radio program, and asks her about the order of the program and each person's job. When he arrives at the subject of the poisoned bottle that Mr. Orchard drinks from, Nancylee reveals a discrepancy in the number of bottles that are used during the program. When Wolfe confronts her on it, she stops talking, thinking that not answering Wolfe will eventually make him want to stop asking. Nancylee refused to give Wolfe his answers, so he dictated to Archie a letter for Inspector Cramer, encouraging him to arrest Miss Fraser and her coworkers, since they all, particularly Miss Fraser, were guilty in the murder of Cyril Orchard. Furious, Nancylee agreed to answer Wolfe's questions to protect Miss Fraser from going to jail.

Another ruse that Wolfe invents to persuade the suspects to reveal information to him is

having Archie Goodwin write a letter that gives the impression that Elinor Vance is being blackmailed, but Goodwin is unable to follow Wolfe's instructions. After Goodwin arrived at Madeline Fraser's apartment to confront the group of suspects, Deborah Koppel died by eating a poisoned candy called Meltettes. Eventually, when Wolfe summons all of the murder suspects to his home for the last time, he blackmails them with the threat of telling the newspapers that Hi-Spot, the soda that Madeline Fraser promoted on her radio show "to ten million people made her so ill that she didn't dare swallow a spoonful of it. Indeed, yes, the papers will print it; and they'll get it in time for Monday morning" (Stout 145). After his implied threat of exposing the secret everyone had tried to hide from the beginning, Wolfe confronts the people who had received letters containing incriminating information about Madeline Fraser in order to find out why Hi-Spot removed their sponsorship from her radio program because of the belief that she was either a murderer or a blackmailer. Every time Wolfe confronts the people who witnessed the murders about information they had been hiding, they reveal more details that prove that his reasoning and observations have been correct all along.

Agatha Christie's *Curtain* is one of the best modern examples of detective fiction in which the suspension of moral considerations and the detective's dualistic nature of both detective and criminal are all evident in her main character, Hercule Poirot. While Christie writes about a female detective, Miss Marple, and has several books in which police or other citizens solve crimes, fulfills the Holmesian archetype most with her character Hercule Poirot. Poirot is a Belgian detective who solves cases with the help of Captain Arthur Hastings. As in both Conan Doyle and Stout's writing, Captain Hastings provides the narration that gives Christie's readers an outside perspective into Poirot's mannerisms and detective skills.

Hastings, Poirot's friend and associate, does not realize the truth behind the events at

Styles until he receives the manuscript that Poirot leaves him four months after his death. When Hastings reads the manuscript, he learns everything that Poirot had not wanted to tell him at Styles. Hastings is shocked by the contents of the manuscript, but understands everything that had not previously made sense to him. In the manuscript, Poirot reiterates “X”’s (the murderer he believed was among them) characteristics, and what Poirot had wanted Hastings to realize from the beginning:

You [Hastings] said that X had committed all the murders.

But, my friend, the circumstances were such that in each case (or very nearly) *only* the accused person could have done the crime...So we get the curious result that we have here a case of catalysis...It means that where X was present, crimes took place – but X did not actively take part in these crimes...I had come across at last, at the end of my career, the perfect criminal, the criminal who had invented such a technique that *he would never be convicted of crime*...Everyone is a potential murderer – in everyone there arises from time to time the *wish* to kill – though not the *will* to kill...[T]he art of X was this: not to suggest the *desire*, but to break down the normal decent resistance...It was a marshalling of the forces of a human being to widen a breach instead of repairing it. It called on the best in a man and set it in alliance with the worst. (Christie 253-55)

Hercule Poirot had an acute understanding of human nature, and recognized the potential that everyone has for murder. In the previous murder cases, “X” was involved, but could not possibly have been the one who committed the crime. Instead, Poirot had to find where “X” could have been connected to the crime. His reasoning is similar to that of Holmes in “The Sign of Four”: “[W]hen you have eliminated the impossible, whatever remains, *however improbable*, must be the truth” (Conan Doyle 111). Poirot knew that Norton, the least likely suspect in a murder

investigation, was someone “whom everyone liked and despised – and he could make people do things they didn’t want to do – or (mark this) thought they did not want to do” (Christie 258).

When Poirot realized without uncertainty that Norton was “X,” he knew that he needed to confront him. Poirot arranged for Hastings to have Norton visit his room so he could confront Norton, without Hastings knowing what was happening. When the detective told Norton that he knew his secret, “he did not deny it. No, *mon ami*, he sat back in his chair and smirked. *Mais oui*, there is no other word for it – he smirked. He asked me what I thought I was going to do about this amusing idea of mine. I told him that I proposed to execute him” (Christie 273). In his manuscript, Poirot explains everything he did during the investigation. He did not bring Hastings to Styles just so that he could stand by while Poirot committed murder. Poirot took the time to lay out clues for Hastings to follow; he did “all the things that so often you have reproached me with not doing. I am playing fair with you. I am giving you a run for your money. I am playing the game. You have every chance to discover the truth” (Christie 276). Poirot gave Hastings the chance to uncover Norton’s identity as “X,” to realize that Poirot was the one who killed Norton; it was not a suicide. Out of the three famous detectives, Holmes, Wolfe, and Poirot, Christie’s detective is the one who best exemplifies the dualistic nature of criminal and detective. Poirot dedicated most of his life to catching criminals, and became so immersed in the world of crime that eventually he committed his own crime.

One of the most apparent elements of the criminal aesthetic in the Holmes stories is his fascination with the criminal, rather than the victim. In “The Final Problem,” Holmes’ desire to find Moriarty and lead the police to the famous mathematics professor takes over his life and consumes his energy for three months. Despite all of his efforts to untangle Moriarty’s web, Holmes admits that “[m]y horror at his crimes was lost in my admiration at his skill” (Conan

Doyle 471). Holmes admires Moriarty's inherently criminal nature, and calls him "the Napoleon of crime" (Conan Doyle 471). Holmes does not show any interest in the victims of Moriarty's crimes, just the Professor. As Holmes and Watson are taking the train to get away from Moriarty and his hooligans chasing them, Watson expresses his confidence in their being able to shake off Moriarty's pursuit, but Holmes again expresses admiration for Moriarty's level of intelligence: "My dear Watson, you evidently did not realize my meaning when I said that this man [Moriarty] may be taken as being quite on the same intellectual plane as myself. You do not imagine that if I were the pursuer I should allow myself to be baffled by so slight an obstacle. Why, then, should you think so meanly of him?" (Conan Doyle 475-76). Holmes admits to the immense skill of his adversary, but does not let it interfere with his methods of solving his case. His admiration does not impede his sleuthing abilities or make him emotionally invested; he merely mentions Moriarty's criminal prowess and moves forward with the facts of the case.

Holmes' acknowledgment and admiration of the highly skilled and intellectual criminals he is asked to capture is not restricted to Professor Moriarty. In "The Red-Headed League," one of the first cases Watson and Holmes solve together, and one of the few cases in which Watson was present for each step of the investigation, Holmes is able to guide the police to the capture of John Clay, a criminal that has cleverly eluded their grasp for several years. As Mr. Jones, the Scotland Yard inspector, tells Watson and Mr. Merryweather, the bank director, about Clay's abilities, Holmes adamantly agrees with Jones' estimation, based on his own experiences with Clay: "[H]e is at the head of his profession...[h]is brain is as cunning as his fingers, and though we meet signs of him at every turn, we never know where to find the man himself. He'll crack a crib in Scotland one week, and be raising money to build an orphanage in Cornwall the next" (Conan Doyle 186). Holmes's admiration of the criminals he pursues is significant as it points

back to his own criminal tendencies, and further helps highlight his dual identity as both detective and criminal as he takes care to point out the intellectual abilities of his opponents.

Throughout his investigations, Holmes is often more interested in how a crime is carried out, rather than the effects of the criminal's actions on his victims and surroundings, unless the results are vital to his investigations. This attention to detail is a vital part of another element of a criminal aesthetic: "the replacement of any interest in the effects of a crime by an appreciation of its form" (Harpham 26). His intense desire to follow the clues and facts of a case, rather than the emotions involved, make the Sherlock Holmes stories stand out among other detective stories. Holmes is only interested in the outcome of a crime inasmuch as it provides him with clues to pursue as he tracks the original source. For instance, in "The Red-Headed League," Holmes does not concern himself with investigating the League that temporarily employed Jabez Wilson; instead, he focuses on the details that point toward the assistant and how he spends his time. He admits as much to Watson when he elaborates on the clues that led him to the bank's basement, remarking that the thieves' motives were "perfectly obvious from the first," and that the League was only dreamt up in order to "get this not over-bright pawnbroker out of the way for a number of hours each day" (Conan Doyle 189). Holmes' methods of deductive reasoning are consistent throughout the Adventures Dr. Watson chronicles; in "The Adventure of the Noble Bachelor," Holmes listens to Lord St. Simon's tale of his runaway bride and forms his conclusion "before [the] client came into the room" (Conan Doyle 294). His summation and explanation of the trail of events that led both to Lord St. Simon calling on him, and the result of his investigation, are purely fact-based.

Holmes' embodiment of the different elements that help make up a criminal aesthetic result in the reader's "delight in the titanic criminal" (Harpham 126), while the relationship

between Holmes and Moriarty becomes more like that of an artist admiring another artist's (criminal) work. Moriarty is the titanic criminal of Holmes' cases because he is Holmes' greatest adversary. If Holmes had turned his pursuits to crime rather than detection, it is entirely possible that he would have reached Moriarty's level of diabolism. As he introduces the subject of Professor Moriarty to Watson, who has never heard of the professor, Holmes exclaims

[T]here's the genius and the wonder of the thing!...The man pervades London, and no one has heard of him. That's what puts him on a pinnacle in the records of crime. I tell you Watson, in all seriousness, that if I could beat that man, if I could free society of him, I should feel that my own career had reached its summit, and I should be prepared to turn to some more placid line in life. (Conan Doyle 470)

Holmes admires Moriarty's skill at his work, even though it is at odds with his own. Professor Moriarty's skill with crime is attributed to his "hereditary tendencies of the most diabolical kind. A criminal strain ran in his blood, which, instead of being modified, was increased and rendered infinitely more dangerous by his extraordinary mental powers" (Conan Doyle 470-71). The description of Moriarty's tendency for crime perfectly describes the biological degeneration society feared was spreading in Doyle's England at the time. Moriarty's degeneration is natural to him, so traditional morality is indifferent to him.

Both Moriarty and Holmes symbolize the perception of degeneration afflicting the individual in late-Victorian London. Holmes' admiration of Moriarty's work can be seen as symptomatic of Holmes' own degeneration. Holmes has his own tendencies to behave contrary what is considered appropriate, but because of a rapidly deteriorating middle class, Holmes seeks to prevent further deterioration of society by removing those who add to its criminal class. For so long, Holmes is unable to get around the safeguards Moriarty has in place, and the parrying

between the two great minds is, according to the detective, “the most brilliant bit of thrust-and-parry work in the history of detection. Never have I risen to such a height, and never have I been so hard pressed by an opponent” (Conan Doyle 471). Holmes is relentless in his pursuit of Moriarty, and of every criminal he is asked to track down, but throughout his investigations of members of a crumbling middle class, his own nature is called into question. While Holmes appears on the side of the law, he often expresses his own criminal tendencies. Sherlock Holmes does not fit into a specific category of detective or a specific category of criminal. Instead, he portrays elements of both that reflect the theories of degeneracy in the late nineteenth century, and how that degeneracy manifested in Conan Doyle’s society.

The juxtaposition of Holmes and Moriarty helps emphasize Holmes’ own dual identity as both detective and incipient criminal, which represented the fascination with a criminal aesthetic among the middle class in late-Victorian England. The Sherlock Holmes stories provide a way for readers to strip themselves of their need for traditional morality, as Holmes tends to do, in order to follow the clues and reach the outcome of a case. The elimination of moral considerations allows the crime itself to take on an aesthetic dimension, and the reader is able to decide whether or not to become the detective or the criminal, or, in Sherlock Holmes’ case, both.

## Chapter Two: Detective Fiction's Placebo Effect

*"I crave for mental exaltation. That is why I have chosen my own particular profession, or rather created it, for I am the only one in the world."*

*"The only unofficial detective?" I said, raising my eyebrows.*

*"The only unofficial consulting detective," he answered. – Holmes, "The Sign of the Four"*

Detective fiction's nature in the late nineteenth century provided the middle class with a cathartic way of releasing tension: it provided a placebo-like cure for degeneracy, but because such literature was only palliative, the problems remained, and more detective fiction became encouraged. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes adventures provide an attempt at a cure for society's fear of degeneracy, but because of the vicarious thrills they elicit, their link to everyday life, and the dualistic nature of the protagonist, the adventures are merely a placebo for the problem. Conan Doyle's stories create the realization that social degeneracy does not simply contribute to the need for detective fiction; social degeneracy is also a cause of the spread of detective fiction, because the literature actually fails to eradicate the problem of degeneracy.

Literature became one way for people to respond to the spread of the problem of degeneracy as it presented those problems on an individual level instead of a national one. Toward the end of the nineteenth century, as anxieties about individual and national decay mounted, literature offered "human responses to specific situations, responses necessarily articulated in the materials and idioms of the moment" (Arata 6). Literature offered, as Kenneth Burke points out, stylized, rather than strategic, answers to human concerns: "The situations are real'...just as 'the strategies for handling them have public content,' yet the literary work (fiction or nonfiction) is unavoidably 'false' in so far as it constitutes a 'stylized' response" (qtd. in Arata 6-7). Part of the reason the detective story, and Sherlock Holmes specifically, became so popular

is because as society degenerated, and as a sense of morality spun out of control, people instinctively began to search for someone who could right the wrong, restore a standard of justice, and erase feelings of guilt. Conan Doyle's detective provided his readers with an outlet for their struggle with their feelings about a growing trend toward degeneracy.

History, social degeneracy, and detective fiction are linked because as they each affect the others, they provide a way to observe the changes taking place in society. Detective fiction provides a way of looking at the history of degeneration in society and how it affected people, both at an individual and national level. Ellen O'Gorman notes that "the historical whodunit has a dynamic relationship with the wider historical endeavour which exists beyond the bounds of the narrative itself" (19). Even though detective fiction focuses on individual crimes, it is still able to provide context into how society operated at the time of writing, and how it reacted to crime. It also served as a method of coping with concerns that spread throughout the society, even though it never provides an actual solution for degeneracy. Instead, detective fiction produces a scapegoat for society; readers can project their emotions onto the characters and the story, and allow the resolution of the crime to feed into the feeling that they themselves are innocent of any wrongdoing:

Even though we may be aware that crime is produced out of social or systemic causes – want, ignorance, injustice, misfortune – detective fiction may allow us to believe, or at least feel, that when the criminal is exposed and rendered harmless, the rest of society has been purged and redressed. Like a scapegoating ritual, crime fiction identifies and expels the abnormal: in proving someone guilty, it proves everyone else not guilty, and so is engaged in D.A. Miller's phrase, in "producing a social innocence." (Kerr 138)

In detective fiction, the protagonist, the detective, always finds the criminals and restores a sense

of justice or rectification to the victims. Readers of detective fiction can project their own emotional ambiguity onto the criminal in the story, so that they are able to remove any sense of guilt from themselves without having to commit an actual crime. However, due to the anxieties, both individual and national, that were being endured in the late nineteenth century, “the notion that social decay was inextricably entwined with the decline of language and literature was a commonplace of the period” (Arata 26). Because the problem of degeneracy was affecting both society and its cultural productions, such as literature, detective fiction could do little more than provide society with a false sense of closure and temporary balm for their emotions.

The perception that individuals’ both in reality and in literature have of the world affects their emotions – they are preconditioned to think and act a certain way based on what is happening around them, and in return what they think affects how they respond. Detective fiction became popular in part because of the way it helped society handle its emotions in a healthy manner, and because of its predictability; readers know that the mystery will be solved and there will be no loose ends. Detective fiction, temporarily, makes the chaos caused by anxieties over degeneracy in the modern world calm again. Readers know what to expect in detective fiction: “A familiar detective will solve a crime and restore the world to a form of order. All parts of the story – the hermeneutic code – will be explained. There will be no loose ends or enigmas by the end of the narrative...it is readers’ satisfaction in this closure, and their work in puzzling toward it, that account in some part for crime fiction’s popularity” (Brewster 63). Detective fiction’s predictability, though the subject matter can be violent, soothes the readers’ emotional tension, and plays off of them as well, because readers continue to return to detective fiction when they need emotional relief.

In detective fiction, emotions dictate the majority of, if not all, character actions. Not only

are emotions useful in helping characters perceive the significance of certain situations, but they are also a way for readers to perceive and evaluate situations: they not only *see* the situation in a certain way, based on emotional context; they are “already inclined or disposed to *act* in a certain way – not as the result of a decision but as a sort of ‘natural’ tendency given the inclinations that [they have] acquired,” the habits that cause them to ‘lean’ towards certain reactions (Smith 36). Observing one’s surrounding society and the way other people respond to situations, affects how one personally chooses to respond; often, the response is not a choice, but something dictated or “significantly ‘trained’ by narrative. [One] will have implicitly and affectively absorbed stories and narratives and pictures...such ‘storied’ pedagogy, we’ll see, is intimately linked to our embodiment” (Smith 36).

Detective fiction reflects the way groups of people, especially in urban settings like London, adhere to a set of norms that have been established by the society in which they live, and their emotional responses to the changes in social norms. Generally, if large groups of people respond to situations chaotically, the society around them becomes chaotic. According to Nordau, a chaotic modern world produces degenerate artists, who in turn create hysterical readers: “The hysteric is characterized by an utter inability to resist suggestion, especially when it comes to him via the strong rhetorical patternings of literary language” (Arata 29). Writers such as Conan Doyle observe society and translate their observations in literature, which society then interprets and adapts as a response to chaos. This response in turn inspires writers to observe a society in crises, creating a cycle of degeneracy that writers, though they might attempt to provide solutions, permits them to ultimately only temporarily fix a symptom, rather than eradicate a disease. In Conan Doyle’s stories, Holmes provides solutions to the problems his fellow citizens bring him, but because he is temporarily fixing an ongoing problem, clients

continue to bring him cases, embodying the cycle of degeneracy that writers observe in society and then reflect in their work. Literature, especially detective fiction, serves as a basis for understanding degeneracy's development and the effect it has on society and culture, since literature is a direct result of that degeneracy.

However, detective literature is not only a symptom of degeneracy; it also encourages it. Max Nordau, in his work *Degeneracy*, warns against the downward spiral of society, and how it becomes manifested in art. Imitation and style are two key components to understanding the way literature and society become intertwined. Writers reveal their own degeneracy in their work, and their work then transmits that degeneracy to their readers, who then demand more literature because they connect with the degeneracy the writers have portrayed. Nordau believes that “degenerate works in all their varied forms – and there are many – share one overriding feature. They signify promiscuously. Nothing induces more anxiety...than the suspicion that language is not, as it ought to be, ‘clear, homogenous, and free from internal contradictions’” (Arata 29). Degeneracy not only affects society's actions, but also the language it uses. The degenerate writer contributes to the spread of degenerate language by implementing it in his work. The resulting product requires readers to understand the work and see the hidden meanings in it. The reader, in a sense, becomes a detective, similar to Sherlock Holmes, who must be able to understand the criminal, the crime, and the steps to solving it. The reader must unravel the degenerate literature to reveal the writer's original meaning, much as a detective in fiction must unravel the clues to reveal the original crime.

Readers of detective fiction are not only able to become vicarious detectives through the character in the story, but they are also able to become detectives of the actual text. The readers' own inherently degenerate nature, as Nordau points out, causes the detective stories they read to

appear representative of something else:

In the most commonplace and natural movements [the degenerate] sees hidden signs. All things for him have deep backgrounds; far-reaching shadows are thrown by them over adjacent tracts; they send out wide-spreading roots into remote substrata. Every image that rises up in his mind points with mysterious silence, though with significant look and finger, to other images distinct or shadowy, and induces him to set up relations between ideas, where other people recognize no connection. (qtd. in Arata 31)

The methods of reading hidden signs of degeneracy in images and finding connections between ideas thus shift from observing situations in society to interpreting literature. The ability to read vicariously and interpret detective literature as it applied to the rapid spread of degeneracy in society strongly affected the middle class. The worker population in the middle-class was growing, and its ideals were changing, contributing to the change in interpreting society and the corresponding reflection in texts like detective fiction that dealt with the spreading fear of degeneracy. As detective fiction sought to find a balm for this fear, it only temporarily solved the problem, creating a placebo effect on the readers.

The placebo effect that detective fiction has on crime is connected to the way detective fiction transforms societal transgressions into individual ones. The cathartic effect detective fiction has on its readers exists because it affects individuals, rather than whole societies. Catharsis allows individuals to purge emotions or tension, and one of the most effective means of catharsis is art. It encourages people to release feelings that would normally be considered socially unacceptable by providing them with a more acceptable way of relieving any built-up tension they may have. Catharsis can affect groups of people at a time, but it does not affect every person in the same way; therefore, targeting individuals is easier than making the focus

large groups of people. During the late-Victorian era, “literary works were often brought forward as evidence of this or that type of degenerative illness...though literature as a whole was, paradoxically, praised for its potentially therapeutic effects” (Arata 18). While individuals can project themselves into different detective stories, they are not able to eradicate their own inherent degeneracy. This false sense of security is linked to the placebic effect detective stories have on solving the problem of degeneracy. While detective fiction focuses on individual problems rather than national ones, it occasionally has a more widespread effect, which in turn makes it seem like it is solving more of a problem than it actually does.

In late nineteenth century Victorian England, private detectives were not an official department or branch of government. Private detectives were simply ordinary middle-class citizens who decided to try to solve crimes the police either could not solve, did not have time to pursue, or did not consider worthy of their time. The difference between fictional detectives and detectives in real life was that detectives in fiction “could rely on a dependable ambience of law and order to secure and ratify the knowledge produced by Holmes’s detections. The consultant detective gave his opinion, and the apparatus of the law could be left to take the appropriate action” (Kerr 154). In reality, however, citizens felt like they could not rely on the official organs of the law. Because private detectives met with success as they solved crimes, they functioned “as the very embodiment of society’s power of surveillance and discipline. Through [their] agency threats to normality are localized and named; criminals are apprehended; deviance is (for the moment) halted and harmony (for the moment) restored” (Arata 143). The success that detectives in literature had, and the way they were able to resolve and remove threats to the normal and healthy functioning of society also affected the police force’s realization of the growing need for detectives.

Despite the fact that police and private detectives were often portrayed working together to solve crimes in fiction, this partnership was rarely the case in reality. Private detectives did not work to solve the same crimes their literary counterparts did, nor did they ever lead members of the police force in an investigation, as Holmes did. However, with the increased interest in detective stories, many police detective characters became popular; some were the heroes of the stories in which they appeared. Charles Dickens, Wilkie Collins, and Mary Elizabeth Braddon each favorably portrayed their police detectives, contributing to the popularity of the profession. However, when compared with their private counterparts, the police detectives in literature were often found lacking:

The generally sympathetic if very patronizing portrayal of the police in the highly popular Holmes stories no doubt contributed to this gradual change of attitude. The policeman on the beat served the establishment without being of it, and was regarded by the middle class whose property he protected as something akin to a servant or a tradesman – the “handyman of the streets”...His main task was to prevent crime, while the detective’s was to find it out. (Kerr 134)

Conan Doyle’s Sherlock Holmes played a significant role in representing a private detective who was intellectually superior to all of his police counterparts. Doyle was the author who most commonly portrayed “police officers, even when successful in their investigations, as conventional, distrustful of theory, and above all unimaginative and devoid of the mental acuity that characterized Sherlock Holmes” (Shpayer-Makov 174). In “A Study in Scarlet,” the first adventure Holmes and Watson have together, Holmes tells Watson that he is a consulting detective by profession, because “[h]ere in London we have lots of government detectives and lots of private ones. When these fellows are at fault, they come to me, and I manage to put them

on the right scent. They lay all the evidence before me, and I am generally able, by the help of my knowledge of crime, to set them straight” (Conan Doyle 24).

In Doyle’s writing, antagonism often existed between Holmes and his methods and the police department, most notably Inspector Lestrade of Scotland Yard. Two other police officers that Holmes regularly worked with are Inspector Gregson and Athelney Jones. Holmes’ relationship with the police, and his condescending manner, fit another of Haycraft’s aspects of detective fiction: the “well-intentioned blundering and unimaginativeness of the official guardians of the law” (12). When Holmes first hears about the crime in “A Study in Scarlet,” he remarks that “[t]here will be some fun over this case if [Gregson and Lestrade] are both put upon the scent” (Conan Doyle 27). After speaking with Sergeant Rance, who discovered the dead body and then helped the murderer get away, Holmes becomes irritated, calling Rance a “blundering fool!...Just to think of his having such an incomparable bit of good luck, and not taking advantage of it” (Conan Doyle 36). Right before the capture of Jefferson Hope, the criminal who murdered two men, Holmes informs Gregson and Lestrade that he has solved the case, whereupon Lestrade remarks that the two professional inspectors ““have both tried, and we have both failed. You have remarked more than once since I have been in the room that you had all the evidence which you require. Surely you will not withhold it any longer.”” (Conan Doyle 50).

Gregson and Lestrade are not the only police officers that Holmes visits or ridicules in his pursuit of the murderer. Holmes and Watson leave the crime scene to visit Sergeant Rance, who discovered the dead man. While talking to Rance, Holmes learns that as Rance went to alert his fellow police officers to the murder, he helped a lone drunk man into a cab. Holmes informs Rance that he will never advance in Scotland Yard, and “[t]hat head of yours should be for use as

well as ornament. You might have gained your sergeant's stripes last night. The man whom you held in your hands is the man who holds the clue of this mystery, and whom we are seeking" (Conan Doyle 36). As Holmes gives his account of the investigation, after Hope's confession, he informs the two inspectors that he was able to recover the important evidence and track the right suspect because he had "proceeded to do what Gregson had neglected" (Conan Doyle 85). During Doyle's writing career, victims and private citizens initiating the pursuit of criminals, with no concern for formal laws was a common pursuit. Gregson and Lestrade chased the wrong suspects in part because they were too concerned with following the course of the law in finding criminals. Holmes, as a private citizen, was to some extent able to disregard the law in his pursuit of Jefferson Hope, or any of the other criminals whose trails he follows.

In addition to his being a private citizen, Holmes was able to work outside the methods of the law more than in accord with it because his powers of observation and deduction were consistently higher than the police.

Watson knows something, but Holmes knows more, as he always does...Sherlock

Holmes is a fictional character who...is both an amateur detective and a professional one...he identifies himself as a professional, and of a particular kind. He is a consultant, that is, a professional expert. The entry of the voice of the consultant into Victorian talk (and writing) is a significant moment in the unfolding of modernity...Conan Doyle was, for perfectly intelligible reasons, especially alert to this development. (Kerr 41-42)

As expertise gave rise to consultants in the Victorian era, Holmes' role as a consulting detective was an excellent example of both his dualistic nature as detective and criminal, because his ability to work outside the strict confines of the law meant that he had more freedom for his actions. Holmes was a consulting, amateur detective because he worked outside of the police,

and a professional detective because he was the only one in his profession and at his level of expertise. His level of expertise and knowledge being higher than the police force made him someone they could look up to, but at the same time made him someone they resented for outsmarting them. The contrast between private and police detectives in ability, intelligence, and class brought attention to the need for a solution for the changes brought about by degeneracy in the middle class. Detective fiction revealed the need for change and provided a solution in several different ways. In addition to revealing the need for private detectives in the police force, the stories also provide a way for readers to transfer their own tensions onto a fictional story. Literature, particularly detective fiction, became a way to respond to the spread of perceived degeneracy because of the way it removed a sense of responsibility from the readers.

Holmes is not the only private citizen able to solve crimes outside of the official police force in fiction. Stout's Nero Wolfe works as a private citizen in order to solve crimes. The "well-intentioned blundering and unimaginativeness of the official guardians of the law" (Haycraft 12) are more apparent in Stout's writing than in Conan Doyle's, because Wolfe is not shy about how he feels about the police. He does not completely trust the law enforcement, and often expresses his frustration with Goodwin, and occasionally his clients. When he decides to take on the case of Cyril Orchard's (a horse-racing expert) murder, he sends Archie to tell Madeline Fraser, the host of the radio show during which Orchard was murdered, that hiring Wolfe is the best way to solve the case, because he believes that he can solve the case more effectively and quickly than the police. When his clients, and the suspects, express their doubt in his abilities, he tells them that his

whole approach to this matter is quite different from what it would be if I didn't know that the police have spent seven days and nights working on it. They have been after you,

and they have their training and talents; also they have authority and a thousand men – twenty thousand. The question is whether their methods and abilities are up to this job; all I can do is use my own. (Stout 27)

Wolfe knows that his abilities are above what the police force is able to do, and constantly mentions that he knows more than they do throughout the entire case.

Inspector Cramer, shortly after Wolfe talks to all of the suspects for the first time, calls Wolfe to ask what he has uncovered. Wolfe is rude to Cramer when they speak on the phone, but is constantly brusque with the inspector, so that he is used to Wolfe's rudeness and finds it odd when Wolfe is reasonable. Wolfe knows that when he starts working on the Orchard murder case, he must find a different avenue of reasoning to follow because the police have doubtless already followed all of the obvious routes, "and many others, or [Cramer] wouldn't have phoned me squealing for help" (Stout 35). Inspector Cramer, upset that Wolfe is on the case and desperate for help, visits Wolfe at home because he knows that Wolfe is able to uncover clues that the rest of the police force cannot. Wolfe is willing to tell Cramer what he discovered "by talking with the very persons who had been questioned by you and your men many times, and it was not given to me willingly. Only by intense and sustained effort did I dig it out" (Stout 72). However, Wolfe only offers his help to Cramer in order for the police force to carry out work that Wolfe does not want to do. He allows the police to assist him in the investigation, but by the time the police follow the lead he gives them, he has already solved the case and come to a conclusion as to who the killer is, and how the killer managed to get away with murder in such a controlled setting.

Another factor of the false sense of closure with which detective fiction provides its readers is the moral voice the detective often assumes at the close of a crime. Ellen O'Gorman

notes that

what is admissible to the detective, what is congruent with his moral stance, is not necessarily (or is necessarily not) congruent with the publicly admissible narrative about the past with which the detective novel frequently closes the case. This publicly admissible narrative is not an innocent one. Cawelti has observed that '[u]nlike the classical detective, for whom evil is an abnormal disruption of an essentially benevolent social order...[the] detective has learned through long experience that evil is endemic to the social order.' (23)

Because of Holmes' dualistic nature, he provides readers with an interesting choice: Holmes can either be viewed as the detective, who resolves a problem for his fellow man, or the criminal, who creates problems for someone else to manage. Many times, though, he is both. Holmes "has his vices. He would not be nearly so interesting without them, because without them, he would not be at all like the rest of us. He is, after all, a man" (Rozema 34). Sherlock Holmes is presented in his *Adventures* as a man who brings a sense of justice to his clients. He traces the crime back to the criminal, and doles out punishment. However, he often works outside the law to do so. Very rarely does Holmes consult the police in finding the criminals he pursues. He also has similar qualities to the criminals he is so often asked to find. Holmes often hides his identity as he works on a case, misleads people, and often uses drugs, specifically cocaine and morphine. His internal restraint, however, prevents him from leaving the side of the law and becoming a formidable criminal. Instead, he is able to use what he knows about the criminal side of society to help him with his work. Sherlock Holmes' dualistic nature assists him in always finding the criminal and bringing some form of closure for the victim. His understanding of criminal nature and behavior, as well as his own degenerate tendencies, allow him to better piece together clues

and find out the solution to crimes. However, just as little was done about the rise of crime in England, Holmes actually “accomplishes very little in the way of righting wrongs” (Arata 145), and the closure he brings to a case until the end of the story, not past it.

One example of Holmes’s cases only bringing temporary closure is the fact that few of the people Holmes hunts down and confronts rarely end up going to prison. In “A Scandal in Bohemia,” Holmes attempts to recover a photograph from Irene Adler that would ruin the King of Bohemia’s future marriage, but when Holmes, Watson, and the King arrive at Ms. Adler’s home to take the photograph from her, they are told that the lady said they “were like to call. She left this morning with her husband by the 5:15 train from Charing Cross for the continent” (Conan Doyle 174). Ms. Adler took the photograph the detective had intended to retrieve with her in order to “safeguard [herself], and to preserve a weapon which will always secure [her] from any steps which [the King] might take in the future” (Conan Doyle 175). Instead of continuing to pursue Ms. Adler and retrieve the desired photograph, Holmes informs the King of Bohemia that he will not continue to pursue Ms. Adler because both he and the King accept her word that she will not attempt to blackmail the royal family. Ms. Adler is not heard from again after the case is closed, no one is sent to prison, and there is no real sense that the demands of justice have been fully satisfied.

An additional example of Holmes’ placebic effect on crime as a result of the criminal(s) not going to prison is the adventure “The Man With the Twisted Lip.” In this case, the police are after the murderer of Mr. Neville St. Clair, and arrest Hugh Boone, a beggar with a disfigured face, even though “his life appeared to have been a very quiet and innocent one” (Conan Doyle 236), so there seemed to be no reason for him to have had motive to kill anyone, particularly Mr. St. Clair. Throughout his investigation, Holmes searches for the beggar’s motive in killing Mr.

St. Clair and where Boone might have hidden the body. Holmes quickly realizes the real nature of the crime, however, and through the use of a wet sponge, reveals that the beggar is actually Neville St. Clair, the man the police think was murdered, and that he spends his days begging to support his family. The police are unable to arrest anyone, because St. Clair “can’t be charged with [making away with Mr. Neville St. Clair] unless they make a case of attempted suicide of it” (Conan Doyle 242). Because they cannot arrest him, the police tell Mr. St. Clair to stop begging and to start earning an honest living, while Holmes and Watson return to Baker Street “just...in time for breakfast” (Doyle 244).

In “The Adventure of the Blue Carbuncle,” Holmes intends to find the thief of the Countess of Morcar’s blue carbuncle, a precious blue gem that was found in the crop of a Christmas goose. Through a drawn-out investigation, during which Holmes and Watson retrace the path of the goose in which the jewel was found, they come across the thief, James Ryder, the head attendant at the hotel where the Countess was staying. Holmes confronts Ryder, who implores Holmes to “[h]ave mercy!...Think of my father! of my mother!...I never went wrong before! I never will again. I swear it” (Conan Doyle 255). After questioning the man, Holmes orders him to leave instead of calling the police to arrest him. He tells Watson that he did not detain the man because “I am not retained by the police to supply their deficiencies. If Horner were in anger 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” (Doyle 257). In this adventure, Holmes solves the case, but he also appears to have hope in his fellow man, implying that one’s degenerate qualities can be somewhat cured. By believing that Ryder will follow his advice, Holmes trusts that the innocent man the police initially arrested will be set free and the crime will ultimately be forgotten.

“The Adventure of Charles Augustus Milverton” is another such case in which Holmes knows the identity of a criminal but does not send him to prison, further solidifying the concept of his not truly having an effect on the problem of crime affecting society. Holmes sets a meeting with Milverton to discuss one of his clients, and informs Watson that Milverton is “the king of all the blackmailers... With a smiling face and a heart of marble he will squeeze and squeeze until he has drained [his victims] dry. The fellow is a genius in his way, and would have made his mark in some more savoury trade” (Conan Doyle 540). Despite Holmes’s knowledge of Milverton’s crimes, he is unable to have him arrested due to lack of proof, which will ensure a less than satisfactory outcome for his arrest. When Holmes is unable to reason with Milverton on his client’s behalf, he decides to break into Milverton’s home and steal the incriminating documents, with Watson’s help. While the two men are in Milverton’s office, they are forced to hide because of the arrival of Milverton himself and a late-night visitor, who kills Milverton by shooting him repeatedly in the chest. Watson notes that

[n]o interference upon our part could have saved the man from his fate; but as the woman poured bullet after bullet into Milverton’s shrinking body I was about to spring out, when I felt Holmes’s cold, strong grasp upon my wrist. I understood the whole argument of that firm, restraining grip – that it was no affair of ours; that justice had overtaken a villain; that we had our own duties and our own objects which were not to be lost sight of.

(Conan Doyle 548)

Holmes chooses not to interfere when Milverton is shot, nor to assist Lestrade in investigating his murder, because he thinks that “there are certain crimes which the law cannot touch, and which therefore, to some extent, justify private revenge” (Conan Doyle 550). Holmes is able to choose whether or not he assists Scotland Yard in their investigations because of his profession

of consulting detective – he has the freedom to decide whether he will take cases or not, based on his own personal preferences. His decision not to prevent the mysterious female visitor from killing Milverton also serves as further proof of his dualistic nature – he has his own criminal nature and does not always operate on the side of the law. Holmes’ custom of letting his criminal tendencies affect his investigations is significant in that even though he works to fix degenerate problems in society, his own nature prevents him from being fully able to eradicate the problem.

Holmes’ refusal, or, in some cases, inability to send criminals to jail reveals his dual role as both criminal and detective. His position outside of the official police force allows him to choose which cases he takes, as well as influenced his methods of pursuing criminals and bringing about some form of rectification. Sherlock Holmes is a character who vividly reflects the spreading degeneracy of the society during the late Victorian era in which Sir Arthur Conan Doyle lived. Conan Doyle’s portrayal of this degeneracy in his writing, and the absence of a clear solution to the problem of degeneracy, strongly influenced the popularity of detective fiction, and revealed the need for a continual proliferation of more detective stories.

The basic qualities of Conan Doyle’s Sherlock Holmes stories, particularly the detective’s dualistic nature as both criminal and detective, are also evident in various retellings, and are present in other works published by authors like Rex Stout and Agatha Christie, who were inspired by Conan Doyle’s detective stories. The placebo effect detective fiction has on the crumbling sense of morality society fears is a cause of the need for more detective fiction. Because of humanity’s fallen nature, degenerate or criminal tendencies are part of everyone’s nature. Detective fiction becomes a cathartic way of releasing the emotional tension over the deteriorating society, and the solution of the crime gives readers a feeling of closure, and that the degeneracy they are worried about is also solved. However, because detective fiction focuses on

specific problems, and the detectives themselves have criminal tendencies, the problem of degeneracy cannot go away, and readers continue to turn to and need detective fiction, which grows the need for the publication of more detective fiction, even into the twenty-first century. The way detective stories are told, and the type of narration the writers use, emphasize both the spread of criminal tendencies among social classes that society feared and the detective's own criminal nature.

Watson's narration of his friend's adventures, rather than Holmes narrating the stories himself, provides readers with an outside view of how the different types of degeneration are portrayed in Conan Doyle's detective stories. Because Watson himself is not the detective, he is able to provide a more objective look at the criminal tendencies Holmes possesses, and gives readers not only a better view of the degeneracy of both the other characters in the stories, but also of the degeneracy that was spreading in the society around them. Because of Holmes' criminal tendencies, he is unable to recognize how his detective skills are affected. The use of Watson as the narrator provides a better lens for readers to observe how a dualistic nature manifests itself in the detective without hiding any of the criminal tendencies that are a part of it. As the criminal tendencies spreading from the lower classes to the middle and upper classes were continually becoming more manifested in society, not everyone was aware of how those qualities were becoming apparent in themselves. Having a narrator that allows one to step back from the investigation in detective fiction, and looking through what Haycraft calls the detective character's "admiring and slightly stupid foil" can help to enlighten readers to their own degenerate tendencies, and to the ones in their fellow citizens. Watson's narration in "A Study in Scarlet" gives readers insight into Holmes' dualistic nature, and the "admiring and slightly stupid foil" (Haycraft 12) that Watson provides to Holmes' detective skills allow the reader to attempt

to solve the case on his own.

Watson often remarks on how amazing Holmes' detective skills are, and shortly after they live together compares Holmes to Poe's Dupin, remarking that he "had no idea that such individuals did exist outside of stories" (Conan Doyle 24). Holmes, on the other hand, is not impressed with Watson's comparison, and criticizes Dupin and Gaboriau's Lecoq. Watson, upset at "having two characters whom I had admired treated in this cavalier style" (Conan Doyle 25), is temporarily put off by the detective's lack of admiration for two fictional characters, but is impressed once again when Holmes identifies the messenger that visits them as a retired Marine sergeant before the man walks through the door. "A Study in Scarlet" is the first case Holmes and Watson work together, and Watson's amazement at Holmes' observational abilities stand out more than they do in other adventures. Watson almost constantly remarks how the detective's insights amaze him or how Holmes has "brought detection as near an exact science as it ever will be in this world" (Conan Doyle 33).

If Conan Doyle had not created Watson to be a foil to Holmes' quiet, intellectual personality, readers would not have a character to ask the questions they do: How does Holmes know so much? How did he realize who the killer was? What gave it away? What do all of the seemingly insignificant clues mean? Holmes is so attuned and attentive to detail that he painstakingly covers crime scenes similar to "a pure-blooded, well-trained foxhound, as it dashes backward and forward through the covert...until it comes across the lost scent" (Conan Doyle 31) and he is able to arm himself with new information as he pursues the murderer. Watson's narration also provides better insight into the way Holmes is so easily able to cast off moral considerations during a case. As detective fiction progresses and developed, modern detective writers continued to incorporate companions who served as foils to the detectives in their work.

The foils remained necessary because the societal degeneration people feared never went away. Rex Stout and Agatha Christie both provide such characters in their work.

Archie Goodwin is possibly the most developed of foils in detective fiction, because he is more than a narrative role; he actively participates in investigations and helps Wolfe physically track down any suspects. He enjoys watching Wolfe interrogate a suspect, especially when he knows beforehand what information Wolfe wants to get out of the suspect: “When you know exactly what he’s after and he’s sneaking up on it without the slightest sound to alarm the victim, it’s a joy to be there” (Stout 34). Goodwin is also one of the few people that knows when Wolfe is working on a problem, because to other people who observe what is happening, Wolfe often appears to be sleeping when he leans back with his eyes closed. Even though Goodwin can interpret most of Wolfe’s habits and actions, he is often still left in the dark, as are the readers. Goodwin frequently expresses his disapproval with certain decisions Wolfe makes, because he does not always agree with Wolfe’s way of working for a paycheck:

If Wolfe was starting some tricky maneuver and only fed [Inspector Cramer], a couple of crumbs...I was ready to applaud if he got away with it. If he really opened the bag and dumped it out, letting Cramer help himself, that would be something quite different. In that case he was playing it straight, and that could only mean that he had got fed up with them, and really intended to...let the cops earn his fee for him. That did not appeal to me.

Money may be everything, but it makes a difference how you get it. (Stout 74-75)

Later in the narrative, Goodwin admits that Wolfe’s agreement with Inspector Cramer is not a bad idea, and that it could ultimately help them in their investigation, but he remains skeptical until Wolfe thinks up a different way to solve the case. Wolfe’s deal with the police is not the only decision Wolfe makes that Goodwin does not understand, he also does not understand when

Wolfe suggests to Inspector Cramer that the police investigate Elinor Vance, one of the eight suspects in the case: “[F]or me the toss to Elinor Vance was a passed ball. It went by me away out of reach” (Stout 117). Regardless of whether Goodwin understands everything Wolfe wants him to do, or the methods Wolfe uses in solving a case, he goes along with Wolfe’s instructions and trusts that his employer will always find the criminal and restore order to the small portion of society affected by the crime.

As with both Conan Doyle and Stout’s writing, Agatha Christie’s Captain Hastings provides the narration that gives Christie’s readers an outside perspective into Poirot’s mannerisms and detective skills. Poirot is more similar to Holmes than Nero Wolfe is because neither of them rely on their assistants to collect information for them, and often have to explain to their companions how the events of the case are progressing. However, Poirot is different from Holmes in his methods of investigation. He has an “inflated confidence in the infallibility of his ‘little grey cells’” (Haycraft 131), as he calls them, and as result, his methods are “imaginative rather than routine. Not for Poirot the fingerprint or the cigar ash. His picturesque refusal to go Holmes-like on all fours in pursuit of clues is classic in the literature” (Haycraft 131). The most prominent similarity between Poirot and Holmes is their choice of foil, Hastings and Watson. Both detectives often remark on how slow their friends comprehend information, and Poirot is more vocal than most, especially in *Curtain*, his final case.

Hastings is Poirot’s “admiring and slightly stupid foil” (Haycraft 12), and the Belgian detective often reminds him of his less than astute instincts. Hastings contributes to Christie’s adherence to the Holmesian model of detective story-writing by providing the readers with a narrator other than the sharp-minded detective, and by being rather slow to see and interpret the surrounding clues. Hastings is referred to by some as “easily the stupidest of all modern

Watsons” (Haycraft 132). Keeping sensitive information to himself is difficult for Hastings, and “Poirot has always persisted in the humiliating belief that I am a transparent character and that anyone can read what is passing in my mind” (Christie 39). As Hastings observes his fellow guests at Styles, and reports back to Poirot, he attempts to guess the identity of “X,” the murderer Poirot insists is at Styles and is planning to kill one of the other guests. Poirot often becomes frustrated with his friend, and berates him for “clumsily and laboriously following the way I have already trodden” (Christie 55). Hastings continues to try to discover X’s identity, and lets his focus on something Poirot already knows get in the way of the real reason Poirot invited him to the country. He forgets that murder is

*not a game – it is not le sport. For you, you occupy yourself in guessing wildly at the identity of X. It is not for that that I asked you to come here...I know the answer to that question. But what I do not know and what I must know is this: ‘Who is going to die – very soon?’ It is a question, mon vieux, not of you playing a guessing game, but of preventing a human being from dying.’* (Christie 86)

Even with Poirot’s constant remonstrations and insistence that a murder would occur at Styles, Hastings remains unsure, and allows his own faulty sense of judgment to get in the way of his detective work. Much like Dr. Watson and Archie Goodwin, he sees, but does not observe.

Poirot is often frustrated with Hastings’ sense of “honor” and “respectability” during the investigation, and becomes angry when Hastings refuses to consider looking through keyholes to find clues:

You [Hastings] are obstinate and extremely stupid and I wish that there were someone else whom I could trust, but I suppose I shall have to put up with you and your absurd ideas of fair play. Since you cannot use your grey cells as you do not possess them, at any

rate use your eyes, your ears and your nose if need be in so far as the dictates of honour allow. (Christie 90)

Hastings puts Poirot's disappointment out of his mind and continues to observe his fellow guests without looking through keyholes or any other methods that Poirot prefers him to use. He tells Poirot that after what he has observed at Style, he is sure that no unfortunate incidents will occur. That night, Mrs. Franklin died. Hastings' inability to observe important details belonging to the people around him causes him to fail in preventing Mrs. Franklin's death, and fail to assist Poirot in finding out who "X" wanted to kill before Poirot's own death: "I had never contemplated the possibility that X might come out victor. In spite of Poirot's feebleness and ill health, I had faith in him as potentially the stronger of the two. I was used, you see, to Poirot's succeeding" (Christie 226). In each of the three writers' detective stories, the foils to the detectives, while they may question the techniques the detectives use in their investigations, never doubt the chances of their associates succeeding in finding the criminal.

As detective fiction has a tendency to deal with gruesome subjects, a fascination with such topics can be traced back to Aristotle, who, even though detective fiction was not published in his time, "had a stout appetite for the gruesome. 'Though the objects themselves may be painful,' says he, 'we delight to view the most realistic representations of them in art, the forms, for example, of the lowest animals and of dead bodies'" (qtd. in Sayers 167). Sayers points out that in his *Poetics*, Aristotle says that "[i]t is also possible to discover whether someone has done or not done something" (168); or, in the case of detective fiction, whether someone has or has not committed a crime. This statement is certainly true in detective fiction, as the investigator always reaches a solution by the end of the story, where the capture or discovery of the criminal serves as the denouement of the work. The detective sets out with a task to "repair an individual

violation of a social order that embodies a collective and unchanging ideal of ‘Britain’” (Bertens and D’Haen 2). While the general methods used by detectives in detective fiction such as Sherlock Holmes (Conan Doyle), Nero Wolfe (Stout), and Hercule Poirot (Christie) generally differ, the basic plot points and structure of the detective stories remains much the same, as does their audience’s fascination with them, and the attempt (and inevitable failure) to provide a solution to the degeneration taking place outside of the focused narrative within the story.

Even though the detectives in fiction are successful in tracking down the criminals they are after, they do not have any interest in them after the case is solved. The readers of detective fiction, once they reach the end of the story, also lose interest in the criminals’ fate. This loss of interest in the subjects society is so fascinated with leads to the need for more detective fiction. Kerr notes that “[i]t is often averred of crime fiction that it follows, consciously or not, an agenda of reassurance and the reinforcement of social norms’ (137). As society’s views on morality and crime changed, detective fiction changed and grew in popularity, which in turn affected both the amount of detective fiction that was published, and the way traditional morals were embraced.

**Conclusion: The Continuation of an Era**

*“There’s always a new problem to solve at 221B Baker Street. That room, above all, is a place where adventures begin.” – Zach Dundas*

When people think of Sherlock Holmes, they tend to think of the modern adaptations: the parodies, the spoofs, and the television and movie visualizations. Out of the vast range of literary detectives, from August Dupin to Nancy Drew, Sherlock Holmes has remained perhaps the most popular and has continued to be a beloved character for generations. Because of his popularity, not many people link Sherlock Holmes with degeneracy or aesthetics. In an increasingly degenerate world, the study of the detective literature that both contributes to the spread of degeneracy while attempting to find a solution for it becomes more and more necessary.

Examining the late-Victorian society that Sir Arthur Conan Doyle lived in is essential to understanding the profound effect the Sherlock Holmes adventures have on their readers. Because of humanity’s fallen nature, degeneracy is inescapable. Detective stories, especially Conan Doyle’s writing, provide a way for people to release their degenerate practices and emotional tensions. Transmitting society’s perception of degeneracy onto a fictional character allowed people living in the late nineteenth century to experience a form of catharsis; they could solve crimes, or commit crimes, without leaving the comfort of their home (and without actually committing any crime). The detective genre remains popular in the twenty-first century because it provides a sort of scapegoat for society. The representation of degenerate traits that were problems on a national level in an individual character in a story, whether the detective or the criminal, gave society someone to blame for their own crimes and emotional tension. The detective’s logical method of solving cases removes emotional ties to the crime, but also shows a systemic effect of everyday life.

Part of Holmes' and Watson's popularity stems from their connection to the common man. The two men worked together to solve cases for their fellow members of the middle class. Because of the growing fear of moral and social decay in the middle class, the need for a solution to the decay grew as well; detective fiction attempted to provide this solution. However, it only contributed to the problem as people became fascinated with the aesthetic aspects of the crime. The structure Conan Doyle used in his detective stories helped contribute to the criminal aesthetic movement, which is still very much present in modern literature. The elements necessary for a criminal aesthetic are not neglected in more contemporary detective fiction, as seen in Rex Stout and Agatha Christie's novels, or any other detective story found in a local library or bookstore. The growing fascination with detectives in fiction contributed to a growing aspect of crime, and the way people worked to solve the mystery.

Conan Doyle's "The Final Problem" is one of the best examples of the different elements of the criminal aesthetic in detective fiction. The literary renaissance that Holbrook Jackson categorized as the first half of the nineteenth century continued into the second half as new ideas and theories of degeneration were spreading. Detective fiction became a way for writers to attempt to understand and repair the social anxieties of a middle class whose identity was rapidly changing, and the struggle to understand identity both at an individual and at a national level. The degeneracy that people were exploring and enjoying was being portrayed in literature, which made enjoying crime and seeing it as something that could be beautiful more popular as well. Conan Doyle's fiction provided a method of breaking down and exposing the decay in society in all its forms, as well as the literature's connection to the aesthetic. Detective fiction's connection to the aesthetic also raises the consideration of connecting morals to crime. Realizing that degeneracy and criminal nature are inseparable from an individual's character made removing

morals from crime easier. The criminal aesthetic elements that tie together Conan Doyle's writing and contribute to his writing's popularity are still prevalent in modern literature as current detective fiction writers continue to attempt to expose and solve the degenerate problems in society.

Through detective fiction's attempt to reveal the degeneracy among the middle class in late-Victorian England, the realization that degeneracy was not only a result of detective fiction, but also a cause of it, began to take root. The crumbling of social barriers and constructs led to a crumbling sense of morality, and the need for a solution and someone to fix the problem became apparent. Literature, specifically detective fiction, became the response to situations in society. One good thing that came about because of detective fiction's revealing the problem of degeneracy was the official police force's realization of a need for detectives. Consulting detectives, like Holmes, were providing the change society craved, and as a result, society did not view the police force in a favorable light. Detective fiction, in addition to affecting a physical change, also gave society an emotional outlet for their degeneracy as they responded to the chaos around them. However, the ability to project one's self into a story does not mean that his own degeneracy becomes erased.

The need of an outlet for society's degeneracy contributed to the spread of detective fiction, and its continued popularity among today's literature. Part of the genre's continued popularity has to do with the dualistic role of the detective in the stories. The detective is not above the rest of society, and has his own vices. His degenerate attributes mean that he can be either the criminal or the detective in a case. Occasionally, he is both. Readers of detective fiction can escape into the stories and project their own degeneracy onto either the detective or the criminal. If they choose to be the detective, they are very often the criminal as well. Because

of the degenerate nature inherent in society, as well as the detective attempting to resolve the problems in society, detective fiction is more of a placebo than a solution to the problem, which leads to a need for more detective fiction. The more degeneracy is perpetuated in society, the more the need for a solution arises. Detective fiction attempts to resolve the problem, but adds to it more than it is able to provide some form of retribution.

Looking at the historical and social contexts of an author are important in understanding his works, and understanding the reaction his society had to his writing. An aesthetic is that which is not attached to morals or reasons – it just *is*. Doyle's Sherlock Holmes is the embodiment of the criminal aesthetic of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. As he solves crimes, he does not look at a criminal's motives or the reasons behind why people make certain decisions. He follows the clues wherever they may lead him. The removal of moral ties and the submersion of oneself into a literary work allows the reader to follow the path of a criminal, as Holmes does, without actually becoming one.

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