

The Death, Burial, and Resurrection Of Sherlock Holmes

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Sherlock Holmes, which can be said to be among the most common household names in the world, has inspired books, films, and even theatrical plays for the past hundred years. The literary genius of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle is greatly displayed in the stories of the enigmatic sleuth. The monthly publications of the Holmes stories in The Strand Magazine gained a large number of subscriptions for the magazine, of course, but the short stories earned Doyle a somewhat surprising fan base. This fan base, perhaps surprising only to Doyle, was loyal to its hero (Sherlock Holmes), and this loyal fan base was numerous and influential enough on Doyle to change history.

By 1890 Sir Arthur Conan Doyle was regretting the creation of Holmes. Doyle referred to the detective stories of Sherlock Holmes as an “elementary form of fiction”. Furthermore, Doyle wanted to be known for his other writings. Doyle had his heart set on writing historical novels, which, to him, were in a higher class of writing above these “elementary” stories of Holmes. In a letter to his mother in November of 1891, Doyle writes, “I think of slaying Holmes...and winding him up for good and all. He takes my mind from better things.” (Panek 78)

Shortly after Doyle’s death, Rev. John Lamond was chosen by Sir Arthur’s widow Jean (Doyle’s second wife) to write a biography of Doyle’s life. In *Arthur Conan*

Doyle: A Memoir, Lamond reveals many aspects of Doyle's life and writing career. In this memoir are three pages dedicated to explain Doyle's decision of killing Holmes. Another biography of Doyle, *Conan Doyle: A Biography*, written by Pierre Nordon, uses letters written by Doyle to help the reader understand Doyle's reasoning in killing Holmes. I found most of my information in these two books, which can be found in the ETSU library.

The Creator

The man who created the world's most notorious detective was born in 1859 in Edinburgh, Scotland. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle attended the University of Edinburgh from 1876-1881 to study medicine, and wrote several short stories during this period. Doyle's first published story was written in 1879, which means he had a published piece at age twenty. Conan Doyle completed his doctorate in 1885. During the slow days and free time at his shop, Doyle would write stories. In 1886, the name of Sherlock Holmes is read for the first time. "A Study In Scarlet", published in Beeton's Christmas Annual in December 1886, was the first story, and first of four novels, that introduced the world to the adventures of Sherlock Holmes.

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's stories of *Sherlock Holmes* consisted not only of Holmes himself but also of Holmes' loyal roommate and companion Dr. Watson. Dr. Watson writes the stories in first-person as adventures and exploits with his dear friend: Holmes. "A Study In Scarlet", the story, not only introduces the two interesting characters to the world, but the story also explains how the two men came to meet one another, which is due to a mutual friend of both men bringing them together when each were looking for a roommate.

The publication of “A Study In Scarlet” sold for twenty-five pounds, which was a nice fee for an author at the time. Of course, Doyle couldn’t stop with only one story. And in February of 1890 the second Holmes story, “The Sign of the Four”, was published in Lippincott’s Magazine. Unfortunately, for Lippincott’s Magazine, Doyle had a disagreement with the publishers of the magazine, which Doyle claimed to be exploiting him, and left the magazine in search of another.

The search didn’t take long, and in 1891 the first of fifty-six *Sherlock Holmes* short stories appears in The Strand Magazine: “The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes: A Scandal In Bohemia”. The fifty-six short stories, which began in 1891, spanned over thirty-six years as the last publication of Holmes was printed in The Strand Magazine in 1927. The Strand Magazine was a monthly publication of stories of mystery and drama alike. Some notable names to grace the pages of The Strand Magazine include: H.G. Wells, Agatha Christie, and even Winston Churchill.

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle had a Holmes story within each monthly edition of The Strand Magazine from July of 1891 to December of 1893. Doyle was already growing weary of his writings of *Sherlock Holmes* by 1891, which by this time Doyle’s Holmes writings consisted of two novels (one of which was published serially in a magazine) and a handful of short stories published in The Strand Magazine. Doyle wanted to be known for his writings of historical fiction, but first he had to kill this seemingly invincible detective.

The Arch-Nemesis

In 1893, in The Strand Magazine publication of “The Final Problem”, Doyle created a worthy nemesis for Sherlock Holmes: Professor Moriarty. Professor Moriarty is

a mathematical genius and even had a published book: *The Dynamics of an Asteroid*. In “The Final Problem”, Holmes tells Watson, who hasn’t heard of Moriarty until this story, that Moriarty’s book is “a book which ascends to such rarefied heights of pure mathematics that there was no man in the scientific press capable of criticizing it.” (Doyle 559)

Moriarty, no longer a professor by the time of the story “The Final Problem”, is the leader of an underground organization, which Holmes himself fears. Holmes refers to Moriarty as the “Napoleon of Crime”, which was actually a title given to thief Adam Worth by the Scotland Yard prior to Doyle’s fictitious character of Moriarty. Moriarty is titled the “Napoleon of Crime” because of his overseeing of all the underground’s works—just as Adam Worth was in the actual English underground. In “The Final Problem”, Holmes describes Professor Moriarty to Dr. Watson:

He is the Napoleon of Crime, Watson. He is the organizer of half that is evil and of nearly all that is undetected in this great city... He sits motionless, like a spider in the centre [sic] of its web, but that web has a thousand radiations, and he knows well every quiver of each of them. He does little himself. He only plans. (Doyle 559)

However, when the story of “The Final Problem” was published, the readers and fans of Holmes couldn’t understand how such an arch nemesis suddenly appears, and this nemesis frightens Holmes beyond the readers’ belief. Holmes is frightened of Moriarty, not only because of Moriarty’s equaling wisdom to Holmes’ and underground organization, but also because of Moriarty’s sharpshooting gun-for-hire: Colonel

Sebastian Moran, which Doyle portrays in “The Final Problem” as a decorated, honorable soldier of the English Army.

While on vacation in Switzerland, Doyle visits the majestic Reichenbach Falls, and it is here that Doyle decides is worthy burial grounds for Sherlock Holmes. In the story, “The Final Problem”, Holmes somehow “inconveniences” Moriarty, but Doyle doesn’t explain how. Instead the reader is thrown directly into the rival plot between the detective and the professor.

The Death

The story of “The Final Problem” leads up to Reichenbach Falls, which is where Holmes and the loyal roommate Dr. Watson find Professor Moriarty. While looking at the splendor of the Reichenbach Falls, Holmes sends a fake letter to Dr. Watson; distracting the doctor so that Sherlock can have a private confrontation with Moriarty. Upon Watson’s return to the Falls, he witnesses two men struggling on the ledge until eventually both men fall to their deaths in the falls below. To Watson’s horror, he discovers that the two men were none other than Moriarty and Holmes. Watson writes his goodbye to Sherlock Holmes, and the close relationship between the two roommates is obvious.

In December of 1893, the subscribers to The Strand Magazine read about the death of their favorite detective. Young men in London wore black armbands in symbolism of their mourning of Sherlock Holmes. In reaction to the unbelievable, shocking death of Holmes, over 20,000 people canceled their subscription to The Strand Magazine, and there were rumors that even Queen Victoria “was not amused”.

Cause and Conduct, which justified England's involvement in the Boer War. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle attained the title of "Sir" by being knighted in 1902, which Doyle believed was earned because of the pamphlet.

Everything was looking up for Doyle at this point. He was writing stories he wanted to write, traveling with his first wife, Louisa Hawkins, and studying history to use in his stories. But Doyle was receiving letters of dismay from the public in response to the death of Holmes the entire time. When Doyle wrote "The Hound of The Baskervilles", published in 1901 while Holmes was dead, the story was written without Holmes in mind. But the public pressure to bring Holmes back influenced Doyle to use the sleuth once more. Doyle had to make "The Hound of The Baskervilles" set at a time before Sherlock's death to keep the death applicable.

The publication of "The Hound of The Baskervilles" originally appeared in The Strand Magazine, and subscriptions to the magazine increased by thirty thousand almost overnight. The reception of "The Hound of The Baskervilles", along with further public pressure, finally showed Doyle the appreciation of Holmes. In his autobiography, Doyle writes, "They say a man is never properly appreciated until he is dead, and the general protest against my summary execution of Holmes taught me how many and numerous were his friends. 'You Brute!' was the beginning of a letter which one lady sent me...." (Doyle and Crowder 57)

The Resurrection

Finally, in October 1903, Sherlock Holmes is reborn in "The Return of Sherlock Holmes: The Adventure of The Empty House". The world had gone ten years without Sherlock Holmes, but the story of his rebirth was set in 1894, which in the fictitious

world of Sherlock means he was only “dead” for three years. Some readers, then and now, find Sherlock’s explanation for his faking his death somewhat improbable, but the majority didn’t care.

Sherlock Holmes explained that he had to fake his death to hide from Moriarty’s associates. During his time hiding, Holmes traveled the world and caught the remaining members of Moriarty’s gang. Dr. Watson’s reaction to his best friend’s resurrection was sincerely heart-felt, and the feeling was mutual with the English public. “It was indeed like old times, when, at that hour, I found myself seated beside him in a hansom, my revolver in my pocket and the thrill of adventure in my heart,” said Dr. Watson in reverence to Holmes in “The Empty House”.

Doyle once again published a *Sherlock Holmes* story in The Strand Magazine monthly until December 1904, and also published a fourth and final novel serially in the magazine from September 1914-May 1915: “The Valley of Fear”. Finally, in the last set of Holmes stories, “The Case-Book of Sherlock Holmes”, published in The Strand Magazine from October 1921-April 1927, Doyle decides to give Sherlock Holmes a proper end and allows Holmes to retire. Sherlock’s retirement as a bee-farmer in Sussex is referred to within three of the stories among Doyle’s final detective tales: “The Blanced Soldier”, “The Lion’s Mane”, and “His Last Bow”.

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle was found clutching his chest on July 7, 1930, and was pronounced dead from a heart attack at age 71. Doyle is known for many great pieces of literature, such as his pamphlet of the Boer War, *The Lost World*, and “The Exploits of Brigadier Gerard”, but Doyle—perhaps against his will—is most popularly known for the writing of *Sherlock Holmes*.

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