The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes Study Guide

The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes by Arthur Conan Doyle

BOOKRAGS

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Section 1, A Scandal in Bohemia

Section 1, A Scandal in Bohemia Summary

"A Scandal in Bohemia" is the first short story in the Adventures of Sherlock Holmes. Dr. Watson narrates the story and it begins some time after the second Sherlock Holmes novel, The Sign of Four. Watson is now married and his domestic bliss and medical practice has kept him so busy that he hasn't seen very much of Holmes. On March 20th, 1888, however, as Watson happened to be passing by Holmes address at 221B Baker Street, he decides that he should go upstairs and visit his old friend.

Once upstairs, Holmes welcomes Watson warmly and is clearly happy to see the doctor. Holmes quickly deduces from Watson's appearance facts about the state of his married life. Sherlock them moves to a letter that he has just received that says a man with a mask will arrive at the house soon with an important case that implicates an important European family in scandal. Watson agrees to stay and meet the man with Holmes.

The two men are able to deduce, from the information on the letter, that the paper the letter was written on is from Egria, a country in Bohemia. Suddenly, the masked man walks into Holmes room. The man sits down and starts to tell Homes the facts of his case when Sherlock reveals the man's identify and asks the man to take off his mask. The man happens to be the hereditary king of Bohemia, when he was younger he was involved in an affair with an American born opera singer named Irene Adler. There is a picture of the two of them that Irene threatens to make public on the day that the king announces his engagement to the other woman he plans to marry. The king is desperate to get the picture back, lest Irene use the picture to ruin his impending marriage and rack his kingdom in scandal. Sherlock agrees to take on the case and the King tells them they have three days before his marriage is announced.

Holmes, the next say, goes out disguised as a drunken stable worker to Miss Adler's stable to see what he can learn from the other workers. He discovers that Irene see a Mr. Godfrey Norton quite often. Indeed, while collecting information, Holmes sees Norton race off in a carriage from the house and then sees Adler leave in another carriage. Sherlock follows them and ends up at a mostly empty church. Thinking that Holmes is just another worshipper, Norton see the disguised detective and asks him to serve as his best man in a rushed marriage ceremony. Sherlock agrees and the marriage in conducted.

After the marriage, Holmes returns to tell his tale to Watson. Holmes decides that he must try to find the picture tonight or all may be lost. He devises a scheme whereby he will, dressed as a minister, save Miss Adler from being accosted in font of her house. In the process, he will pretend to be hurt and Adler will take him into her drawing room. Once inside, Watson will throw a smoke bomb in the house and yell fire. Miss Adler, thinking there is a fire will grab the photograph to try and save it, thereby revealing the

location to Holmes. The plan goes off without a hitch and the two men return to Baker Street with the location of the picture.

The next day, the two men plus the king go to Adler's house to retrieve the picture only to find Miss Adler gone. She has left with her new husband to escape Holmes and the king. She realized after he left, that the minister was indeed Sherlock Holmes and decided to spare her new husband. She leaves the picture behind and the King gives it to Sherlock Holmes in payment. Sherlock is so impressed with Miss Adler that he now only refers to her as "the woman."

Section 1, A Scandal in Bohemia Analysis

This first story in the Adventures of Sherlock Holmes introduces the reader to the two characters and shows a variety of different contrasting types of characters. The story is odd because most of the action, except for the final scene and the scene at Miss Adler's house is told rather than shown. This is not uncommon in the Sherlock Holmes stories and is almost a hallmark of the stories.

This story shows Sherlock as a cold, calculating deduction machine that, nevertheless is enthralled not only with Miss Adler, but also with the excitement and challenge of the case. Watson makes a point of telling the reader that Holmes generally looks down on women and often makes disparaging comments about the fairer sex. Holmes is a snob, an elitist. Although, as this story makes clear, his elitism is purely merit based. The king's title and rank do not impress Holmes at all. Indeed, he lobs a backhanded insult at the king in one of the final scenes. Still, he respects Adler greatly, more so than any other woman we are told because of her intelligence and verve. This is a theme that we will see throughout these stories. Sherlock despises almost all other men, at least on some level, for their lack of intelligence, but it is clear that he despises the aristocracy the most. He often looks down on those he thinks have the most advantage but have done nothing to take advantage of their advantages. This is especially true of the landed gentry and the nobility. He is no anarchist though, he is happy and honored to work for the queen and it is clear that he has a real affection for England and her monarch.

Section 2, The Red-Headed League

Section 2, The Red-Headed League Summary

The story begins with Watson dropping in on Sherlock Holmes only to be roped in to listen to a red-haired man tell Holmes and Watson the interesting facts of recent events surrounding him. The man is a Mr. Jabez Wilson, an owner of a local pawnshop who is interested in having Holmes solve a mystery of his. Sometime before this, Wilson, who was working in his shop at the time, heard from his assistant, Vincent Spaulding, about a group known as the Red-Headed League.

The Red-Headed League is an association formed by an American businessman to advance the interests of Red-Headed men everywhere. The League had placed and advertisement in the newspaper for an opening at the League that paid a good salary with little work. On the advice of his assistant, Wilson joined many other redheaded men at the appointed time and place. Despite the huge number of other applicants, Wilson was immediately accepted into the society. He was to be paid four pounds a week to show up daily at an office that Duncan Ross, the agent of the League, would show him and, from 10-4 each day not leave the office on any account and to copy the Encyclopedia Britannica. Wilson accepts the job and begins to spend his time copying encyclopedia entries.

Suddenly, the same morning that he appears at Sherlock's home, Wilson is notified that the Red-Headed League is dissolved and that his job has been eliminated. Wilson wants Sherlock to find out what is behind this business. Holmes accepts the case and begins to ponder the story he has just heard and to smoke his pipe for hours. After many hours, Holmes decides that he and Watson should attend the theater to hear a noted violin talent. On the way, they stop by Mr. Wilson's shop and ask the young man, Spaulding if he knows the way to the theater. Afterward, Holmes tells Watson that he as interested to see the boy's knees. After the theater, Sherlock asks Watson if he will meet him at Baker street that night at 10 p.m. with his revolver to settle this business once and for all as Sherlock believes he has figured out the entire mystery.

Watson shows up at the appointed time to find Sherlock with Peter Jones, a city detective, and Mr. Merryweather, a bank president. The men rush off to the area around Mr. Wilson's shop. On the way, Holmes tells the group that he believes a man named John Clay, a nobleman and arch-criminal, is behind the whole Red-Headed League business. Holmes believes that Clay, posing as Vincent Spaulding, has been tunneling underneath Mr. Wilson's store while the owner is away copying the Encyclopedia. The whole Red-Headed League was only a ruse to get Wilson out of the office. The point of the tunnel is to get into the next-door bank underground and to steal their money. Holmes plans to catch Clay and his associate red-handed tonight. Holmes's gambit is successful and the group does indeed catch Clay red-handed and the mysterious Red-Headed League is a mystery no more.

Section 2, The Red-Headed League Analysis

This story shows Sherlock Holmes using his powers of deduction in an almost unbelievable way. He does almost none of what would be considered normal detective work and solves the crime purely from the story that Mr. Wilson relates, a quick trip to the pawnshop, and a look at the neighborhood. The fact that Holmes is right about Clay's plot is, in reality, extraordinarily good luck. This story brings out the type of method that Holmes uses to solve his mysteries. As Jones the detective remarks, Holmes's methods are fanciful, too fanciful for the normal police force.

Oftentimes Holmes will only need one clue to be able to unravel and deduce the entire mystery. Most detectives work through a process of induction, that is, they find individual clues and facts that they use to piece together a theory that they will eventually test against all of the facts. Holmes works in the opposite manner, that is, he works by deduction. He develops theories that he then tests against one or two key facts. Holmes's mind is so powerful and his theories so ingenious, that this method works, but it is worth noticing how odd the method actually is.

Section 3, A Case of Identity

Section 3, A Case of Identity Summary

The story begins with Watson and Holmes discussing the strangeness of ordinary life. Holmes claims that any household contains a number of stories that are so strange as to be impossible for a fiction writer to make up. Watson disagrees and argues that the newspapers are filled with vulgar, though commonplace crimes. For instance, he claims, picking up a newspaper and looking at the front page, a story about a man beating his wife. It is all too common to be interesting. On the contrary, Holmes argues, he knows the case and it was anything but ordinary. The conversation continues until, as if to illustrate the point, Holmes looks out his window and sees a woman on the corner hesitating to come in to 221B Baker Street.

Eventually the woman comes into the room and the two men learn that she is Miss Mary Sutherland and she would like Holmes to locate her fiancée, a Mr. Hosmer Angel. After Miss Sutherland's father's death, her mother remarried a man not much older than Miss Sutherland. The young woman draws the interest from a large sum left to her by her father and works as a typist. Her stepfather, Mr. Windbank, is a wine dealer who often travels to France and keeps Miss Sutherland cooped up in their home. One day, desiring to attend a ball and with her stepfather unable to attend as he is away in France, she goes to the ball and meets Mr. Angel. She begins to see the man who wears dark glasses and speaks quietly in secret while her stepfather is gone. She writes Angel letters everyday and he writes letters back to her exclusively on a typewriter. Her mother approves of the relationship and they decide to get married. Her mother and Angel have the girl swear on a bible to always be faithful to Angel. On the morning of their marriage, however, Angel is nowhere to be found. He simply disappears.

Holmes after hearing the story decides that the woman is interesting, but her case is not. He believes he has the entire matter worked out once she leaves and sends a letter to Mr. Windbanks office. The next day after Watson has finished dealing with one of his medical patients, he meets Sherlock again in the Baker Street flat. Holmes and Watson discuss the importance of small details and explain how it is the seemingly minor details that always make all the difference. It is at that time that Mr. Windbanks enters and sits. He tells Holmes that there is no point in looking for Angel and Holmes replies that he has indeed found Angel. Sherlock then goes into an explanation of how he can look at typewritten pages and determine whether or not the letters are from the same typewriter. He then goes on to tell Windbanks that the letters from Angel and his return letter are from the same typewriter hence Windbanks is Angel. Apparently Windbanks is trying to prevent Miss Sutherland from marrying and this masquerade is meant to make it less likely that she will marry. Holmes tells Windbanks that there is nothing legally he can do to the fraud, but threatens to beat the man with a riding whip before Mr. Windbanks runs off.

Section 3, A Case of Identity Analysis

There are several interesting features of this short story. At the outset of the story, Holmes and Watson are arguing about the strangeness of ordinary lives and of the stories that these lives contain. However, when Miss Sutherland tells the two her apparently interesting story, Sherlock practically yawns. As he tells Watson, the importance of any story or observation is in the details. A thing may be alike in most particulars, though differing even slightly in the details it will be a completely different thing. Watson and Holmes discuss this point at length in the story.

This story, not unlike the "Red-Headed League" also shows Holmes's method. It is not his skill as a detective in the normal sense that distinguishes Holmes from the ordinary sleuth. Usually, all of the relevant clues are visible and clear for all to see in the story. He doesn't have a particular skill in finding clues that no one else sees. Rather, his skill, as he tells Watson, is observing and understanding the details that no one else understands. He sees and understands what others miss. So it is in this story. Holmes does almost no other investigating save looking at the typewritten letter from the girls father, yet he understands everything about the case.

Section 4, The Boscombe Valley Mystery

Section 4, The Boscombe Valley Mystery Summary

The story begins with Watson having breakfast with his wife when he receives a telegram from Sherlock Holmes asking him to join Holmes on a mystery for a couple of days. Watson, after asking his wife if she will mind his absence, heads off to join Holmes at the railway station. While on the train, the two discuss the mystery, of which Watson has read some in the paper. The case takes place in Boscombe valley in the countryside and involves a man named John Turner, a man named McCarthy, and McCarthy's son. Turner and McCarthy evidently knew each other from their time in Australia and Turner had made a lot of money in Australia, enough to buy a large estate and McCarthy lived on a part of it.

On June 3rd, the Monday before the trip, Charles McCarthy the father left his house to make an appointment at the Boscombe pool. According to a witness's report, James McCarthy, Charles's son, followed him without his knowledge while holding a gun. They were seen quarreling loudly at the lake and then Charles was found dead. The son James was arrested for the murder of his father.

Watson agrees with the common opinion that circumstantial evidence certainly points against James, but Holmes sees more than meets the eye in the mystery. It is detective Lestrade who has called in Holmes to be of assistance in the case. Holmes, reading the interrogation of James notices some interesting facts. First, he notices that the father, despite his belief that James was out of town made a call of "Cooee!" to Charles before he saw him. This indicates that the man's call was not meant for his son, but for someone else. Second, he notices that the dying father mentions something about a rat as he is dying and that James claims to have seen a cloak in the water. All of this, combined with the fact that Watson's medical investigation of the dead man indicate that the killing blow came from behind, suggest to Holmes that James is not the killer. Furthermore, Holmes notices from the tracks in the grass that man who killed Charles walks with a limp and smokes cigars. He also deduces that the man is likely Australian. Believing that there is really only one man who fits this description in the town is John Tuner. Holmes summons the man.

Once Turner arrives, it is clear that he is the killer. He tells Holmes that he is fully willing to admit to the crime so long as it prevents James McCarthy from being unjustly accused. Turner, once a criminal in Australia, reformed his life and used his money to start a new life in England. McCarthy, an associate of Turner's in Australia has been using his knowledge of the man's past life of crime to blackmail him. Unable to take any more abuse from McCarthy and realizing that he would likely die of Diabetes soon, Turner decided to kill the man. Holmes, sympathizing with the sick, blackmailed man, decides not to tell the police about his guilt and to use his evidence to eliminate the charges against McCarthy. His plan works and both men are free from prosecution.

Section 4, The Boscombe Valley Mystery Analysis

This story shows another interesting side of Sherlock Holmes's character, his willingness to work outside the law if necessary. Holmes decides to let Turner off the hook, insofar as it is also possible to acquit McCarthy. This shows a consequentialist or utilitarian shade to Holmes's thinking. He sees no benefit to putting a guilty man, Turner, in jail because he knows that Turner is not a threat to anyone else on account of his medical condition and that Holmes seems to believe, at least on some level, that McCarthy got what he deserved. This is interesting despite the fact that Turner is a confessed highwayman and murderer. Why Holmes takes pity on Turner's plight and not on another's is unclear. Something about the injustice of McCarthy's blackmail seems to offend him. He also clearly sees no benefit to imprisoning a guilty man who is about to die. Ultimately the reader tends to sympathize with Holmes, though it is not entirely clear what his standards of justice are in this case. This is not the first or the last time that Holmes will take justice into his own hands.

Section 5, The Five Orange Pips

Section 5, The Five Orange Pips Summary

The story begins with Watson, his wife out of town, staying with Holmes at the apartment on Baker Street. There is a violent storm outside and both men are engaged in their own activities, Watson reading a sailing novel and Holmes cross-indexing his files. Suddenly a young man in his early twenties comes in and asks to speak with Holmes, the two men bid the young man to sit down and tell his story.

He is the son of a Joseph Openeshaw and the nephew of Elias Openshaw. Elias, his uncle, lived for some time in Florida and was a landowner and planter there before the civil war. During the civil war, he fought for the south and left America to return to England several years after the war citing distaste for black people and a hatred of Republican politics. Upon his return, the man disliked having any company whatsoever, even that of his brother. Elias would spend his time drinking and smoking heavily in his own room, rarely leaving. The only company he liked was that of his nephew, John Opnenshaw. Gradually, Elias gives over complete access of the state to his nephew. One morning, while Elias and John are at Breakfast, Elias receives a letter with the letters KKK scrawled on the top and five orange pips inside. The letter was sent from Pondicherry, India and Elias is clearly afraid of the letter.

This fear leads the man to call his lawyer and to have his will rewritten to make his brother and then, eventually, John his heir. Hit locks himself in his room smoking and drinking most days and then one day after he leaves the house, he is found face down in a shallow pool drowned. The police rule it a suicide. Sometime later, while sitting with his father Joseph, John notices another, similar looking letter. This time the letter is the same, though is is post-marked from Dundee. It has the same KKK and the five orange pips and instructs the reader to place the papers on the sundial. Joseph doesn't understand the letter and puts all thought of it out of his head. A little later though, while visiting a friend, Joseph trips over a hole and hits his head, killing him. John inherits the estate and not long after, he receives a similar letter, this time post-marked from London.

Holmes, intrigued by the case and worried about the young man's safety, tells John to return home and to do exactly as the letter says. Holmes will send him information once the case is solved, meanwhile the young man should take every precaution. After the man leaves, Holmes takes down his American encyclopedia and looks under K, finding a listing for the Ku Klux Klan, a southern anti-reconstruction terrorist organization. Apparently, the KKK would often send in their threats orange pips or melon rinds or something similar. Holmes realizes that these letters must have also come from a ship given their disparate postmarks and the amount of time between the reception of the letters and the murders. Holmes, upon more investigation the next day discovers that the only ship that could house the culprits is the Lone Star from America, captained by a man named Calhoun. Holmes sends a letter to the captain with his own orange pips.

Before the letter can reach the ship, however, Watson discovers that John died, apparently by accident, on his way back to his home. Furthermore, they find out that the Lone Star was recently sunk at sea. The case ends without any clear resolution.

Section 5, The Five Orange Pips Analysis

"The Five Orange Pips" is a strange Sherlock Holmes mystery. There is very little action. The story mostly consists of John Openshaw telling Holmes and Watson his story. The story also uses a somewhat contemporary, but also to Doyle's readers, exotic organization as the dark villain: the KKK. Now much of what Holmes says about the KKK in this story is fanciful or made-up. Still, the organization was real and no doubt, in the news. The use of the American secret society is another example of Doyle using a character who has returned from some foreign, usually either colonial or related territory with a dark past and a history beyond the law.

We see characters returning from Australia and India with similar pasts in many other Sherlock Holmes stories. This is a recurrent theme that we see in the Sherlock Holmes stories over and over again. Furthermore, this story, like "A Scandal in Bohemia" is an example of a case that Holmes is unable to completely solve. There are several reasons why Doyle may have written the story this way. He may have not known how to end the story properly or he may have wanted to show that Holmes is capable of not catching a villain.

Section 6, The Man with the Twisted Lip

Section 6, The Man with the Twisted Lip Summary

The story begins with a description of Isa Whitney, husband to Kate Whitney, one of Watson's wife's friends and of his addiction to opium. One night just as Watson and his wife are sitting down to respectively read and knit after dinner, Kate Whitney comes to their door. She is panicked because her husband has been missing for several days, presumably at an opium den in London. She implores Watson to travel to the opium den and retrieve her husband. Despite the hour and the unpleasantness of the business, Watson duly goes onto London's underbelly to try and find Isa Whitney. He quickly finds the addict lying about in the opium den.

Isa is unaware that he has been gone for so long and asks Watson to pay his opium bill before he leaves. Watson does this for the man but is stopped on the way by what looks to be another opium addict, but is really Sherlock Holmes in disguise. Holmes asks Watson to send Isa home and to meet him outside the opium den.

Once outside and away from the den, Holmes explains to Watson that he is investigating the disappearance of a Mr. St. Clair who was last seen by his wife in this very opium den. Holmes suspects foul play and is on bad terms with the owner of the opium den. While walking down the street several days ago looking for a cab, Mrs. St. Clair saw her husband in the window of the upper floor of the opium den. He let out a cry and then vanished as if being pulled back by someone else. She attempted to get upstairs, but the owner of the opium den barred her way. When she returned with the police, all they find in the room is a cripple man and some of Mr. St. Clair's clothing.

There are no other signs of foul play aside from some bloodstains near the window. Hugh Boone is the name of the cripple and Holmes fears that it is the cripple who is behind the entire business. Several days after the disappearance Mr. St. Clair's coat is found in the water behind the opium den, weighed down with pennies in the pockets. Mrs. St. Clair has enlisted Holmes to find her husband.

Holmes and Watson travel to Mrs. St. Clair's home to spend the night and to tell the woman any news about her husband's disappearance. Holmes frankly confides to the woman that he fears her husband is dead. Mrs. St. Clair, however, shows Holmes a letter she has just received that day with a note from her husband telling her not to worry and his right in it. Although not the entire letter is in her husband's handwriting, some of it is and the ring is clearly his. Holmes, puzzled, sits on the couch and begins to smoke his pipe. Watson falls asleep though Holmes goes on smoking throughout the night.

Around daybreak, Holmes wakes Watson and tells him to get the stable boy and his cab as Holmes believes he has solved the mystery. They travel to the police house where the beggar Boone is being held. Holmes announces that the beggar Mr. St. Clair and

Boone confesses to being St. Clair in disguise. He has taken to begging in disguise once he found that he could earn a significantly higher income begging than working. Still, he was ashamed of his trade and seeing his wife in the window of the room he rented for his trade, he panicked and hid his identity. Holmes tells the man to go back to his wife and to quit begging.

Section 6, The Man with the Twisted Lip Analysis

"The Man with the Twisted Lip" like "A Case of Identity" involves an odd story that may or may not include a crime. At the outset, Holmes belies that Mr. St. Clair is dead, though at the end of the story we find out that he is not dead at all. It seems, besides the lies to his family, that there is no crime at all in this story. The story is also an odd attempt at something like social realism. Holmes and Watson often travel in the underbelly of London and, indeed, Holmes is even somewhat addicted to morphine and cocaine. This story has Holmes and Watson going deep into the underground world of opium dens and beggars.

Doyle though, keeps this approach fresh by adding a heavy dose of irony to the realism. The beggar, who Holmes assumes is the killer at the beginning of the story, is St. Clair. He, a respectable bourgeoisie, has disguised himself as a beggar to make more money on the streets of London than at his normal job. Contrast St. Clair then with Whitney who is also seemingly a respectable member of London society, but secretly addicted to opium. Doyle is playing around with social class and roles here as he often does in the Sherlock Holmes stories. As Holmes says over and over again, things are not always what they seem on the surface. Doyle seems to be showing the reader that this may be as true of the city around them as it is in the crimes of his hero.

Section 7, The Adventure of the Blue Carbuncle

Section 7, The Adventure of the Blue Carbuncle Summary

This story begins two days after Christmas with Watson dropping in on Holmes to wish him a Merry Christmas. He finds his friend Holmes investigating a black hat that has been delivered to him by a local policeman. The policeman was heading home when he saw a man with a goose being accosted by a gang outside of a bar. The policeman shouted at the gang, who ran off, but the man, apparently frightened as well, ran off and dropped his goose and hat. The policeman brought the hat to Holmes and took the goose home to his family. Holmes deduces, from studying the hat that its owner is an intelligent man who has fallen on hard times and taken to drink. The goose, no doubt was meant as a peace offering to the man's wife.

All of a sudden, the policeman bursts into Holmes's apartment. He has found in the stomach of his goose a beautiful blue stone that Holmes identifies as the recently stolen Blue Carbuncle. The gem was stolen from the Countess of Morcar who was staying at the Hotel Cosmopolitan several days ago. Catherine Cusak and Ryder, maid and butler to the Countess of Morcar, claimed that John Horner, a plumber, was responsible. The plumber is no being held by the police. Holmes, though, not trusting that Horner is responsible puts an advertisement out in the paper for the owner of the goose and hat. When the man, Henry Baker, arrives, Holmes tells him that he has eaten the original goose but that he has bought the man a replacement. Holmes offers to give Baker the stomach and other unused parts. Baker declines and is happy to get a replacement goose. He also tells Holmes that he originally bought the goose from the owner of the Alpha Inn.

Holmes and Watson travel to the Alpha Inn where the landlord tells the two men that he bought his goose from a Mr. Breckinridge in Covent Garden. Holmes and Watson find Breckinridge and ask him where he bought his goose, but he refuses to tell them. Holmes then tricks the man into telling him by pretending to bet Watson about whether or not the goose was city or country bred. As they are leaving with the address of the goose seller, they hear Breckinridge arguing with another man who is interested in the goose. Holmes intercepts the man and offers to give him the goose in question if he will come back to Baker Street.

Once at Baker Street, Holmes shows the man, who happens to be James Ryder, the gem and asks Ryder to tell him the whole truth. Ryder tells Holmes that he stole the gem with the help of Cusak and framed Horner. He then took the gem to his sister who runs a goose farm in town. He stuffed the gem down a goose, but when he returned some days later to take collection, he picked the wrong goose. Realizing his mistake he has been trying to find the goose with the jewel ever since. He offers to leave the

country and Holmes tells the man to leave and never commit any crime again, telling Watson that he will make sure Horner is freed. Holmes claims his clemency is in the spirit of the Christmas season.

Section 7, The Adventure of the Blue Carbuncle Analysis

"The Adventure of the Blue Carbuncle" is a rightly famous and favorite tale in the Sherlock Holmes canon. The story, unlike some of the other more experimental stories in this collection is a taught, well-plotted and paced detective story. It involves a framed man, a drunken patsy, a goose that hides a stolen jewel, and Sherlock Holmes outsmarting everyone he comes across. A good example of Holmes's street smarts is his bet with Breckinridge about the origin of the goose. Breckinridge is firm in the intention not to tell Holmes the origin of the goose until Holmes bets the man. If it is the question of a wager, and presumably the opportunity to one up Holmes, Breckinridge is willing to give up all of the information that Holmes desires.

"The Adventure of the Blue Carbuncle" is yet another example of Holmes acting outside of the law in what he sees as the name of justice. He believes that it is better to let Ryder go than to make him into a hardened criminal in jail. This may be the correct move, but it is still not clear why Holmes allows some men to go free and others to go to jail. It is also not clear how much of Holmes's motivation is based on a sense of justice and how much is based on a simple desire to solve mysteries.

Section 8, The Adventure of the Speckled Band

Section 8, The Adventure of the Speckled Band Summary

"The Adventure of the Speckled Band" takes place before many of the other stories in this collection, in April of 1883. Watson and Holmes are living in Baker Street together as bachelors when one morning, Holmes wakes Watson very early to meet with a young woman, Miss Helen Stoner who has come with a mystery. She lives in the country house of an old aristocratic family, the Roylotts of Stoke Moran, who have fallen on hard times. The head of the household is Miss Stoner's stepfather, a doctor who made a living in India before being forced to return to England after beating his butler to death in India. Miss Stoner now lives with her stepfather in the family home. Her only other relative was her twin sister who recently died under strange circumstances.

Neither of the two girls left the house much and the family is not held in very much esteem because of her stepfather's temper. On one trip to her aunt's house, Helen's sister Julia was engaged to a local military officer. Her stepfather made no outward signs that he disapproved of the engagement. Julia had a room near her sister's and one night she came to Helen's room to talk about the marriage when she mentioned to her sister that she had been hearing a whistling and a metal clamp late in the night. Later that same night, Helen hears a scream from Julia's room and when she enters she sees her sister in a fright muttering about a "speckled band" before dieing. The coroner found no marks on her or any indication of poisoning.

Recently, Helen has become engaged to a young gentleman just like her sister once was. The night before her visit to Holmes, she also heard a whistling and a metal noise, just like her sister heard the night before she died. Frightened she immediately came to Holmes. Holmes tells her to return home and that he and Watson will meet her there later in the day. Before Holmes can leave, however, the woman's stepfather comes into the room in a rage and threatens Holmes before leaving. After the man leaves Holmes goes out for awhile to the record office and discovers that Miss Stoner's stepfather stands to lose a large sum if Helen is married. Convinced he has the motive, Holmes and Watson travel to the house.

The find in Julia's room, which Helen has been moved into by her stepfather, a dummy servant bell cord and a ventilator hole above a bed that has been attached to the floor. In the adjacent room of her stepfather, Holmes finds a safe a milk saucer and a cord. Believing he has solved the mystery he tells Helen to go to bed and then to signal Holmes who will be at the inn nearby. Once signaled he and Watson will take residence in her room and she will move to her old room. Helen does as Holmes tells her and Holmes and Watson sit up in Julia's room waiting for something to happen.

After a while of waiting, they hear a metal clang and smell a lantern lit in the adjacent room. Suddenly Holmes jumps up and begins hitting the bell cord with his cane, they here a scream in the other room and rush into Helen's stepfather's room to see what has happened. They find the stepfather dead with a snake on his head. Apparently, the man trained a poisonous "swamp adder" to crawl down the bell cord and attack whomever was in the bed. Holmes, by hitting the snake must have angered it and it turned on its master. Holmes realizes that he is responsible for the death of the violent man, but feels no remorse.

Section 8, The Adventure of the Speckled Band Analysis

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle believed that "The Adventure of the Speckled Band" was his best Sherlock Holmes story and it seems reasonable to share in this appraisal of the story. It has many of the classic elements of a great Holmes story. There is the exotic, often Indian or at least foreign murder weapon, in this case the snake. There is the strange, violent man who has made his fortune in India or Africa and now threatens one of his relatives. There is the potential victim, often a young woman about to be married. Finally, there is the sense of danger and suspense in this story that is lacking in some of the other stories in the Adventures of Sherlock Holmes.

"The Adventure of the Speckled Band" echoes the Sign of Four and "The Devil's Foot" both stories that have many of these same elements. While Sherlock Holmes's skills are in deduction, he is at his best as a character when he is actively solving a mystery and ferreting out danger rather than just cooling deducing in his office. Sometimes Doyle gets caught up in the grotesque elements of the particular mystery as in "Five Orange Pips" and "The Man with the Twisted Lip," while ignoring the action and suspense of the story. In the "The Adventure of the Speckled Band" Doyle finds the perfect mix of grotesque and exotic crime with a story of suspense and danger.

Section 9, The Adventures of the Engineer's Thumb

Section 9, The Adventures of the Engineer's Thumb Summary

"The Adventures of the Engineer's Thumb" begins in the summer of 1889 not long after Watson's marriage. A guard who has brought a man that needs treatment to his house awakens Watson. The man is Victor Hatherly, an engineer who has had his thumb cut off in, what he calls, a murderous attack. Watson suggests that they see Sherlock Holmes and the two men travel to Baker Street.

Victor tells the story about how he, a bachelor and an orphan, was approached by a Colonel Lysander Stark to come into the country late at night with him and fix his hydraulic press. Stark offers to pay Victor 50 guineas for his trouble and swears him to absolute secrecy. The next night, Victor follows the mysterious colonel's instructions and takes the train out in the country, whereupon, Stark meets the man and takes him to a home. There he meets a young, German woman, who implores him to leave immediately. Not afraid and anticipating his money, Victor decides to stay at the site.

Stark talks German with the woman and then shows Victor to a room with a heavy mechanical press. Victor is asked to repair the press, though the engineer wants to know what the press is used for before he repairs it. This angers Stark and another thinner man who is with him and they shut the door on Victor locking him into the workings of the press. They then turn the press on which will crush Victor unless he escapes. He notices that the walls are made of wood and pushes through the panels to escape narrowly from the press. In the process, he knocks over a lamp, which lights the walls on fire. Once in a corridor the German girl helps him to a window, which he jumps out of, but not before Stark, wielding a cleaver cuts off his thumb. Dazed from his fall and bleeding, Victor hides himself in the bushes until morning when he makes his way to a train station and eventually to Watson.

Holmes, Watson, Victor and Inspector Bradstreet travel to the train station that Victor escaped to and try to find the home with the press. Holmes deduces that the press is being used for counterfeiting and finds evidence that a previous engineer was murdered after he repaired the press. Alas, they cannot find the criminals because the lamp that Victor broke ultimately ended up burning down the house, which caused the men to flee.

Section 9, The Adventures of the Engineer's Thumb Analysis

"The Adventure of the Engineer's Thumb" is another strange tale, like the "The Five Orange Pips" that has no real resolution in terms of the criminals being brought to justice. One might argue that in "The Five Orange Pips" at least the murderous sea captain presumably met his fate in the deep, paying for his crimes with his own death, but this is only to say that it rains on the just and the unjust alike as it is most likely the case that the captain's men died along with him. There was also no direct reckoning with his crime. This brings up a serious question of justice in the Sherlock Holmes tales that we have already mentioned in relation to Holmes's cavalier attitude towards criminal clemency.

As Holmes will tell Watson in a later tale, it is the logic of his deduction not the details of the specific crime that is of interest to him. In some sense, the crime is just the occasion for the application of his peculiar and particular skills and talents. It would be going too far to say that he does not care about justice at all as we shall see, but he knows that oftentimes justice will not or cannot be done. In this case it is the luck of the engineer and the unexpected help of a woman that save an innocent man. His predecessor, however, did not have such good luck. We are not asked to consider the implications of this fact or the morality in the story, though Doyle will bring up some of these issues again in later stories.

Section 10, The Adventure of the Noble Bachelor

Section 10, The Adventure of the Noble Bachelor Summary

This story begins a few weeks before Watson's marriage, when he was still living with Sherlock. Holmes receives an elaborate looking letter from the Lord St. Simon. The letter says that St. Simon has heard about Holmes and that he wishes Sherlock to look into the matter of his vanished wife. The lord has only recently been married, but on the day of his marriage, his wife disappeared. Inspector Lestrade is working on the case but, predictably, he has found nothing. Holmes asks Watson to read him the relevant sections about the marriage from the paper so he can get acquainted with the background material before the lord arrives. St. Simon tells Holmes much of what he has read.

The lord, in his forties, was married to Hatty Doran the American daughter of a rich miner from San Francisco. St. Simon, though he comes from a great family, is not very rich and he would stand to gain a large dowry form the marriage. While the couple are walking down he aisle, Miss Doran dropped her bouquet and a man in the pew picked it up and handed it back to her. During the reception, a previous lover of St. Simon attempts to make a scene but she is escorted out of the house, later Miss Doran is found missing. The ex-lover of St. Simon, Flora Millar, is now in prison for the disappearance of Doran. After the lord is done with his story, Holmes bids him goodbye and tells him that he has solved the case and will call on him later with the solution.

After the lord has left, Inspector Lestrade pays a visit. He tells Holmes he is dragging the river looking for the body of the woman after he found a dress and shoes in the water. He shows Holmes a note that he found in the dress. The note tells the woman to come when a F.H.M signals. Holmes is intrigued by the note, but not by the message, rather by the hotel bill upon which the note is written. Lestrade leaves and Holmes goes out telling Watson he will return.

While Holmes is gone, some servants come in with a nice meal, setting it up in Holmes's room. Later Holmes arrives and then he lord. Holmes tells him that the matter will be cleared up shortly when a man and woman arrive. The woman is Miss Doran and the man is Mr. Francis Hay Moulton. Holmes asks them to tell their story and Doran describes how she met Francis years ago in America and wed him before he took off to earn his fortune. She received news that he was killed and ultimately married the lord, though on the day of the marriage, Francis was in the pew and used the dropped bouquet to send her a message to meet him. She could not desert her first love and ran off to meet him. The lord is incensed at this story and leaves while Holmes has dinner with the two Americans.

Section 10, The Adventure of the Noble Bachelor Analysis

"The Adventure of the Noble Bachelor" is another story that involves no real crime and has principal characters from a foreign, and to Doyle's readers, exotic land. Unlike many of his other stories, Doyle here tries to be at least somewhat accurate in his portrayal of an American character. At the end of the story, Miss Doran tells Holmes and those assembled about her affair with Francis and her earlier years in America. There is a clear, sharp change between Miss Doran's pattern of speech and Sherlock's. This is meant to be a representation in the difference between American and English spoken English.

While Doyle could have used some kind of obvious dialect to indicate this shift and coming from a mining family in San Francisco, Miss Doran would have probably had some kind of accent, it is his subtlety, which is most impressive. He merely changes the meter and vocabulary of his dialogue slightly, though the reader perceives an immediate and important difference in the two characters. This subtly highlights one of the oft-overlooked facts about Doyle's writing, his excellent dialogue. While it is true that many of these stories involve long monologues of characters recounting the details of past events, there is often taut and sprightly dialogue between Holmes and Watson. In this story, the dialogue in the beginning between Holmes and St. Simon as well as the dialogue at the end between Holmes and Miss Doran are both excellent examples of Doyle's mastery of this aspect of his storytelling.

Section 11, The Adventure of the Beryl Coronet

Section 11, The Adventure of the Beryl Coronet Summary

The story begins with Watson noticing a man rushing down the street towards the Baker Street apartment. He soon comes up in a huff and asks to speak to Holmes. The man is Alexander Holder, a banker in one of the largest banking firms in London. He tells Holmes of a nobleman who has recently come to his bank and asked for a large loan and as security has given the man the Beryl Coronet, an exquisite piece of jewelry that in known not only for its beauty and monetary but also for its historical value to England.

Fearing that the bank may not be safe, Holder takes the Coronet home with him where he lives with his son, his niece, and some servants. His son gambles at the clubs and always needs money. His niece is very sweet, but does not leave the house. The only other person that visits then is a charming gentleman named Sir George Burnwell. He shows the two of them the Coronet before going to bed, only to be awakened by a noise in his office. Upon entering, he sees his son with the Coronet, which is now missing three of its precious Beryls. Holder accuses his son and calls the police. He asks Holmes to help him find the missing Beryls.

Holmes travels with the man back to his house to investigate. He meets the niece who claims that the night of the crime she saw one of the servant girls meeting with a lover in the back of the house. The niece believes, like Holmes, that the son is innocent. Holmes investigates the house and then asks Holder to come to Baker Street the next day.

Once back at the house Holmes puts on a disguise and goes out twice in the evening. The next day Holder comes to Holmes and tells him that his niece has disappeared. Holmes figured as much and asks for 4000 pounds for the return of the jewels. He tells Holeder that Burnwell is an evil man and has seduced his niece to help him steal the jewels. On the night in question she took the Coronet and gave it to Burnwell who was waiting outside. The son saw all of this, but fearing to dishonor his beloved niece, he ran after Burnwell once outside, unbeknownst to the niece, and pulled the Coronet away from Burnwell, though without the three jewels.

What Holder saw in his office that night was the son returning the Coronet. Holmes, the night before, tracked down Burnwell and threatened him to induce the rogue to give up the Beryls. The niece has clearly fled with Burnwell and will probably meet some sad end. The men go free Holder's son from jail and then return the Coronet to its owner.

Section 11, The Adventure of the Beryl Coronet Analysis

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle is different from many current writers of detective fiction and also from many of his contemporaries in the absence of extreme plot twists in his work. Usually, though Holmes may have complete control of the facts of the case, the reader is in the dark until Holmes reveals to us the hidden parts of the story. The hidden details themselves, however, are hidden to us only because of our lack of deductive ability and sometimes because Holmes knows facts that we do not know. Part of the reason that there are not many dramatic twists in these stories is a reflection of Holmes's method of deduction.

To Holmes, nothing is truly hidden. Everything is connected through a chain that, given the right information, we can unravel. "The Adventure of the Beryl Coronet," like some other stories does involve a genuine plot twist. Holder's son is framed for the crime and we are made to believe that he is implicated, though Holmes keeps telling us throughout that he is not, until the very end. We find out that the son, far from being the perpetrator of the theft, actually prevented a greater crime and is, nobly if not prudently, keeping silent to protect his beloved niece. This twist occurs suddenly in the story and sets this adventure apart from most of the other stories in this collection.

Section 12, The Adventure of the Copper Beeches

Section 12, The Adventure of the Copper Beeches Summary

This story begins with Holmes abusing Watson for not focusing more in his writings about Holmes's case more on the logic of deduction than on the crimes. He then bemoans the fact that all of the good cases are already over and done with. At that moment, a letter arrives from a Miss Violet Hunter asking to meet with Holmes. She then arrives at the door and sits down. She wants to ask Holmes some advice on whether to take a job as a governess at a country home. She tells how she was propositioned to be a governess for a large man through her agency who offered her much more than the going salary to look after his son and to wear specific dresses in the house and to cut her hair.

Balking at the prospect of cutting her hair, Hunter refused until the next day when he offered her even more money. Holmes tells her that the offer seems fishy and that she should not accept, but that if she does accept, she should telegram him immediately if anything happens. She agrees and decides to accept the offer.

It is not too many days later that Holmes receives an urgent telegram from Miss Hunter asking him to meet her in Winchester. Holmes and Watson travel to Winchester where Hunter tells them of the strange happenings at the house where she works, The Copper Beeches. The master of the house is a Mr. Rucastle. He lives in the house with his younger second wife and a son. His daughter from his, now dead, first wife is said to live in Philadelphia. There is also a drunken groom and his wife the head servant. They keep a large mastiff to prowl the grounds at night.

The master of the house makes Hunter put on a blue dress and sit with her back to the window. One day she spies from a concealed mirror a man behind her watching in the yard. She also notices that one wing of the house is closed off and when Rucastle finds her snooping around in that wing he threatens to throw her to the Mastiff is he finds her there again. She is scared and doesn't know what to do. Holmes tells her what to do and says he will meet her at the house later.

When he arrives she has already carried out part of his plan by waiting for the Rucastles to leave that house and the groom, Mr. Toller, to get drunk. She locks his wife in the cellar and takes her keys up to the secret locked room where she meets Holmes. Expecting to find the Rucastle's daughter they only find an open window. Rucastle who has returned, finds them in the room and rushes downstairs in a rage to release the Mastiff. The dog has not been fed in days, however, and it attacks its master before Holmes can shoot the dog.

The Rucastle's daughter has escaped with her lover and fiancée, the very man who, by dressing Hunter up as the daughter, the Rucastles were hoping to fool. Mr. Rucastle stood to lose a considerable sum by his daughter's marriage and hoped to prevent the union. At the end of the story the Rucastles still live in the Copper Beeches, Mr. Rucastle was not killed by the dog only seriously injured and his daughter has escaped and married her lover. Mrs. Hunter is off running a school of her own.

Section 12, The Adventure of the Copper Beeches Analysis

"The Adventure of the Copper Beeches" is similar in many ways to the "The Adventure of the Speckled Band" and only slightly less successful. Both stories involve a mysterious country house run by a strange, large and slightly ill mannered master. Both stories involve a young woman whose marriage is a financial threat to the master of the house. Both stories involve an exotic, dangerous animal that turns on the master of the house, a "swamp adder" in one case and a mastiff in the other. Both also involve a young woman in danger that Holmes and Watson save at the last minute in a thrilling scene.

While the "Speckled Band" unwinds slowly with an economy of characters only to explode at the end in a flurry of excitement, the "Copper Beeches" burdens the reader with too many characters and bizarre details. The hidden room in the unused wing, the drunken groom, the mysterious man who turns out to be the fiancée, the blue dress, the hair cut, all of these facts and plot details if taken alone or together with a few others would enrich the story, but taken together, they turn the story into a bloated mess. The final scene, which should be as thrilling as the final scene in "Speckled Band" is hurried and confused because of the number of characters and details. This is not the only story that doesn't completely work in this collection, but it is the clearest example of failure because of its similarity to Doyle's most successful and favorite story, "The Adventure of the Speckled Band."

Characters

Sherlock Holmesappears in All

Sherlock Holmes is the key character in all of the stories in this collection. He is a "consulting detective," what we would today call a private investigator. Apparently, not long after the started his career as a detective, he needed more money and took Watson on as a roommate in his apartment. He lives and works out of 221B Baker street, a small but well furnished apartment with 17 steps leading up the the room from the street. Although he may have needed money at one time, by the time of these stories he is comfortably well off. So much so that he often doesn't charge at all for his services.

Holmes's chief characteristic and his most useful trait is his cold, calculating mind and his method of deduction. He is able to devise theories to explain crimes with the smallest amount of evidence. He, as he constantly tells Watson, sees what other do not see. He believes that the details of a case are all important and he will often question a client about the most, seemingly, irrelevant detail of their account.

Happiest and most contented when on the track of a criminal or when trying to solve a tricky case, Holmes becomes agitated when his mind is not occupied with some tough problem. He habitually injects cocaine ot improve his moods in the downtimes and also uses Morphine somewhat frequently. Both of these drugs were legal in England at the time of these stories. He smokes a pipe and loves music, even going so far as to play the violin after he has solved an important case or when he is thinking.

Dr. John Watsonappears in All

Dr. Watson is Sherlock Holmes's intimate friend and partner. Watson narrates all of these stories and acts as something like Holmes's biographer in that he writes many of the interesting cases into stories that he publishes. Holmes's is very fond of Watson though he believes that Watson has ruined his stories by making them too sensational and sentimental. Originally Watson was Holmes's roommate, but the too men became fast friends and began to solve mysteries together.

Watson was originally a military doctor who served with the army in colonial Afghanistan. He still keeps his military revolver which Holmes's asks him to bring on several of their investigations. Watson is intelligent, but lacks the power of Holmes's skills of deduction. Holmes tries to instruct Watson, but his methods seem beyond the doctor. A bachelor for many years, Watson married Mary Morstan, a character from The Sign of Four before the beginning of most of these stories.

Although Holmes has no interest of skill with women, Watson has a keen interest in the fairer sex as he shows in several of these stories. Watson effectively functions as Holmes's side-kick and as the everyman foil to Holmes's more cold personality. More

than once, though, it is an observation or a brave act by Watson that saves the day. Although Watson moves out of Baker street once he is married, he constantly stops back in to see his friend and many of these tales begin with a chance visit to Sherlock Holmes.

Inspector Lestradeappears in The Boscome Valley Mystery, The Adventure of the Noble Bachl

Lestrade is a well-repsected and able Scotland Yard detective that Holmes often works with on cases. Lestrade thinks that Holmes's method is suspect and Holmes finds Lestrade a little bone headed, but the two work together well and Sherlock will often give the credit of the case to Lestrade.

John Clayappears in The Red-Headed League

Clay is the noble born mater criminal in the "Red-Headed League" who pretends to be an assistant before Sherlock finds out his true identity.

John Turnerappears in The Boscombe Valley Mystery

Turner was originally an Australia highway robber who eventually left Australia to settle down in the English countryside. He murders Mr. McCarty because McCarthy is trying to force Turner's daughter into a marriage with McCarthy's son.

John Openshawappears in The Five Orange Pips

He is the nephew of Elias Openshaw who returned from Florida after the Civil War to return to the English countryside. His uncle incurs the wrath of the KKK which kills his uncle, his father, and eventually him.

Isa Whitneyappears in The Man with the Twisted Lip

Educated husband of a friend of Watson's wife. An opium addict, he often spends days at a time in opium dens.

Mr. Neville St. Clairappears in The Man with the Twisted Lip

Although St. Clair is a somewhat successful business man, he has taken to disguising himself as a beggar to make more money on the streets of London. Fearing that his wife

has found out his secret, he fakes his own disappearance and is then accused of his own murder.

Inspector Bradstreetappears in The Adventures of the Engineer's Thumb

Another Scotland Yard detective that sometimes works with Holmes. Like Lestrade he sometimes looks down on Holmes's methods though he will often also look the other way when Holmes circumvents the law.

James Ryderappears in The Adventure of the BLue Carbuncle

The thief of the Blue Carbuncle. Holmes catches his by subterfuge and then, convinced that the man will not commit anymore crimes, Holmes releases him without telling the police.

Helen Stonerappears in The Adventure of the Speckled Band

She is the stepdaughter of Dr. Roylott who holds an inheritance from her mother's death. Dr. Roylott kills her sister Julia and he aims to do the same thing to Helen to prevent her marriage and the loss of her inheritance before Holmes and Watson save her.

Objects/Places

Scotland Yardappears in All

The London police department at the time of these tales. Originally, Sir Peel founded the city's police services in 1829, but by the time of the Sherlock Holmes stories the police are located at Scotland Yard in the Whitehall district of London.

Opium Denappears in The Man with the Twisted Lip

A Legal institution in Victorian England, the opium den was a place, not unlike a bar for opium, where users of the narcotic could go to buy and use opium. Usually located in bad parts of town.

Berylappears in The Adventure of the Beryl Coronet

Gems made from beryllium aluminium cyclosilicate. An emerald is a green Beryl, though there are many different other types of this rare and precious mineral.

Bohemiaappears in A Scandal in Bohemia

A kingdom in what is now the Czech Republic, Bohemia at the time of the story was ruled by a hereditary, ethnically German, king.

Klu Klux Klanappears in The Five Orange Pips

An American terrorist and protection organization formed by six civil war veterans in Tennessee 1865. Tried to enforce racial standards and to harass white's from the north and blacks that offended their members.

Orange Pipsappears in The Five Orange Pips

Parts of the orange that look like seeds.

Swamp Adderappears in The Adventure of the Speckled Band

Holmes calls the snake in "Speckled Band" a "swamp adder", though there is no such known snake. He was probably thinking a of a snake like a cobra with a neurotoxin

venom that would be fatal and act quickly as the snake kills Roylott almost instantly in the story.

Londonappears in All

Capital and most metropolitan and cosmopolitan city in England and at the time of these stories, probably the world.

English Countrysideappears in Nearly All

A catchall term that refers to the English towns outside of the major cities. This area was traditionally the province of a class of aristocratic landowners who still exist and operate in somewhat different ways from the occupants of the city.

221B Baker Streetappears in All

221B Baker Street is a fictional address in London where Sherlock Holmes and Watson, at least some of the time, lives. At the time of the writing, Baker street addresses did not go as high as 221, so the address could not have actually existed.

Themes

Deduction in Detection

Sherlock Holmes employs a peculiar type of method in his work, a method that sets him apart from his sometimes colleagues in the regular police force and also from the common man. He calls this method deduction and the use of deduction is a common themes running through every single Sherlock Holmes story. In logic, deduction is the inference of a conclusion from premises such as the inference of the fact that Socrates is mortal given the information that Socrates is a man and also that all me are mortal. This method differs from induction, which involves amassing separate instances, or facts and attempting to draw regular conclusions from them that often hold but that is not logically required to hold.

For instance, if one notices that every day the sun rises and then, at some later point, the sunsets, it is reasonable to assume that the sun will rise and set tomorrow. Most detectives use a method that is more similar to induction than to deduction, that is, they look for clues that will point to the likelihood of one criminal theory rather than another where 'theory' means the complete set of true facts and there relations in a crime. Holmes, on the other hand reasons in the opposite direction. He constructs theories from the facts he is a given and then test the theories against any new facts that he finds. This is why he is so interested in specific details. The general facts of a case may be present in many similar cases and therefore do not help the detective determine whether any particular theory is correct.

Details however, tend to be unique and hence they give support or refute a vast number of potential theories His method then is a type of falsificationism rather than a type of verificationism. He seeks to find specific facts that will eliminate his theories rather than amass facts that will support a theory. The reason for this method is clear. Any number of facts can verify a theory, but it only takes one fact to render a theory impossible, that is, a theory only needs on counter-example to be discarded. His method, however, is taxing mentally and not everyone could employ it as it requires a huge knowledge of past cases and facts about items that might be used in crimes.

Countryside vs. Town

In English history there has often been a distinction between the town and the countryside. In England, unlike America, an aristocracy once owned the entire countryside. Kings or other nobles for service gave these land grants to the king or noble, typically in the military. The landowners would often own huge tracts of lands as big as many modern day American counties and anyone living or working on that land would have to pay the landowner rent. This is a typical, feudal, land arrangement.

Because land was a huge source of revenue, many of these landowners became extremely wealthy and stayed wealthy for centuries. In English politics from the time of the English civil war in the 17th century on until at least the early-20th century, the countryside represented the Whig, or anti-monarchical party, and many of the later liberals. The country aristocrats were used to acting as masters and lords of their own households and, oftentimes, of the surrounding towns and landowners. They tended to be very jealous of their authority and suspicious of outsiders.

In the Sherlock Holmes stories, many of the crimes involve wealthy, country, landowners. Their homes are presented as concealing great vices and crimes. At one point in their journey to the country in one of the stories, Holmes mentions that he countryside frightens him because of its isolation and the ease of crime. No doubt, some of this sentiment expresses the general city sentiment that the country aristocracy is parasitic and debased. Many of the landowners in these stories or criminals are also from colonial holdings in India, Australia, or America. There is a sense that the colonies and, to a certain extent, are outside the pale of civilization and law. This is an odd sentiment to us today, but at the time, it would not have seemed as odd.

Public and Private Justice

Sherlock Holmes is a detective and most of his abilities are used to solve crimes. It would seem obvious then that criminal justice in the most general form would feature heavily in these stories. It is true that justice is an important theme in the Sherlock Holmes tales, but most strikingly in its absence in Holmes's reasoning. Holmes himself has a strong sense of justice, in some ways, which motivates him in several of the cases. Oftentimes, though his personal sense of justice will conflict will public justice. That is, Holmes does not by any means stick to the letter of the law. He will break into private property when necessary and use disguise and lies to get the information that he needs. In one case, "The Adventure of the Beryl Coronet," he threatens a criminal with a pistol to get what he wants.

Several of the stories involve Holmes catching a criminal of one kind or another and deciding that he won't tell the police and that the criminal can go free. Sometimes the crime that they have committed is minor, but in the case of the "Blue Carbuncle" the criminal has engaged in a very elaborate burglary. Still, Holmes, struck with the Christmas spirit, decides to take the man at his word that he will not commit any more crimes. Holmes believes in punishing the guilty, but it matters to him what the nature of the criminal's guilt is. John Turner murders another man, but Holmes doesn't think it is necessary to turn the man in to the police.

There is a kind of utilitarianism behind Holmes's motives and he won't turn a criminal in or tell the police if he thinks that the effect of doing so will be worse than the effect of turning a blind eye. Normal police do not have this luxury as they must enforce public conceptions of justice that are specified in the law, however, Holmes, as a private citizens may be within his rights in doing so.

Style

Point of View

All of these stories are told from the point of view of Watson, Sherlock Holmes's friend. Sometimes the narrative will take the course of Watson recounting to the reader past events or sometimes the narrative will seem to come directly from Watson's present point of view, though he is clearly still recounting the events of the story. Watson's own prejudices and sentiments color his presentation of the cases and Sherlock scolds him sometimes for injecting too much sensationalism into the stories.

The stories will often begin with Watson either dropping in on Holmes and being sucked into to some engrossing mystery or by Watson directly telling the reader about some past event that might be of interest. Once united with Holmes, some concerned person will recount the details of their story. Holmes will listen and then question then before sending them away. Sometimes Holmes will investigate and sometimes not and he will summon the person back in a couple of days to explain away the mystery.

Oftentimes Watson is involved in the investigation and he will describe the details to the reader in the first person, though sometimes Holmes will go off on his own and he will later tell Watson what he has discovered. In these cases, the reader is in the same position as our narrator as we both have to listen to a recounting of events by Holmes. More often than not, it is Watson who is involved in the action and we can get a true first hand account of the investigation.

Setting

All of the stories are set in England. All of them begin at 221B Baker Street in London with Holmes and Watson listening to the tale of some person who has called on them or with Watson telling us about some time when they listened to a petitioner. Some of the stories take place wholly in London as do the "The Man with the Twisted Lip," though many of the investigations take the two characters into the English countryside. Once in the country, they often have occasion to visit old country houses, more often than not, the setting of some crime or other and local pubs or stables. While in London, Holmes and Watson travel to a wide variety of different locations including, pubs, opium dens, fancy homes, and all manner of other shops and side streets.

The stories are often put together in such a way that would make them easy to stage as plays. There are not many locations in any given story and much of the story involves dialogue. Whether intentional or not, this has the effect of limiting the number of setting, though in many of the accounts from Holmes's customers, they mention a variety of different settings including parts of America, India, and Australia. The settings are very important in these stories because, for Holmes, nothing is accidental, everything is connected to the case so the settings become a clue in themselves. If a story is set in

one place rather than another the reader should ask why the author has chosen that particular setting and what effect it will have on the overall story.

Language and Meaning

As Watson narrates the stories here, it should be no surprise that the language that he uses is common Victorian English. Both Watson and Holmes use a somewhat refined, though not austere, English style that shows intelligence and some class status, but is not affected or silly. Much of the vocabulary that is used is probably very different and more intricate than we would find today, though that was common in Victorian England.

Holmes is educated, probably at Cambridge, though his education was not in the Liberal Arts and he seems to know very little about humanistic disciplines aside from those that may have a bearing on crime. We do know that he has written several treatises on a variety of crime related subjects so it is no surprise that his spoken, and presumably his written, English is excellent.

Watson too, though clearly of a middling class must have been highly educated as he is a doctor. We see Watson often reading novels and the newspaper so it is clear that his knowledge of English letters is probably somewhat better than Sherlock's.

Doyle uses the meter and his choice of words are very evocative of this particular time and place and he shows his mastery when he introduces foreign characters. Several times in these stories Doyle introduces characters from Australia or America or continental Europe. In each case he varies his language subtly to reflect the characters different style of English. He doesn't do this in an over the top way and in "Noble Bachelor" the effect is masterful.

Structure

The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes is divided into twelve tales. They are roughly related in time, though some take place much earlier than others. Most of the stories occur after the Sign of Four and, hence, after Watson's marriage to Mary Marston. Since Watson is no longer living with Holmes because he now lives with his wife, the stories will often begin with Watson stopping in to visit Holmes for some reason or other and will be swept up in the excitement of the mystery. The order of the stories here do not form an obvious logical structure though there does seem to be some relationship to their order.

The first story shows Holmes being bested by a woman. This story is a good way to start the collection because, to those who may have read earlier Sherlock Holmes novels, this would be a surprising result. Similarly, the last story, "Copper Beeches" ends in a similar way to the Sign of Four, the previous Holmes novel with a woman being saved from the hands of a grotesque oppressor. It is important to remember that all of these tales were published individually in literary papers at the time and were only later released as a collection.

There is a kind of organic unity to these stories though, and many of the themes are shared between stories. In some of the stories, "Twisted Lip" and "Orange Pips," Doyle introduces some foreign or exotic aspect to the story as an occasion for a mystery. In both stories, the mystery itself does not amount to very much, though the exotic element in interesting to the reader nonetheless. Regardless, this collection should be rightly seen as a collection of related but still separate short stories.

Quotes

"A Scandal in Bohemia" (229) "He [Holmes] used to make merry over the cleverness of women, but I have not heard him do it of late. And when he speaks of Irene Adler, or when he refers to her photograph, it is always under the honorable title of the woman."

"The Red-Headed League" (241) " "As a rule," said Holmes, "The more bizarre a thing is the less mysterious it proves to be. It is your commonplace, featureless crimes which are really puzzling, just as the commonplace face is the most difficult to identify."

"A Case of Identity" (260) "Not invisible but unnoticed, Watson. You did not know where to look, and so you missed all that was important."

"The Boscombe Valley Mystery" (268) "The more featureless and commonplace a crime is, the more difficult it is to bring it home."

"The Boscombe Valley Mystery" (271) "There is nothing more deceptive than an obvious fact."

"The Adventure of the Blue Carbuncle" (330) "On the contrary, Watson, you can see everything. You fail, however, to reason from what you see. You are too timid in drawing your inferences."

"The Adventure of the Blue Carbuncle" (346) "I suppose that I am commuting a felony, but it is possible that I am saving a soul."

"The Adventure of the Speckled Band" (367) "Violence, does, in truth, recoil upon the violent, and the schemer falls into the pit which he digs for another."

"The Adventure of the Noble Bachelor" (400) "I am afraid, Holmes, that you are not very practical with your deductions and your inferences."

"The Adventure of the Noble Bachelor" (401) "'I've wasted time enough.' said Lestrade, rising. 'I believe in hard work and not in sitting by the fire spinning fine theories."

"The Adventure of the Beryl Coronet" (428) "It is an old maxim of mine that when you have excluded the impossible, whatever remains, however improbable, must be the truth."

"The Adventure of the Copper Beeches" (430) "Crime is common. Logic is rare. Therefore it is upon the logic rather than upon the crime that you should dwell. You have degraded what should have been a course of lectures into a series of tales."

Topics for Discussion

Explain Watson's role in the Sherlock Holmes stories.

Describe the relationship between Sherlock Holmes and Watson.

Give an example of Sherlock Holmes style deduction.

Would Holmes's method of deduction be easier or harder to use today? Explain your answer.

How do class differences have an effect on these stories?

Explain and comment on Doyle's use of foreigners as key plot devices in his stories.

In what ways are Sherlock Holmes stories from other detective stories? Give at least two examples?

Some might say that Sherlock Holmes goes too far in letting some of the criminals that he catches off the hook. How far would you go?