



Arthur Conan Doyle: A Multifarious Personality

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ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on the life of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. It begins with the introduction to his family, his roots and will then go on to study his life. The research has focused on his experience in the schools and colleges he attended, his relationship with his mother and It is through these relationships that his perspective is analyzed.

Keywords: Arthur Conan Doyle, Sherlock Homes, Detective, History, Perspective

Arthur Ignatius Conan Doyle was born on May 22, 1859, in Edinburgh, Scotland. He came from a long line of prosperous Irish Catholic people. The name Arthur Ignatius Conan is registered in the records at St. Mary's Cathedral in Edinburgh. As per this record, Arthur Ignatius Conan is his first name, while Doyle is his surname. However, few historians believe that Conan may not be his middle name, but maybe the first part of his surname. Arthur's grandfather, John Doyle, was a tailor and was very good at painting. John married Marianne Conan and moved to London in 1820. Arthur's father, Charles Altamont Doyle, was a partially successful artist. He suffered from alcohol addiction. One can notice the glimpses of the influence of his father's alcohol addiction in a story he wrote in 1880, "The Surgeon of the Gaster fell". Doyle's father was admitted to an asylum and this story was clearly based on this episode of his life. Doyle's mother, Mary Doyle, had a talent for storytelling. Mary had also read about contemporary English and French Authors, and it may very well be her art of storytelling that later influenced Doyle to become a writer (Bates 323).

Doyle himself would talk about how brilliant a storyteller his mother was. Once in an interview with Bram Stoker, he said

"It is not only that she was-is still-a wonderful storyteller, but she had, I remember, an art of sinking her voice to a horror-stricken whisper when she came to a crisis in her narrative." (Goodson 23)

Doyle wrote his first story at the age of five. Doyle's rich relatives helped in sending him to Jesuit Boarding school when he was nine. He frequently rebelled against the severe punishments which were quite prevalent at the boarding schools of England during those times. The letters he wrote to his mother gave him peace and happiness. At other times he would either play Cricket or make up stories and narrate them to other students; he was equally good at both of them (Mureşan 216). His storytelling would amuse other students and give them relief from the mundane life at the boarding school. He found that he was particularly good at storytelling. Due to the strict disciplinary nature at the school and stringent religious instructions that the students received daily at school, Arthur's interest in religion and faith was mitigated and by the time he left school, he became an agnostic (Navigli et al. 273).

Doyle was the editor for a college paper named Wasp during his stint at the Stonyhurst College. He was also editor of another paper, Stonyhurst Figaro. These early works of Doyle showed his talent. After completing his matriculation at Stonyhurst College, he spent a year at Jesuit Grammar School in Austria. He went there to learn German. However, he was always surrounded by English pupils and could not learn much German. Nevertheless, one good thing that came out of his stint at Jesuit Grammar School was that he read Edgar Allan Poe's works. Doyle came across "The Murders in the Rue Morgue". He was influenced by the story and it clearly showed when he wrote stories featuring Holmes later (Winans 36). He also read novels of Robert Michael Ballantyne, Jules Verne and others. He used to spend a lot of time in the library. He went to study medicine at the University of Edinburgh Medical School. It was one of the best medical schools of that time. Dr Bryan Charles Waller was a lodger at Doyle's mother's residence. He had a good impression on Mary Doyle. It was this enchantment that made his mother ask him to study medicine. During this time, he worked as an assistant to many Doctors. He also started writing to make his ends meet. While some of his stories were rejected, some were published (Taylor-Pirie 153). Doyle was impressed by a certain Dr Jonathan Bell, who was his guide and mentor. It is the personality and behavioural traits of Dr Bell which can be found in the characterization of

Holmes. During this time, he wrote a story named "The Mystery of the Sasassa Valley". This work was heavily influenced from the literary works of Poe. He continued his studies and took time out to write stories. His second story "The American Tale" was published in the London society in this period.

He took a break from studies in 1880 and went on a voyage to the Arctic. He was travelling as the ship's surgeon with a large group who were going to the Arctic for the purpose of exploration. He enjoyed the journey but did not enjoy the killing of seals and whales he witnessed during this voyage. During his voyage, he wrote "The Captain of the Pole Star". After the voyage, he returned to studies and finally completed his medical course a year later. Although he was not particularly enthusiastic and excited to resume his studies, he did complete his Bachelor of Medicine and Master of Surgery. After his graduation, he went to Africa as a medical officer. He was posted as a medical officer on a steamer named "Mayumba". Since this steamer used to travel between Liverpool and Africa, he had a chance to visit and explore Africa. It was his first full-time employment. He was not fascinated by the job and gave it up and came back to London. He did not find Africa as interesting as the Arctic. After returning to London, Doyle started medical practice at Portsmouth by renting a house and furnishing two rooms in the house. Initially it was hard to make enough money and it did not give him enough time for story writing (Zipes 156). By the end of three years of medical practice, he was generating a good amount of money. In 1885, Doyle married Louisa Hawkins, sister of one of the patients he treated. His yearly income during this time was approximately 300 pounds which was fairly decent during the time. Also, in 1885, he was awarded an advanced medical degree by the University of Edinburgh for the "state of the art" thesis he wrote about a syphilitic disease in the spinal cord.

Arthur Conan Doyle published *A Study in Scarlet* in 1888. This story introduced two of the most famous fictional characters of all time, Sherlock Holmes and Dr Watson. This story also established Doyle as one of the most talented writers of the time. The story was initially named "A Tangled Skein" and the two central characters were initially named as Sheridan Hope and Ormond Sacker. By the time, *A Study in Scarlet* was published, Doyle was already famous in the United States of America. In 1889, editor of the American monthly magazine, Lippincott visited London to launch the British edition of the magazine. A Grand function was organized at the Langham Hotel. Doyle was also invited to this event. Doyle met the editor of Lippincott and Oscar Wilde at this event. It was this evening that lay the foundation of the publication of one of his most famous stories, *The Sign of Four*. Arthur Conan Doyle was also writing another novel *The White Company* at the time. He was more excited about this historical novel but had to sacrifice it by spending more time on *The Sign of Four* due to the demands from the publisher and growing interest in Holmes among the public. Even after tasting success in the literary world, Doyle always felt as if something was missing in his life. He left Portsmouth and went to Vienna to study Ophthalmology. He did go to Vienna but the lack of knowledge about the local language presented him with serious challenges and he had to return back to England. After his return to London, he shifted his clinic to a posh area in Upper Wimpole Street. He rarely got any patient visiting him at this clinic and this gave Doyle plenty of spare time to write stories. He had employed A.P Watt to talk on his behalf with the publishers, so he could focus only on writing. Watt introduced Doyle to *The Strand Magazine*. The Strand agreed to publish Doyle's Holmes stories. The Strand appointed Sidney Paget to draw illustrations for these stories. This collaboration of Doyle, Paget and The Strand tasted success that was never before seen in the literary world. The amount of success can be seen from the incidents of fans posting fan mails to the address of 221b Baker Street which was the residential address of the fictional character Holmes (Taylor-Pirie 294). By this time, Doyle was making so much money from his stories of Holmes that he had already given up his medical practice and had begun his career as a full-time professional writer. Between 1891 and 1893, he wrote a series of Holmes stories for the Strand Magazine. He was not very proud of these works despite the immense success and love from the fans and readers. He always considered his historical works to be of more excellent value and significance than the detective stories that he wrote. He always regarded his works such as *Micah Clarke* (1889) and *The Great Shadow* (1892) more highly. Doyle's and Hawkins' son Kingsley was born in 1892. Doyle always regarded this as one of the most joyful episodes of his life. In 1893, when Holmes was enjoying unmatched popularity, Doyle killed him in one of the stories as he fought with his arch-enemy Professor James

Moriarty at Reichenbach Falls (Soygül 354). He might have wanted to put an end to the series of Holmes stories so that he could focus more on the historical works. He reintroduced Holmes in *The Hounds of Baskervilles* in 1902 and later resurrected him in "The Adventure of the Empty House". This was published by *The Strand Magazine*. This and many other stories were collected and published as *The Return of Sherlock Holmes*, *His Last Bow*, and *The Casebook of Sherlock Holmes*. These comprised more than half of the stories he ever wrote on Holmes. *His Last Bow* showcases an old Holmes while the story is set in the background of the era just before World War

1. Doyle published the last story of the Holmes canon, "The Adventure of Shoscombe Old Palace", in 1927. There have been many adaptations of Holmes in cinema. Recently the BBC aired *Sherlock*, a TV show that shows Holmes in the twentieth century. An American TV show, *Elementary* shows Holmes in modern day America assisted by a female Dr Watson. Another popular TV show, *House* shows the two central characters Dr House and Dr Wilson having similarities to Holmes and Dr Watson. Many of the characteristics and behavioural patterns of Dr House resembles that of Holmes. Dr House goes on about his diagnosis of patients suffering from serious and mysterious illness in the same way as Holmes goes on investigating mysterious cases.

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Apart from the stories in the Holmes canon, Doyle has written literary pieces belonging to various genres, including medical journals, essays, historical, supernatural, horror, science fiction and other non-fictional works. His nonfiction works include various essays about the involvement of England in the wars in African nations. His historical works such as "The exploits of Brigadier Gerard", "Adventures of Gerard" are brilliant works (Dirda 165). They are brilliant portrayals of the Napoleonic ethos. They were first published in a magazine and then later reprinted in book format. These stories featured a French Brigadier, Gerard, who was fighting in the Napoleonic wars. These works show a humorous side of Doyle. During the latter part of his life, he wrote on the subject matter of paranormal and spirituality as well. During his trip to Egypt with his first wife Louisa in the year 1896 which he undertook in the hope of the warm climate doing good to the degrading health of his wife, he wrote *The Tragedy of Korosko*. Doyle in 1907, published "Through the Magic Door". It was an essay about the charm of books. He also wrote on various other topics in the non-fiction genre. One such non-fictional piece of writing was "The Crime of the Congo". He published *A History of the British Campaign in France and Flanders*. It had six volumes, and they were published between 1916 and 1920. He also wrote several pamphlets about the wars in Africa. During the time when his wife's condition started deteriorating due to tuberculosis, he was so busy writing that he initially did not notice the deteriorating health condition of his wife. By the time he did realise that his wife was ill, she was already diagnosed with tuberculosis and it was estimated by the Doctors that she could only live for a few months.

Doyle took good care of her and this prolonged her life by a few more months. After her death, Doyle showed interest in understanding spiritualism. He joined the society of Psychical Research and went on to travel many countries to preach about spiritualism. A story that Doyle wrote during his early years as a writer, "The Mystery of Cloomber" showed his interest in spiritualism. "The Land of the Mist" is another spiritual story written by Doyle.

Apart from the Holmes stories, Doyle also wrote a series of stories and novels featuring Professor Challenge. *The Poison Belt*, *The Lost World* are some of the stories that featured Professor Challenge. *The Lost World* is considered as his best science fictional work. It shows the central character of the story, Professor Challenge travelling to South America with a group of people to find big giant creatures who were deemed extinct. Some other historical works of Doyle are *Sir Nigel* and *The Hundred Years' War*.

Doyle had two children with his first wife, Mary and Kingsley. After the death of his first wife, he married Jean Lackie. Doyle served the British Empire with voluntary services as a Doctor in the Boer Wars. He served at the Langman Hospital at Bloemfontein. After his return from the war, he wrote a book on it through which he justified the cause for the war from the British point of view (Norton and LeFanu 22). It was a 500-page voluminous book that detailed the chronicles of the Boer war as he witnessed. The British Press hailed the book for the accuracy with which facts related to the war were laid down. He also wrote a pamphlet, "The war in South Africa: Its causes and Conduct". He was awarded Knighthood for this. He was initially hesitant to accept the Knighthood but eventually accepted the title as per the advice given to him by his mother (Pascal 83). Later in life, after the deaths of his son, brother and two brothers in law, he became attracted to spiritualism even more than before. He also did intensive study and research on the subject matter of the afterlife. He also believed that the spirits do not just leave after death and that they wander around us. In 1921, he wrote an article, "The Evidence for Fairies", in which he supported the claim of two girls who witnessed fairies. In 1926 he published *The History of Spiritualism* in two volumes. He did this publishing at his own expense.

Doyle was an advocate of the ambitions of the British Empire and Imperialism. It was evident from the fact that he never criticised British policies. He wrote about so many varied topics including history and wars and yet he never once questioned the motive behind any war. This either shows his belief in the British Policies and ambitions, his patriotism or the fact that he never wanted to go against the great Empire and invite troubles. His voluntary services offered during the war shows that the first reason is more likely. Doyle breathed his last breath on July 7, 1930. He was with his family during his last breath. His last words were addressed to his wife stating that she was wonderful.

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