The ‘Other’ Side of London
The Roles of the Orient in the City of Sherlock Holmes

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Abstract

This essay focuses on the city of London as it is presented in three Sherlock Holmes stories, and how its society is changed by the Other. The Other here refers to a product or person which has origins in the Orient, as the term is defined by Edward W. Said in his *Orientalism*. It is quite clear that the Other influences the plots and characters, and the claim of this essay is that the Oriental Other is a negative influence in the three analyzed stories, since the issues that are depicted in the stories would not have existed without the Other. The stories that are analyzed are *A Study in Scarlet*, *The Sign of the Four* and *The Man with the Twisted Lip*, in that order.
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Introduction

Informal colonialism is that form of intergroup domination that results from the voluntary migration of permanent settlers from places other than the metropolis. (Horvath 49)

The stories of Sherlock Holmes, the only unofficial consulting detective in the world (Conan Doyle 98), have been a pillar of British literature since the first one was published in 1887. They were written and published in what was a time of change for London and Great Britain as a whole. What will be most essential in this essay is the colonialism that was taking place, which came with consequences such as immigrants of different cultures and new products that were not researched properly for side-effects before arriving in Britain. Because of this, London was under a great strain with a wave of narcotics appearing, which were completely legal, and a surge of criminality. As Britain colonized parts of the Orient, trade was conducted from these new countries. This meant that narcotics were introduced in the society of London without any thought of the consequences that would follow. Therefore, narcotics will be a crucial concept for this thesis to use. Sherlock Holmes is the character that both symbolizes and counteracts the elements of the colonization; his occupation is catching criminals that vandalize London, but he is an addict to cocaine.

With this background as a foundation, the aim of this essay is to focus on the city of London as it is presented in the Sherlock Holmes stories, and how its society is changed by the (unknown) Other. The Other here refers to something which mainly has its origins in the Orient. There will also be occasions in the analyses of something domestic posing as an Other. It is quite clear that the Other influences the plots and characters, and the claim of this essay is that the Oriental Other is a negative influence in the three analyzed stories, by way of the crimes depicted in the stories being impossible without the Other’s participation.
The Other is a term which is not used when looking at literature only, but can be modified into usefulness in many fields of study. One definition of the term can be that an Other is the opposite of Self, which in this case is London, and the Self struggles to marginalize or ignore the Other for fear of something which is mainly unknown. It is famously discussed in Edward W. Said’s *Orientalism*, where he writes:

> The Orient is not only adjacent to Europe; it is also the place of Europe’s greatest and richest and oldest colonies, the source of its civilizations and languages, its cultural contestant, and one of its deepest and most recurring images of the Other. In addition, the Orient has helped to define Europe (or the West) as its contrasting image, idea, personality, experience. (1-2)

As is mentioned earlier, the Orient is seen as the Other when seen in contrast to the Western world, which also will be the case in the forthcoming analyses. The Orient is a defining element of London in the stories, as Said claims, though it is not looked at as something positive, which seems to be the case for Said in most respects. The focus of the Orient in this thesis will be on how it is conceived in the stories, and not on factual and historical evidence. What is relevant here is how the Orient is perceived as the Other in these three stories, and not how it really was perceived at the time.

The Other is highly present in the London of the Sherlock Holmes stories, both in those who come in from new cultures and bring them with them, and those who are native Londoners but give in to the influence of the Other and act accordingly. The Other can, for example, be seen in “the blowpipes, tropical snakes, and other exotic artifacts that so often lead Holmes to the guilty” (Jann 693). This is clear since all these things do not belong in the environment they are found in, which means that Holmes can most often deduce their true origin and therefore come to a solution to the issue at hand. Jann seems to suggest that the Other aids Holmes in finding the criminal he is pursuing, but also that the criminal in question
often is a part of the Other themselves. This is an important notion which will be looked at more closely in the analyses.

Many of the stories of Sherlock Holmes concerns an Other, but the three that will be presented in this essay are the first story to be published, *A Study in Scarlet*, the second to be published, *The Sign of the Four*, and a short story which is included in one of the collections, *The Man with the Twisted Lip*. These were selected because of their links to the Other, even though the Other is not the same in every story. The first analysis concerns the invasion of the Oriental Other in London, as well as a religion acting as a communal Other which is threatening London. The second will analyze mainly the drug use that the colonization has brought with it to London. The third will focus on narcotics as well, but also the controversy of acting as an Other in one’s own environment. They will be analyzed separately, though some comparisons between them will be drawn.
A Study in Scarlet

Under such circumstances I naturally gravitated to London, that great cesspool into which all the loungers and idlers of the Empire are irresistibly drained.

(Conan Doyle 14)

In the first Sherlock Holmes story, *A Study in Scarlet*, there are two major points which are relevant to this analysis. These are the issue of colonialism and its effects on London, and the conflict of Mormonism as a threatening Other which still has its roots in Britain, by way of Britain colonizing the United States. The relevant conflict for this analysis is that after Britain has colonized the United States, a community in the States come together to create a new religion and a society of their own, with customs and habits that in some ways threaten Britain.

When the narrator of the story, Dr. John Watson, returns from the Anglo-Afghan war with his health “irretrievably ruined” (Conan Doyle 13), he does not have anywhere to go at first. His move to London does not seem to be a conscious decision, as can be seen from the above quote. The key word of the sentence is “cesspool”. This has very negative connotations when used to describe a city, and implies that only the “worst” kinds of people have ended up living there. Lydia Alix Fillingham agrees with this notion in her essay “The Colorless Skein of Life: Threats to the Private Sphere in Conan Doyle’s *A Study in Scarlet*”, when she writes of London as “a particular site for the ‘residuum’” (669). Her calling the inhabitants of London the “residuum” goes with Conan Doyle’s description of London as a “great cesspool”. Both are critical against the city being a natural place for foreign people and/or criminals to settle down. However, Conan Doyle’s use of the word “drain” implies that the “loungers and idlers”, as well as Watson, do not arrive in London purely by will or choice, but by necessity or for a lack of better options. This strips away much of Watson’s dignity, which begins to be restored when he moves in with Sherlock Holmes. As Anna Neill puts it, “the
healing of Watson obviously has its counterpart in the healing of city as its criminal underworld is exposed and frustrated by the penetrating detective mind” (612). Watson then stands as a symbol for the city of London and its strive to heal itself and regain command and order. He is born British, leaves for a country which is unknown to him, and returns as an Other in his own home country. He, just as those he calls “loungers and idlers”, is drawn to London, perhaps because its predicament matches his own. Through their parallel struggles, they are connected and strive to develop into their ultimate selves. When he returns to London, he has some trouble acclimating himself. This fact is described in the following passage:

There I stayed for some time at a private hotel in the Strand, leading a comfortless, meaningless existence, and spending such money as I had, considerably more freely than I ought. So alarming did the state of my finances become that I soon realized that I must either leave the metropolis and rusticate somewhere in the country, or that I must make a complete alteration in my style of living. (Conan Doyle 14)

He has trouble with finding suitable accommodations, keeping his finances under control, and generally leading a worthwhile life. He also acknowledges that he will have to surrender the privilege of living in London if he does not change his everyday life, and immediately decides to do the latter. This sense of anxiety in a gentleman of luxury will be discussed further in the section on *The Man with the Twisted Lip*.

In the case of both London and Watson, Sherlock Holmes is the common denominator. He is what heals Watson by taking him on his cases and allowing him to experience adventure again, and London by delving into its criminality and solving some of its more complicated issues by capturing criminals who otherwise would most likely go free and keep London from developing in the right direction.
The Other is highly present in London at this time, deriving mainly from new arrivals from other, more exotic countries and arriving in Britain and the city. As Fillingham says in her essay, the police force is under development, especially in their investigation techniques, which might mean that they did not have much power or control of the people of the city due to their presumed lack of organization (671-2). As she also mentions, Jefferson Hope, the villain of *A Study in Scarlet*, always goes by his own name, as do his victims, and he does not even change occupation after murdering them (669-70). He completely trusts the anonymity of London, and that no one will ever know that he even exists. This would be highly unlikely today but was a fair assumption then, despite Hope’s eventual capture at Holmes’s hands. This notion is also confirmed by Julian Wolfreys in his *Writing London*, where he says that “A city of less than two millions was big - plenty big enough for people to disappear into it without a trace for years at a time” (8). Fillingham also writes that “the city provides a location where the masses mask the individual” (668). This sense of being more or less invisible is crucial to gaining a sense of the city in those days. There is no fear of leaving DNA evidence or being filmed by security cameras, etcetera, but criminals can be assured that so long as there is no living witness they will most likely get away with the crime. Also, there is no proper register of the people residing in London, and no way of knowing what cultures are intermingled in the people there and what way of life they were accustomed to before arriving in London. This should make it almost impossible to have the spotlight turned on you. Jefferson Hope as well as his two victims are Others in London, being Americans and thoroughly unknown in Britain, and Hope “trusts that because he and his two victims are Americans, his deeds and motives will be invisible in the metropolis” (Thomas 14). However, this proves to be untrue since Holmes does catch him after quite little detective work, symbolizing the advantages of the Self over the Other.
The second part of *A Study in Scarlet* is set in Utah in the U.S., where we get to know Jefferson Hope’s back story and find out why he murdered his victims. The main theme in this part is the issue of Mormonism, and the whole story can be interpreted as critique against the, at the time, very young religion. The religion is condemned mainly because it embraces and promotes polygamy; that is, a husband having more than one wife at the same time. It was seen as foreign and blasphemous by the general population of Britain. Fillingham writes that “polygamy represented the furthest reaches of taboo exoticism, but many of those polygamous wives and husbands had emigrated from England” (674). In other words, the English are highly present in this religion that they condemn, which makes the situation complicated. Fillingham goes on to say that “Mormonism is crucial for *A Study in Scarlet* both for its utter foreignness and for its familiarity to the English” (674). This means that the fear of Mormonism as a religion could stem from the notion that it is an Other which is still a Self, so to speak. There is an inherent chance that it could return to England, since it in some ways originated there (674). This also proves that it is by the author’s hand that Mormonism is made an Other, by emphasizing the characteristics of the religion that would shock the reader as a Self. These characteristics thoroughly separate London from the Mormon community.

When comparing the setting of the first part to the setting of the second one, they could not be further apart. The dreariness and gloom of London with its mixture of people from different cultures and classes, and general lack of order is suddenly transformed into the newly formed Salt Lake City and a very organized and civilized young society. Joseph McLaughlin writes that “like many writers about exotic cultures, Doyle emphasizes the extreme, the unusual, the excessive in Mormon culture” (33-4), and this implies that while many of the points in the second part of *A Study in Scarlet* might be exaggerated, there is always a hint of truth behind them. This is also a trace of the fear of the unknown, as Conan
Doyle might have heard about the Mormons’ preference for polygamy and such, and then in his fear taken it to a higher level where the Mormons appear to be typical villains of literature, working solely to reap the benefits for their community. However, there is a sense of pride in the author when he attributes the Mormons’ impressive colonizing to their “Anglo-Saxon tenacity”; something they acquired in their native home of Britain (McLaughlin 32).

The fact that the Mormons are, during the time of the story, colonizing the United States and building a community of their own can be compared to the British once colonizing the United States. That, consciously or not, can be seen as a hint of irony on the author’s behalf; the Mormons are seen as something alien and threatening by doing something his own people did years earlier.

To sum up, the Other is mostly negative in this story. It is already established as existing in London when we read that Watson regards the city as being a “cesspool” of people from different cultures and understandings. The Orient is highly present in the city, though not in a positive way. For example, Jefferson Hope is able to stay anonymous even after committing murder, something which should not be possible in a fully functional society. Furthermore, Jefferson Hope is, though unwilling, a part of the Mormon Other existing in London, which makes him a negative entity. Thus, in this story, the Other appears as a community of people residing in London, a person who returns to his home country as a foreigner, a person coming into the society and committing murder, a community on the other side of the sea threatening their home country, and a young religion with threatening traits and origins in Britain.
The Sign of the Four

Cocaine is . . . the archetypal colonial product: it traces an arc from raw substance originating on the ill-defined periphery of empire to the imperial center where it is refined and sold for profit in the domestic marketplace. (Keep and Randall 210)

In The Sign of the Four, just as in A Study in Scarlet, a main theme is the fear of the unknown invading Britain. There is a sudden intrusion of the exotic and fairly unknown, the Other. This intrusion is an allegory for the ongoing colonialism of the time at which the story was written. New imported products were arriving in Britain, and with them came new forms of narcotic substances and, of course, new cultures.

Holmes is called on to solve the mystery of a woman receiving a pearl each year. This case leads him and Watson to a suburban house in a dreary part of London, as Holmes says on their journey there, “Our quest does not appear to take us to very fashionable regions” (Conan Doyle 108). The house appears as nothing out of the ordinary as per London standards, however when they are welcomed inside they are met with what their host Thaddeus Sholto refers to as, “An oasis of art in the howling desert of South London” (Conan Doyle 109). Simply by using the word “oasis”, it is understood that we are no longer in the environment of London, but have metaphorically stepped into a different and less known culture. However, referring to South London as a “howling desert” implies that the environment of London and an actual desert land are perhaps not so different after all, in regards to the feel of the places. Despite its vast inhabitants, London is a place of loneliness and anonymity for many, which makes “desert” a perfect simile. Also, a desert is something which is expected to be found in the Orient, which is the exotic Other that is being discussed here. Therefore, something heavily associated with the Other can be seen as already existing there.
The exotic elements of the story can also be seen in the decorations of Thaddeus Sholto’s house, which Watson describes as following:

The richest and glossiest of curtains and tapestries draped the walls, looped back here and there to expose some richly mounted painting or Oriental vase. The carpet was of amber and black, so soft and so thick that the foot sank pleasantly into it, as into a bed of moss. Two great tiger-skins thrown athwart it increased the suggestion of Eastern luxury, as did a huge hookah which stood upon a mat in the corner. A lamp in the fashion of a silver dove was hung from an almost invisible golden wire in the centre of the room. As it burned it filled the air with a subtle and aromatic odour. (Conan Doyle 109-10)

This description of the apartment our protagonists have entered is not of the usual form; Watson interrupts the somewhat briskly-paced narration to thoroughly give the reader a view of the room which they, in the end, do not spend much time in. Furthermore, this passage applies to nearly all of the human senses. When we read “the richest and glossiest of tapestries and curtains,” we can clearly imagine the sight, and when Watson remarks of the carpet that it was “so soft and so thick that the foot sank pleasantly into it, as into a bed of moss,” it refers to our sense of feeling. He also calls the sense of smell into attention by relaying that the lamp in the room by burning “filled the air with a subtle and aromatic odour” (Conan Doyle 109-10). By thrusting this vision of different cultures appearing in the same arena into the plot, the author is involving the reader in the physical experience of witnessing it for the first time. This unknown culture is highly seductive by applying to our senses and enveloping us in it, which in turn makes it threatening by existing in one’s own environment.

Nature is also a prominent presence in the place, which can be found in metonyms such as “a bed of moss”, “two great tiger-skins”, and “a silver dove”. This is also a great contrast to our view of the city of London, where we would rarely expect to see a bed of moss
and most certainly no tigers. It allows us a sense of understanding of where Sholto might come from and why he would find it necessary to bring aspects of his home country into his London home.

In his *Orientalism*, Said writes about “a complex array of ‘Oriental ideas’ (oriental splendor . . . sensuality)” (4). This can be seen in the “Eastern luxury” of Sholto’s home, where there also is a hookah displayed; something which is purely Eastern. He is not at all trying to hide his addiction to narcotics, but leaves his hookah out in the open for any guests to see. This leads us to another of the prominent themes of this story: narcotics. In the previous Sherlock Holmes story, *A Study in Scarlet*, there is almost no mention of Holmes having an addiction to drugs. However, it is highly present in the very beginning of this story and is arguably the most integral part of the story. In the opening of this novella, Watson says:

Sherlock Holmes took his bottle from the corner of the mantelpiece and his hypodermic syringe from its neat morocco case. With his long, white, nervous fingers he adjusted the delicate needle and rolled back his left shirt-cuff. For some little time his eyes rested thoughtfully upon the sinewy forearm and wrist, all dotted and scarred with innumerable puncture-marks. Finally, he thrust the sharp point home, pressed down the tiny piston, and sank back into the velvet-lined armchair with a long sigh of satisfaction. (Conan Doyle 97)

This is another somewhat rare instance of Watson describing an event at length and with precise details. In his discussion of this passage, McLaughlin describes it as sexual (53), which calls back on Said commenting on the Orient’s “sensuality” (4). Also, Holmes is not alone in the room; Watson is there observing, and is clearly conflicted in his roles as both doctor and chronicler. McLaughlin claims that this “reflects an intense confusion about the erotics surrounding the growing intercourse between Britain and its colonial others, commodities and peoples, here represented by South American cocaine” (54). The seemingly
simple act of Holmes giving in to his addiction thus stands as a symbol for colonialism itself; without it he would most likely not have access to the cocaine at all. It is also significant that his drug use is carried out by a needle, leading to a clear puncture wound and penetration of Holmes’s body. If his addiction is a symbol for the colonialism, then the penetration of the narcotics entering Holmes can surely be compared to the Other, in the form of different cultures, penetrating London and finding its way in, effectively changing the city by simply being there.

McLaughlin sees it as most effective to read *The Sign of the Four* allegorically (54). By describing the enjoyment of drugs as a relaxation from the mundane, Conan Doyle effectively references Britain as an empire and London as its centre of communication. We can assume that this passage “reveals that the personal frontiers of Holmes’s body have become charged with the same anxieties and pleasures as the frontiers of Britain’s political body” (McLaughlin 55). However, the fact is that Holmes has a clear choice in whether he should indulge in narcotics or not, even after becoming addicted. This is in contrast to the concept of the Other, as London has no choice but to let itself be invaded as Britain colonizing the Orient makes anything else impossible. Also, there is no clear sense of anxiety in Holmes’s addiction; it does not obstruct his work or mind in any significant way, and he really does seem to have control over it since he is later on able to quit; something Britain most certainly could not do with the Orient’s influences. A British person succumbing to a cocaine addiction can be argued to “reduce the user to a mere “slave”, and reverse the relationship of colonizer to colonized” (Keep and Randall 210). Holmes can then be viewed as protesting this fact, suggesting that by overcoming the addiction of something the Other has introduced he proves his superiority to the Other and his refusal to be inferior to it.

Going back to the cultural collision which occurs when Watson, Holmes and Mary Morstan, the client, enter the eclectic home of Thaddeus Sholto, we can find some contrasts.
When Thaddeus Sholto is introduced, he can be instantly identified as an Other. It is not by his name, which has British origins, or his appearance in itself. It is the way he behaves and the way he lives that reveal him to be an Other. His features are described as “in a perpetual jerk - now smiling, now scowling, but never for an instant in repose” (Conan Doyle 109). He instantly gives the impression of an addict, and with the addition of the hookah this suspicion is solidified. Sholto himself remarks that “I am a little nervous, and I find my hookah an invaluable sedative” (Conan Doyle 110). He appears to be the complete opposite of Sherlock Holmes in every way but one: he, too, indulges in his addiction to narcotics. However, the nature of Sholto’s addiction appears to be of a very different nature from Holmes’s. Sholto is constantly twitching and convulsing, and is what Watson describes as “clearly a confirmed hypochondriac” (Conan Doyle 115). This can be attributed to what some drug addicts experience as paranoia. Sholto seems to be a slave under his addiction, suffering side effects seemingly without being aware of them. Holmes, on the other hand, is completely in control of his addiction and is very meticulous in drawing up his seven-per-cent-solution (Conan Doyle 97). When Watson protests Holmes’s seemingly unnecessary use of cocaine, he explains it thus:

“My mind,” he said, “rebels at stagnation. Give me problems, give me work, give me the most abstruse cryptogram, or the most intricate analysis, and I am in my own proper atmosphere. I can dispense then with artificial stimulants. But I abhor the dull routine of existence. I crave for mental exaltation.” (Conan Doyle 98)

This passage suggests that Holmes perhaps is not addicted to the substance itself but instead uses it to escape the mundane. When Watson inquires whether Holmes is working on a case at the present, Holmes answers:
None. Hence the cocaine. I cannot live without brainwork. What else is there to live for? Stand at the window here. Was there ever such a dreary, dismal, unprofitable world? . . . What is the use of having powers, doctor, when one has no field upon which to exert them? Crime is commonplace, existence is commonplace, and no qualities save those which are commonplace have any function upon earth. (Conan Doyle 102)

He explains his cocaine use as something he craves because he has nothing to focus his brain upon, and boredom is unacceptable to him. His addiction can therefore be attributed to his immense intelligence and passion for his occupation, and he is very aware of this fact. This is a great contrast to Sholto’s wild appearance and lack of control or even concrete awareness of his addiction. Also, his boredom at the face of the lack of criminality suggests that perhaps London is “boring” without the Other’s presence. Without it, Holmes has no goal or function in society, and therefore he needs a part of the Other, in this case its narcotics, to thrive. Said writes that “European culture gained in strength and identity by setting itself off against the Orient as a sort of surrogate and even underground self” (3). This applies to Holmes as he gains strength by having the Other as a threatening presence in his home country. It can also be said that London as a Self gains identity by having the Other defining it. Without the Other’s presence, there would be no focus on defending London against it, and therefore no thought on what is part of the Self and what is not.

These examples are meant to present the Englishman in the light of the Eastern and exotic alien. Holmes is a thoroughly English Londoner who is submerged in another culture by way of some of his cases and the use of the foreign substance of cocaine. Sholto is an Oriental Other who completely embraces his exotic heritage, but chooses to place it in the middle of a dreary part of suburban London. The Other is not purely negative in this story, as Sholto is not a villain, but the one who is, in some ways, a victim. He is simply a presence in
an environment where he does not belong. The exoticism of Sholto’s home is amplified by the fact that it is placed in a typical London house. It makes the differences between the two cultures that much clearer.

The negative part of the Other is shown in the narcotics it brings with it. Both Holmes and Sholto are a part of the Other in this sense, though Holmes relies on his British identity to refrain from succumbing to an addiction. Without the Other’s criminality, Holmes needs the Other’s narcotics to keep from being bored. However, a positive aspect can also be explored since Holmes is able to keep from being addicted, and therefore shows the insinuated superiority of the Western identity.
The Man with the Twisted Lip

In the short story *The Man with the Twisted Lip*, Conan Doyle depicts a number of contemporary phenomena of Victorian London. There is the issue of London’s inhabitants being addicted to narcotics in great numbers, as was previously discussed from the perspective of an Other being addicted to them in the analysis of *The Sign of the Four*, and the controversial subject of begging in the streets.

The issue of narcotics in this story concerns the people of London succumbing to addictions that the Other has made possible. At the beginning of this story, John Watson is sent to “an opium den in the farthest east of the City” (Conan Doyle 522) to retrieve a man who is caught in an addiction to narcotics. Watson describes the location of the opium den thus: “Upper Swandam Lane is a vile alley lurking behind the high wharves which line the north side of the river to the east of London Bridge” (Conan Doyle 522). Its location is vital for this discussion, as the den can be viewed as a clear connection between London and the exotic Other. It is positioned right at the edge of the city, by the harbor where the narcotics might even have arrived. It is also, in both of the previous quotes, described as being in an eastern part of London, which could be a hint on the author’s part that the Oriental Other is to blame for the issue of there even being an opium den in London. The place constructs a link between London’s distinctive issues and the fairly unknown which has provided at least some of them, and the wharves can be seen as the boundary which vaguely separates them. The den being placed in an alley is also significant as alleys are quite hidden away. There is a chance that unknowing passers-by would not even take notice of the hordes of human beings who are indulging in something which is taboo. This can be seen as proof that what is occurring in this place is new and forbidden, and probably unknown to the majority of the general public.

When he arrives at the den, Watson remarks:
Through the gloom one could dimly catch a glimpse of bodies lying in strange fantastic poses, bowed shoulders, bent knees, heads thrown back, and chins pointing upward, with here and there a dark, lack-lustre eye turned upon the newcomer. Out of the black shadows there glimmered little red circles of light, now bright, now faint, as the burning poison waxed or waned in the bowls of the metal pipes. The most lay silent, but some muttered to themselves, and others talked together in strange, low, monotonous voices, their conversation coming in gushes and then suddenly tailing off into silence, each mumbling out his own thoughts and paying little heed to the words of his neighbour. (Conan Doyle 522-23)

This seems to be a description of a group of people who have completely lost their humanity. They are situated in a dreary and filthy place, piled on top of each other, bent into what could be construed as praying positions. This suggests the participants’ wish for something different, and not to be in the place they are. It can be seen as a protest against the Other almost invading London with elements that the people living there cannot handle properly, or a cry for help and release from the new aspects of the city.

Expressions like “the gloom”, “a dark, lack-lustre eye”, and “the black shadows” also show the negativity and hopelessness of the place. Anything that is new and unknown is generally seen as dark or unwanted, and this description of a bad part of the city fits perfectly into that notion. Those who have given into the temptation of narcotics have become, in a way, “dark” people in a “dark” place, something that had generally been seen as purely foreign prior to this change. There has been an intrusion of the London society of sorts, a new darkness in a city already known for its “gloom”.

Language is highly present in the passage quoted above as well. The people lost in their high are talking incoherently in a way which is impossible to decipher, and seem to have
no interest whether they are heard by anyone. They are impossible to understand for Watson, who is an outsider in this place and does not belong there, and can almost be seen as using a language of their own. This is also an attribute of the Other; someone who cannot be understood in the environment of London because the person does not strictly belong there. These narcotics do not belong in London since they have never been there before and have been brought into the country from the exotic unknown, and the people who are under their control become a part of the Other accordingly.

As is mentioned earlier, there is a loss of humanity in the opium den. People are piled on top of each other, mumbling incoherently and seemingly praying in another language. They are not part of their own society anymore, but caught in a limbo of sorts. They are primitive and unconcerned with others. There is no violence in the opium den, and no signs of real anguish or regret. Everyone is simply there for their fix, and not for any sort of human interaction.

There are different forms of the Other taking place in London in this story. Reading on, we find that Sherlock Holmes is on a missing-person case. An aristocrat has gone missing, and is in the end found to have posed as a beggar in London for some time. When the man is asked to explain his actions he says,

‘Well, you can imagine how hard it was to settle down to arduous work at two pounds a week when I knew that I could earn as much in a day by smearing my face with a little paint, laying my cap on the ground and sitting still. It was a long fight between my pride and the money, but the dollars won at last, and I threw up reporting and sat day after day in the corner which I had first chosen, inspiring pity by my ghastly face and filling my pockets with coppers.’ (Conan Doyle 539)
He acknowledges the shame of begging in the streets, even though no one would ever recognize him for his true identity, and succumbs to the lure of easy money. In her essay “Detecting the Beggar: Arthur Conan Doyle, Henry Mayhew and The Man with the Twisted Lip”, Audrey Jaffe writes that the “middle classes of the nineteenth century regarded the unproductive gentleman in a dubious light. Since neither he nor the beggar put in what they regarded as an honest day’s labor, both were subject to general suspicion - the suspicion, in particular, of attempting to deceive those who did” (99). In the case of The Man with the Twisted Lip, this suspicion seems to be well-founded. An interesting point is the comparison between an “unproductive gentleman” and “the beggar”. These two should, in theory, not be able to have any at all common denominators, but are here merged into a fully-fledged being.

The aristocrat, named Neville St. Clair but going by the alias Hugh Boone when he dresses as a beggar, mentions “smearing my face with a little paint”. This is an interesting part of the colour symbolism which can be found throughout the story and points to the aforementioned notion of the Other. It adds an element of race, and indicates that as St. Clair puts on the costume of the beggar he also puts on the costume of the Other, and does it by covering his face with paint. He also calls himself “ghastly”, which is another element of his Otherness and which he has planned in order to gain pity. The face paint and sense of pity are significant when defining the Other as something foreign and fairly unknown in London’s society, as people of different colours presumably were. It is another reason why he is more successful in his guise of beggary than his real form as an aristocrat; he poses as someone the people of the streets of London have not seen before, and are therefore quick to notice.

The laziness and monetary hunger in the aristocrat, St. Clair, are projected onto the form of a beggar, Hugh Boone. There are many sides to this statement. An aristocrat or nobleman of contemporary London is generally believed to have either inherited his fortune or worked hard for it. St. Clair is not a resident of the inner city of London, but is an outsider
himself. He travels into town for work and it is London that grants him the promise that he will be able to pose as a beggar without his wife or children finding out the truth. He is described as having arrived in London as a “gentleman” (Conan Doyle 526), which implies, but does not ensure, that he already was in possession of money. In the passage quoted above, St. Clair admits that even though he fought long with his pride, his wish for quick and easy money won over it. It is by way of the anonymity of London’s streets that he is able to go on with his ruse. Dressed as a beggar, he changes from an outsider to an insider in the inner city; a commonplace presence that people remember.

The reason for Boone’s success as a beggar is described by Holmes in the following passage:

His name is Hugh Boone, and his hideous face is one which is familiar to every man who goes much to the City. He is a professional beggar, though in order to avoid the police regulations he pretends to a small trade in wax vestas . . . Here it is that this creature takes his daily seat, cross-legged with his tiny stock of matches on his lap, and as he is a piteous spectacle a small rain of charity descends into the greasy leather cap which lies upon the pavement beside him.

(Conan Doyle 528-29)

Boone/St. Clair has found a loophole in the law of beggary, half-heartedly selling matches in order to be allowed to sit in the streets for passers-by to see and pity him. Thus, the reason for his success is that his appearance evokes sympathy in the people of London, even though they might not have any significant resources themselves. This is something Boone/St. Clair seems to have planned accordingly. Perhaps he, in his usual appearance as an aristocrat, has given beggars money and knows what makes some of them stick out from the others, even though it means being called a “creature”. His appearance is described thus:
A shock of orange hair, a pale face disfigured by a horrible scar, which, by its contraction, has turned up the outer edge of his upper lip, a bulldog chin and a pair of very penetrating dark eyes, which present a singular contrast to the colour of his hair, all mark him out from amid the common crowd of mendicants and so, too, does his wit, for he is ever ready with a reply to any piece of chaff which may be thrown at him by the passers-by. (Conan Doyle 529)

Again, there are many relevant expressions in this description. The most prominent one is his hair and scar. The hair is described as shockingly orange, which not only allows him to be seen sooner than he might have with a duller hair colour, but also lends him his own character. Through “the gloom” of London, a bright splash of orange is considerably foreign. It does not belong in the environment it is in, and also marks him with a sense of Otherness. The main point to be made is that it does not fit into the given notion of London as a city of gloom and darkness, mainly brought in by the Other, while the Other itself is full of conspicuous and vibrant colour. London then seems to be a city of anonymity and a sense of having to blend in to truly belong there.

It is obvious from the passage that St. Clair/Hugh Boone’s man-made unfortunate looks are what commands people’s attention, along with his wit and eyes. The description of him as having a “bulldog chin” further suggests him being less than a human being; a “creature”. His eyes are described as “dark”, which is significant as well. Contrasting with the splash of colour the orange hair presents, the dark eyes are also in association with Otherness. It can also be seen as a sign of the character not belonging in either of the environments he assumes positions in. Perhaps, in the end, he is neither nobleman nor beggar, but a symbol of the fallacies of contemporary London. Logically, a beggar should not earn more money than a nobleman who goes in to the city to work. However, as the exotic is something new in London, people are able to see it clearly and, in this case, pity it. This goes back to Said when
he writes of “the idea of European identity as a superior one in comparison with all the non-
European peoples and cultures” (7). When he dresses himself as a beggar, St. Clair focuses on
the vibrant hair color, dark eyes and painted face. This suggests that he agrees with Said’s
claim, and that to be seen as inferior he needs to disguise himself with non-European
signifiers.

Another part of his disguise, specifically his wit, could be ascribed to his noble
heritage, something which a “regular” beggar would not have. He has the advantages of
knowing what catches an ordinary Londoner’s eye, with him presumably being in
acquaintance with a number of them, and how to talk to them in order to amuse or arrest their
attention. He can therefore costume himself in order to be unrecognizable but easy to be
interested in and remembered, and play the part accordingly, due to his past as an actor and
undercover reporter. In acting as a beggar, St. Clair takes advantage of the underprivileged
inhabitants of London and uses them for his own benefit, which is exactly what the Self
suspects the Other of doing. St. Clair therefore becomes an Other in his own home country.

To sum up, the consensus of this analysis is that the Other is something which both
invades London and is used by some, such as St. Clair. This gives the Other both positive and
negative traits. For example, people are handicapped by their addictions and lose their
humanity and identity in the process, making them a part of the Other in a sense. St. Clair, on
the other hand, proves that you do not need to have a certain origin or certain physical
attributes to be an Other by simply disguising himself. He pretends to be an Other for his own
gain, and by doing so becomes one.
Conclusion

London has been written a million different ways by a million different authors, and it is never presented the same. During the time of colonialism, the city was subjected to constant change with new cultures and products influencing the population. The result was a sense of great confusion, which Said calls “a way of coming to terms with the Orient that is based on the Orient’s special place in European Western experience” (1).

Conan Doyle wrote about Sherlock Holmes during this time, and never failed to comment on the current events, however exaggerated. When analyzing three of the many stories using the definition of the Other as the method, interesting results are revealed.

In *A Study in Scarlet*, Conan Doyle presents the character of Sherlock Holmes and instantly shows us how the latter is exceptional in his intelligence and an anomaly in how he performs his occupation. London is characterized as a place of gloom and vast criminality which goes largely unpunished, and the word used for it is “cesspool” (Conan Doyle 14), which carries a great sense of negativity about the inhabitants of the city. Watson returns after a stint in the army and has trouble acclimating himself with his old environment, which gives him a likeness to the Other. The second part of the story stands in stark contrast to this, showing the young community of Mormons who are building their community in the southern parts of the United States. In this story, Jefferson Hope and Mormon faith are the Others which have to be dealt with.

*The Sign of the Four* is focused mainly on the issue of new narcotics that have been introduced to the people of London by the Other. Here, the Other of the story is the character of Thaddeus Sholto who stands in contrast to Sherlock Holmes in his addiction. Sholto is a part of the culture that has produced the narcotics, but does not seem to be in any control of his addiction. Holmes, however, is very aware of it and careful in his use. Despite this, he is
still affected by the Other and his body is penetrated by it, which takes some of the control from him.

Sholto’s house is an important part of the analysis as it stands as a clear middle stage between the Self of London and the Other of the Orient.

The third story of importance, *The Man with the Twisted Lip*, is also concerned with narcotics. Here, a genuinely dark side of London is presented, where people crowd together and indulge completely and without dignity in their addiction to opium. This is also in contrast to Holmes’s controlled substance abuse, and a clear image of the Other corrupting London. In this case, the Other is a negative force, influencing people to give into an addiction of something the Other has brought into their culture.

The descriptions used when discussing the issue of the beggar are filled with imagery. The man uses attributes which are usually seen in the Other to reap the benefits and, in doing so, becomes an Other himself.

To sum up, London is, in the stories and during this time, highly influenced by Others of many kinds. The main issues that have been discussed in this essay is the ignorance of using narcotics which have been introduced without any second thought, the problem of anonymity and a general lack of identity which can be found in a city which is as large and ever-changing as London, and whether or not the Oriental Other is a positive or negative influence on the population of London.

By way of Britain colonizing the Orient, London as a Self has become a “cesspool” of cultures and influences, most of them negative. However, these negative new aspects would not be there if the Self had not invited them in. The confusion that ensues is what is portrayed in these three stories of Sherlock Holmes.
Works Cited


