



THE MANY DISGUISES OF SIR ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE AND CHARLES DOYLE  
(SHERLOCK HOLMES, FAIRIES, and the SYMBOLIST MOVEMENTS IN ART AND LITERATURE)

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A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department

of Art History

University of Houston

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In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Art History

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By

Mary Forbes

May 2015

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## ABSTRACT

While fairies and Sherlock Holmes may not seem to have much in common, both were thought to be real by many Victorians. Most people are unaware that in addition to the Sherlock Holmes series, Arthur Conan Doyle wrote what he considered a non-fiction book expressing his belief in supernatural fairies. His father, Charles Doyle, shared in this belief and created numerous fairy paintings. Many Victorians believed that Sherlock Holmes was real and Arthur Conan received numerous letters requesting that fictional detective's assistance. While at first glance the Sherlock stories appear to be very straightforward mysteries, upon further consideration it becomes clear that they are literature of *Fin de Siècle* and include intellectual Symbolist elements. The following is an investigation of two topics which initially seem widely disparate, fairies and Sherlock Holmes, and how a connection between the two can be explained through the Symbolist movements in art and literature.

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## Introduction

Fairies and Sherlock Holmes may not seem to have much in common yet both were thought to be real by many late nineteenth century Victorians. It is surprising that Arthur Conan Doyle, who was a medical doctor as well as an author, wrote what he considered a non-fiction book expressing his belief in supernatural fairies. His father, artist Charles Doyle, shared in this belief and created numerous fairy paintings. During the time that his popular Sherlock Holmes series was written, Arthur Conan received several letters from the public requesting his fictional detective's assistance, a public who believed the fictional character to be very real. While at first glance the Sherlock stories appear to be very straightforward mysteries, upon further consideration it becomes clear that they are literature of *Fin de Siècle* and include intellectual Symbolist elements. The following paper is an investigation of two topics which initially seem widely disparate, fairies and Sherlock Holmes, and how a connection between the two can be explained through the Symbolist movement.

The term *fin de siècle* refers not only to the end of the century but also to social, psychological, and artistic attitudes of that time period. It was a period of crises in religion, science, society, and in the arts.<sup>1</sup> Many writers and artists of the late nineteenth century rallied against the mere observation of society that were the focus of the Naturalists and instead chose to express subjectivity and the anxieties of their era in their works.<sup>2</sup> *Fin de siècle* writers and artists presented topics such as alienation, self-

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1. Ian Fletcher, "Preface." In *Decadence and the 1890s*, edited by Ian Fletcher. London: Edward Arnold, Ltd., 1979, 8. Comparable with some attitudes expressed at the end of the twentieth century.

2. Fletcher, 8.

reflection, irony, mysticism, the supernatural, and the collapse of morality; attitudes that had erupted in response to modernism and the approaching new century.<sup>3</sup> For regular distribution of their intellectual, anti-establishment literature and visual artworks, artists and writers often paired up for long-term collaborations and published periodicals.<sup>4</sup> British professional societies such as the Athenaeum Club, the Authors' Club, the Reform Club, and numerous others provided opportunities for like-minded men to meet for intellectual discussions.<sup>5</sup> The free exchange of information among artists, writers, and even musicians which formed the interdisciplinary ideology of Symbolism is exhibited in the works of both Charles and Arthur Conan Doyle.

My research is presented chronologically as well as systematically. The fairy artwork of Charles is presented first while the writings of his son Arthur Conan are examined later. Each chapter provides background information and historical context for those which follow. I begin with the simple topics of fairies, the supernatural, and the Symbolist art movement in order to set the stage for a more complex conversation on the Symbolist movement in literature and specific elements of the Sherlock Holmes series. Chapter by chapter the research builds on itself and connections are established between the topics of fairies and Sherlock Holmes.

Chapter one contains the history of fairy tales, the origins of fairy belief, and the rise of fairy painting in Great Britain. Modernization, industrialization, and the

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3. Jan B. Gordon, "'Decadent Spaces': Notes on a Phenomenology of the Fin de Siecle." In *Decadence and the 1890s*, edited by Ian Fletcher. London: Edward Arnold Ltd., 1979, 34.

4. Fletcher, 173-202; Cyrena N. Pondrom. "A Note on the Little Magazines of the English Decadence." *Victorian Periodicals Newsletter*, Jan 1986: 30-31. British periodicals such as *Dial*, *Yellow Book*, and *Punch* were radically permissive in their literature acceptances.

5. Barbara Black, *A Room of his Own. A Literary Study of Victorian Clubland*. Athens: Ohio University Press, 2012, 3. Arthur Conan Doyle was a member of several clubs including the three mentioned. Women were not permitted.

emergence of new scientific fields affected fairy belief in the mid-late nineteenth century. Differing viewpoints on the origin, purpose, and future of the fairies are presented. Artists and writers who believed in fairies and the works that they created on the topic are presented. Several of the most well-known fairy painters are discussed and their artworks examined.

Chapter two introduces fairy painter Charles Doyle. Somewhat of a biographical approach is employed as his life and artworks are examined. Charles's mental status and various influences on his artwork are discussed. The Symbolist movement in art and elements in Charles's paintings that point to his awareness of that movement are examined. Charles's preoccupation with fairies and the 1924 posthumous exhibition of his artwork assembled by his son lead into the next chapter on Arthur Conan and his belief system.

Arthur Conan Doyle and his lesser known writings on Spiritualism and fairies are the topics of chapter three. Arthur Conan's biographical information is presented in order to provide context for these unusual beliefs and ideas. The information and investigational methods presented in his book *The Coming of the Fairies* are examined in depth. Some of the influences that led him to write this book are indicated. Arthur Conan's Spiritualist association and fairy belief is similar to the belief system of many Symbolists and leads into the next chapter.

In chapter four, Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes series and the Symbolist elements of those books are investigated. The chapter begins with a description of the Symbolist movement in literature and proceeds with an analysis of portions of Doyle's books. Close associates of Doyle who were Symbolist authors as well as fairy believers



are discussed briefly along with their works. Symbolism is presented as the link between fairies and Sherlock Holmes and between the works of Arthur Conan and his father Charles.

The final chapter attempts to explain what seems to be an immense gap between Doyle's highly rational Sherlock Holmes fiction series and his "non-fiction" book on the existence of fairies. Doyle's other book on photography titled *The Case for Spirit Photography with Corroborative Evidence by Experienced Researchers and Photographers* is discussed. The manner in which fairies and fairy belief comprised a national identity for Great Britain is examined as well as the blurring of Arthur Conan's identity with that of his character Sherlock Holmes. A modern-day frame of reference for the dissemination of images is presented and Charles' mental status is re-examined. A possible explanation for the widely dissimilar literature is discovered in Arthur Conan's lifelong goal of universally circulating the Spiritualist message and how that objective became seriously diluted by his more popular fictional character Sherlock Holmes is discussed.

## Chapter 1

### Fairy Folklore and the Origins of Fairy Painting

Though fairy folklore and theories about the existence of fairies had been circulating throughout Great Britain for hundreds of years, there was renewed interest in the nineteenth century.<sup>1</sup> New developments in science, scholarly research, and industrialization contributed to this upsurge of curiosity. Disgust over increased materialism also factored in new attention to the world of fantasy.<sup>2</sup> Writers and artists flooded the market with their creative output on the topic.

The Oxford English Dictionary defines a fairy as “a small imaginary being of human form that has magical powers, especially a female one.” This definition concurs with the reports of people who claimed to see fairies, that is, if the adjective “imaginary” is subtracted. To understand the allure of fairies, some insight into what these creatures represented to the believers and the history of their emergence in Great Britain is first necessary.

Believers in fairies were adamant in their claims about their existence. Believers included many well-educated people such as scientists, historians, folklorists, theologians, artists, and writers.<sup>3</sup> Each of these disciplines held their own viewpoints on the origins of fairies. To some of the scientists, fairies were life forms that existed

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1. Carole Silver, *Strange and Secret Peoples. Fairies and Victorian Consciousness*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1999, 6; Sir Philip Dowson, CBE and Stephen Prokopoff. "Foreword." In *Victorian Fairy Paintings*, by Jeremy Maas et al. London: Royal Academy of Arts, 1997, 7.

2. Robert R. Wark, *Charles Doyle's Fairyland*. Pasadena: The Huntington Library, 1980, 1.

3. Silver, 33-57. Silver includes theologian Martin Luther; folklorist Andrew Lang; scientist Sir Edward Burnet Taylor; Arthur Conan Doyle; Robert Louis Stevenson; W.B. Yeats; and historian Maurice Hewlett as believers.

because of separate evolutionary divisions from those of humans.<sup>4</sup> Other scientists considered them part of the natural world and representative of the forces of nature.<sup>5</sup> Some theologians, folklorists, artists, and writers thought fairies were part of the supernatural world or spirits of the dead due to the emergence of Spiritualism, a belief in the continuity of life and the possibility of communication with those who have passed.<sup>6</sup> Some historians felt fairies were memories of ancient religions or mythology.<sup>7</sup> It would seem that rational thought and fantasy somehow merged in order to make sense of strange phenomena.

In *Spellbound: The Fairy Tale and the Victorians*, Molly Clark Hillard writes that stories of fairies began through the oral traditions of the illiterate lower classes.<sup>8</sup> These traditions evolved to suit the needs of different communities in separate physical locations and chronological eras.<sup>9</sup> In looking at the nineteenth century's renewed interest, cultural anxieties of the industrial age played a part in the adaptations of some fairy tales.<sup>10</sup> In 1882, Henry C. Lunn wrote an enthusiastic article about the "eminent" writers of fairy tales in which he observed that, "It is better to fall back upon the troubles of fairyland, which they can never experience, than to brood over the troubles of our social

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4. Silver, 51.

5. Silver, 51.

6. Alex Owen, "Borderland Forms: Arthur Conan Doyle, Albion's Daughters, and the Politics of the Cottingley Fairies." *History Workshop* (Oxford University Press) 38 (1994), 53; Silver, 9, 36.

7. Silver, 41.

8. Molly Clark Hillard, *Spellbound: The Fairy Tale and the Victorians*. Columbus: Ohio State Press, 2014, 11, 17.

9. Hillard, 11, 17.

10. Hillard, 19.

existence.”<sup>11</sup> Scholar Sinead Garrigan Mattar found that William Butler Yeats’s Irish fairy folklore of the 1880s and 1890s exhibited elements of the new social science field of anthropology through his animistic depictions of “fairy-human environmental” relationships.<sup>12</sup> As Great Britain adjusted to modernity, fairy tales became both an escape *from* and a reflection *of* the period.

The peasantry had often attributed phenomena that could not be otherwise explained to the doings of fairies.<sup>13</sup> Lionel Lambourne explains in the beginning of his essay *Fairies and the Stage*, “The politics of fairyland are never correct.”<sup>14</sup> Fairies were believed to interfere in human lives, to be mischievous, and sometimes even wicked.<sup>15</sup> Objects that mysteriously moved without human assistance, sudden deaths, and unexplained disappearances were often blamed on fairies as were health problems such as deformities, epilepsy, or mental illness.<sup>16</sup> It was thought in those health issues that a “changeling” or fairy duplicate had replaced the real person who was now being held captive in fairyland.<sup>17</sup> Sadly, this particular belief resulted in many unnecessary burning

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11. Henry C. Lunn, "Fairy Music." *The Musical Times and Singing Class Circular* 23, no. 469 (March 1882): 135-136.

12. Sinead Garrigan Mattar, "Yeats, Fairies, and the New Animism." *New Literary History* (The Johns Hopkins University Press), 2012: 138.

13. Hillard, 13.

14. Lionel Lambourne, "Fairies and the Stage." In *Victorian Fairy Painting*, by Jeremy Maas et al. London: Royal Academy of Arts, 1997, 47.

15. Hillard, 136.

16. Robert Kirk and Andrew Lang, *The Secret Commonwealth of Elves, Fauns and Fairies. A Study in Folk-Lore and Psychical Research*. London: David Nutt, 1893.

17. Silver, 60.

and drowning deaths that occurred during so-called exorcism rites.<sup>18</sup> Although typically thought of today in only positive terms, the fairies of the nineteenth century represented both negative and positive traits. In this way, fairy tales also addressed the societal concerns of the day such as morals and ethics. Good fortune was believed to be the result of pleasing the fairies and bad fortune was the result of crossing them.<sup>19</sup> We can compare this belief with that of karma or religious viewpoints on sin.<sup>20</sup>

The telling of fairy tales was a longstanding oral tradition passed down through generations of families but there were also written accounts in existence. Written accounts of fairies can be traced back to Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales* of the late 1300s, Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *The Tempest* written in the late 1500s.<sup>21</sup> Nineteenth century folklorist Andrew Lang discovered a manuscript about fairies that had originally been written in 1691. That manuscript was *The Secret Commonwealth of Elves, Fauns, and Fairies* by Reverend Robert Kirk of Aberfoyle.<sup>22</sup> In this book Kirk wrote that fairyland was a reality in nature existing as a separate world with its own rules. Kirk began the book with a description that included every aspect of fairyland. Part of Kirk's Old English text reads:

THESE *Siths*, or FAIRIES, they call *Sleagh Maith*, or the Good People, it would seem, to prevent the Dint of their ill Attempts, (for the Irish use to bless all they

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18. Silver, 62.

19. Silver, 149-155; Hillard, 131.

20. Andrew Lang, "Introduction." In *The Secret Commonwealth of Elves, Fauns and Fairies. A Study in Folk-Lore and Psychical Research*, by Robert Kirk and Andrew Lang. London: David Nutt, 1893, ix-lxv.

21. Stella Beddoe, "Fairy Writing and Writers." In *Victorian Fairy Painting*, by Jeremy Maas et al, London: Royal Academy of Arts, 1997, 23.

22. Kirk and Lang.

fear Harme of;) and are said to be of a midle Nature betuixt Man and Angel, as were Dæmons thought to be of old; of intelligent fluidious Spirits, and light changable Bodies, (lyke those called Astral,) somewhat of the Nature of a condensed Cloud, and best seen in Twilight. Thes Bodies be so plyable thorough the Subtilty of the Spirits that agitate them, that they can make them appear or disappear att Pleasure.<sup>23</sup>

Technology, science, and folklore joined forces in 1878 with Andrew Lang's founding of the Folklore Society.<sup>24</sup> The purpose of the Folklore Society was to investigate how folklore tradition could contribute to science.<sup>25</sup> Lang reissued Kirk's book in 1893 with his own introduction in an attempt to promote new interest in the topic to provide a more modern explanation for the centuries-old subject of fairies. In his 1691 manuscript, Kirk included his complete analyses of fairies such as their lifestyles, laws, and practices.<sup>26</sup> Kirk wrote that fairies were only visible to those with "second sight" while Lang added that it was metaphysical awareness that allowed one to see fairies.<sup>27</sup> Lang also found several similarities to Greek mythology in Kirk's writings. For example, Kirk called the fairies "subterranean inhabitants" and wrote of their land "as a holding place underground for recently departed souls."<sup>28</sup> According to Kirk, if a human was transported to the fairies' underground realm, it was not advisable to eat any of the food as one would then never be able to return to human form. Lang connected this concept

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23. Robert Kirk, "The Secret Commonwealth of Elves, Fauns, and Fairies." In *The Secret Commonwealth of Elves, Fauns, and Fairies. A Study in Folk-Lore and Psychical Research*, by Robert Kirk and Andrew Lang, London: David Nutt, 1893, 5.

24. Charlotte Gere, "In Fairyland." In *Victorian Fairy Paintings*, by Jeremy Maas et al, edited by Jane Martineau. London: Royal Academy of Arts, 1997, 67. It was during this time period that new sciences such as anthropology emerged.

25. Gere, 67.

26. Kirk, 1-78, 9-12.

27. Lang, lvii-lxv. Lang's comments are found in the introduction to the book.

28. Kirk, 1-78.

with the Greek myth of Persephone in Hades.<sup>29</sup> Persephone was told not to eat any of the food offered her while in Hades as she would then be unable to return to earth in human form. Lang compared Kirk's fairy folklore with aspects of religion and mythology from cultures across the globe and included all his observations as the introduction to the new 1893 edition. In doing this, Lang revealed some shared interests between folklorists and scientific researchers.

Lang and Kirk's book was not the first of the nineteenth century on fairies. A veritable fairy-mania had been occurring in Britain since the early 1800s and a number of writings had been published by well-respected authors. Sir Walter Scott wrote *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border* (1801-2) and *The Lady of the Lake* (1810); John Ruskin wrote *The King of the Golden River* (1841); under a pseudonym William Thackeray wrote *The Rose and the Ring* (1855); Christina Rossetti wrote the poem *Goblin Market* (1862); William Butler Yeats wrote the poem *The Stolen Child* (1886); Robert Louis Stevenson wrote *Island Night's Entertainments* (1893) and Lewis Carroll wrote his version of a fairy tale titled *Silve and Bruno* (1893).<sup>30</sup> These are far from all of the publications of that time period on the topic, but are the works of the most well known nineteenth century British authors. The popularity of these books led to developments in scholarship regarding fairies and several fairy tale compilation books were published.<sup>31</sup> The common denominator in these compilations is that many of the writers truly believed in fairies. In

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29. Lang, xxii.

30. William Gray, "The Incomplete Fairy Tales of Robert Louis Stevenson." *Journal of Stevenson Studies Vol. Two* (The Center for Scottish Studies at University of Stirling), 2005: 98-109. Unfortunately Stevenson died before completing the set of fairy tales and not all were published until 2013; Beddoe, 23-28. Beddoe mentions Lewis Carroll's fairy tale.

31. Silver, 28.

their opinions, they were not writing fiction. It was their passionate desire to enlighten the public and the scientific community that led to these publications.

Some of these compilations are well known to this day. Jakob and Willhelm Grimm's *Kinder-und Haus-märchen* was published in English as *Grimm's German Popular Stories* in 1823 and reissued in 1826.<sup>32</sup> The Grimm Brothers's fairy tales are rather dark, violent stories not necessarily recommended for children's bedtime but many fairy tale compilations were not specifically intended for children. There were moral messages included within the stories that were intended to shape behaviors. George Cruikshank (1792-1878) was a popular illustrator and created the original illustrations for the first translated version of *Grimm's German Popular Stories*.<sup>33</sup> In 1853, Cruikshank decided to promote his views on abstinence from drinking alcohol through distorted versions of popular fairy tales in his book *Fairy Library*.<sup>34</sup> This book was vilified by Charles Dickens who felt Cruikshank had disrespected the honorable fairy tale tradition by using it to promote his own cause.<sup>35</sup> Dickens and the other fairy tale compilation authors however, did not seem to have any problem with the more patriarchal values of society that fairy tales promoted. For example, women were almost always depicted in fairy tales through subservient roles that were very similar to their actual roles in

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32. Beddoe, 28.

33. Beddoe, 28.

34. Beddoe, 29.

35. Beddoe, 29; Kathy Conn, "Charles Dickens and His Illustrators." *University of Alberta* . 2007. <http://capping.slis.ualberta.ca/cap07/KathyConn/index4.htm> (accessed Dec. 17, 2014). George Cruikshank illustrated several of Charles Dickens' books including *Oliver Twist* but Dickens' strict guidelines for his illustrators interfered with Cruikshank's creative imagination.



Victorian society.<sup>36</sup> In this way, gender roles for women were confirmed as well as disseminated by these stories.

Other important compilations were Thomas Crofton Croker's *Fairy Legends and Traditions of the South of Ireland* (1825) and Thomas Keightley's *The Fairy Mythology* (1828).<sup>37</sup> In 1888, W.B. Yeats (1865-1939) wrote his compilation, *Fairy and Folk Tales of the Irish Peasantry*.<sup>38</sup> Lang may have adopted his technique from these earlier versions as they integrate the traditional fairy tales and folklore with contemporary observations on the existence of fairies.<sup>39</sup> In 1922, there was still interest in the topic although it was not as widespread. Historian Carole Silver suggests that due to the lack of any significant scientific progress or evidence, people had lost faith.<sup>40</sup>

In 1859, the theory of natural selection had emerged in Charles Darwin's publication of *On the Origin of Species*.<sup>41</sup> This theory revised traditional evolutionary belief systems in not only the scientific community but also among the general public. This significant development in science led to the new fields of social science such as anthropology and archeology. Darwin's observations made the possible existence of life forms like fairies seem a plausible concept.<sup>42</sup> There was a belief among some Victorians

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36. Silver, 98.

37. Silver, 28-29.

38. Richard Ellman, *Yeats: The Man and the Masks*. New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1979, 119.

39. Silver, 29.

40. Silver, 34.

41. Silver, 7. Silver writes of the effects of Darwin's book on the sciences.

42. Silver, 51; Pamela White Trimpe, "Victorian Fairy Book Illustration." In *Victorian Fairy Painting*, by Jeremy Maas et al, edited by Jane Martineau. London: Royal Academy of Arts, 1997, 67.

that scientists would soon be able to prove the existence of fairies in much the same methodical scientific manner that Darwin proved his theory.<sup>43</sup> It would seem that some preferred the mystery remain unsolved while others eagerly sought explanation since the same year that Darwin's theory was published, *Cosmopolitan Art Journal* published an article lamenting that Britain would no longer have any "National Fairy Lore" due to scientific developments that would eventually dispel all the mystery.<sup>44</sup>

Even though fairies were not all good, there was a growing fear in the nineteenth century that they were leaving the British countryside.<sup>45</sup> Some scholars have theorized that the rise in fairy literature and artwork was a result of fears that the spread of industrialization was destroying the fairy territories.<sup>46</sup> Because these creatures were thought to exist primarily in the British countryside, the advancing railroads and urban sprawl concerned many believers.

As a result of these new theories, there was an increase in fairy imagery. Technological developments in printing allowed for better quality image reproductions and artists were commissioned to illustrate new books of fairy tales. These were not the first fairy artworks, however. In the late 1700s several artists were inspired by Shakespeare's "A Midsummer Night's Dream."<sup>47</sup> In 1786, artist William Blake (1757-1824) painted the scene "Oberon, Titania, and Puck with Fairies Dancing" (see fig. 1). Blake was the first to add butterfly wings to his fairies, possibly inspired by winged

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43. Silver, 34.

44. Mrs. Feitchke, "Our Fairy Lore." *Cosmopolitan Art Journal* 3, no. 2 (March 1859): 59.

45. Silver, 34.

46. Silver, 192.

47. Jeremy Maas, "Victorian Fairy Painting." In *Victorian Fairy Painting*, Jeremy Maas et al, edited by Jane Martineau. London: Royal Academy of Arts, 1997, 13.

cherubs of ancient Greek and Roman artwork, thus creating a new method of transportation for fairies.<sup>48</sup> Henri Fuseli (1741-1825) also painted scenes from Shakespeare (see fig. 2) and became so enamored with fairies that he included them in some Shakespearean scenes that had no mention of fairies.<sup>49</sup> Sir Joshua Reynolds (1723-1792) painted scenes from the “A Midsummer’s Night Dream” (see fig. 3). These artists’ pieces based on Shakespeare writings were shown in the Shakespeare Gallery established in London in 1789.<sup>50</sup>

As its name implies, Shakespeare Gallery was a gallery devoted entirely to artwork inspired by Shakespeare’s writings. It was a commercial venture established by printer and Shakespeare scholar John Boydell (1719-1804) who personally commissioned all of the artwork.<sup>51</sup> In addition to the impressive gallery exhibition, Boydell sold engravings of the artworks to subscribers.<sup>52</sup> He included these in an elaborately illustrated 1803 edition of Shakespeare’s works. For a time it was a successful business and the gallery exhibition grew from thirty-three paintings to nearly 170.<sup>53</sup> Unfortunately the expensive venture became unsustainable and eventually Boydell went bankrupt in

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48. Gere, 63.

49. Silver, 20-22.

50. Ann R. Hawkins and Georgiana Ziegler, *Marketing Shakespeare The Boydell Gallery (1789-1805) and Beyond*. <http://www.folger.edu/template.cfm?cid> (accessed Dec. 15, 2014); Silver, 20; Boydell’s gallery is mentioned several times in Jeremy Maas, et al. *Victorian Fairy Painting*. London: Royal Academy of Arts, 1997.

51. Hawkins and Ziegler; Silver, 20-21.

52. Hawkins and Zeigler.

53. Sylvia Morris, *Picturing Shakespeare: The Boydell Shakespeare Gallery*. April 20, 2012. <http://theshakespeareblog.com/2012/04/picturing-shakespeare-the-boydell-shakespeare-gallery/> (accessed Dec. 15, 2014).

1804.<sup>54</sup> It was shortly thereafter that fairy literature was becoming very popular and the new volumes of fairy stories needed illustrations.<sup>55</sup>

Thomas Keightley's *Fairy Mythology* was published in 1828 with illustrations by William Henry Brooke. The stories in Keightley's book would inspire later artists such as Joseph Noel Paton who painted "The Fairy Raid: Carrying off the Changeling, Midsummer's Eve" (1867) influenced by a combination of both Keightley's *Fairy Mythology* and Sir Walter Scott's *Lady of the Lake*.<sup>56</sup> Paton also painted several pieces influenced by Shakespeare's *Midsummer Night's Dream*.<sup>57</sup> In 1846, Richard "Dicky" Doyle (1824-1883), the brother of Charles Doyle and uncle of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, illustrated a new translation of *The Fairy Ring* by the Grimm Brothers.<sup>58</sup> Richard Doyle was later commissioned to create thirty-six illustrations for a book of fairy poetry.

In 1869, Richard Doyle illustrated the book of poetry, *In Fairyland* (see fig. 4). These illustrations were created before the text, an inverse of standard illustrative practice whereby the artist follows the writer's text in creating the illustrations. Poet William Allingham wrote his fairy poetry for the book directly from Doyle's watercolors. The book is considered a "masterpiece of Victorian book production" not only because Doyle was given absolute imaginative freedom but also because Doyle hand-colored his proofs

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54. Hawkins and Ziegler; Morris.

55. Pamela White Trimpe, "Victorian Fairy Book Illustration." In *Victorian Fairy Painting*, by Jeremy Maas et al, edited by Jane Martineau, London: Royal Academy of Arts, 1997, 55.

56. Gere, 67; Silver, 68.

57. Gere, 68. Paton's "ethereal" paintings style is discussed in one of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's 1884 writing, "John Barrington Cowles." See Arthur Conan Doyle, "John Barrington Cowles." *Project Gutenberg*. 1884. <http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/294> (accessed Dec. 22, 2014), Location 2421.

58. Trimpe, 57-58. Lionel Lambourne, "In Fairyland, or Pictures from the Elf World." In *Richard Doyle and His Family*, by Rodney Engen, Michael Heseltine and Lionel Lambourne. London: Victoria and Albert Museum, 1983, 48-51.

in order to assist with the color printing process.<sup>59</sup> Richard Doyle had already enjoyed great success as an illustrator and caricaturist for *Punch*, a popular satirical political magazine, but this project brought his more whimsical talents to light.<sup>60</sup>

Over time, many artists no longer needed literary sources for their fairy paintings. John Anster Fitzgerald (1832-1906) a well known and prolific fairy painter, created his fairy paintings from his own imagination.<sup>61</sup> Known to be an advocate for opium, Fitzgerald's fairy paintings often contain dreaming people and erotic symbolism.<sup>62</sup> "The Stuff That Dreams are Made Of" (see fig. 5) is a good example of the dream imagery Fitzgerald often represented.<sup>63</sup> A girl soundly sleeps while all around her fairies and goblins dance, play music, and act mischievously. The subject of her dream, an attractive prince, is illuminated in a misty scene on the left side of the painting. There were many other fairy painters who were not directly influenced by published fairy tales.

One of the most original fairy painters is Richard Dadd (1817-1886). Dadd was a Royal Academy artist.<sup>64</sup> At the age of twenty-five he developed schizophrenia and murdered his father. Dadd was committed for life to a mental hospital but while there he was allowed to continue painting. In addition to works inspired by Shakespeare, Dadd created pieces from his own imagination. "The Fairy Feller's Master Stroke" (see fig. 6)

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59. Rodney Engen, "Richard Doyle: The Wizard and the Swell." In *Richard Doyle and His Family*, by Rodney Engen, Michael Heseltine and Lionel Lambert. London: Victoria and Albert Museum, 1983, 15.

60. Gere, 57; Wark, 5; Engen, 15.

61. Silver, 160.

62. Maas, 17.

63. Maas, 19.

64. Charlotte Gere with Lionel Lambourne, *Victorian Fairy Painting*. Jeremy Maas et al, London: Royal Academy of Arts, 1997, 97. Gere and Lambourne provide the details of Dadd's life.

depicts an intricate scene in which fairy figures interact in the midst of towering blades of grass, acorns, and white flowers. A wide array of fairy characters are represented, some are so tiny that they are barely decipherable. A fairy man plays a French horn in the upper left while next to him is an insect creature who plays what seems to be an extremely elongated trombone. A fairy soldier stands at attention holding a shovel nearby. Beside him is a woman who appears to be dressed for a jungle safari and a man with a wheelbarrow. Below them is an old woman wearing a huge red cape and tall pointed hat. A finely dressed couple wearing crowns stands next to her engaged in conversation. The clothing of this couple is a mix of styles; the man's ruff collar, a layered ring of ruffles covering his entire neck, is similar to those worn in the sixteenth century while the woman's dress has a nineteenth century bustle skirt support. In the center of the piece is a white bearded man in a grey robe. He appears to be much larger than the other figures and leans out from a clearing. He wears a wide brimmed crown upon which a number of very small fairies are dancing. All of the figures have gathered to watch the male fairy figure in the lower center portion who holds an axe above his head and is about to chop an acorn. The skin tones of these fairies are mostly grayish providing either a morbid or otherworldly impression. Dadd was not the only fairy painter to create works while committed to a mental institution Charles Doyle was also a fairy painter who created works while institutionalized.

While the heyday of fairy paintings is considered to be from 1840 to 1870, artists and writers continued to produce works on the topic through the early 1900s.<sup>65</sup> Royal Academy artist Arthur Rackman (1867-1939) was commissioned in 1906 by author J.M.

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65. Wark, 1; Trimpe, 60; Maas, 11.

Barrie to illustrate his first Peter Pan book titled *Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens* (see fig. 7).<sup>66</sup> The Peter Pan series became widely popular leading to theater productions, at that time a very successful way to continue to promote an author's work.<sup>67</sup> Many of Richard Doyle's fairy paintings also date after the thirty year span of intense popularity. The fact that Queen Victoria was known to be an admirer of fairy paintings and of Richard Doyle's work in particular, would certainly have spurred continued artistic production.<sup>68</sup> Charles Doyle illustrated *Our Trip to Blunderland* (1877), a spoof on Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking Glass* before creating what would become his largest body of work on the topic of fairies.

What had begun as an oral tradition became a literary and artistic flurry of activity in the nineteenth century. With the rise of industrialization such as railroad systems and new printing processes, text and imagery were easily produced, reproduced, and circulated. Writers and artists became interested in fairies as subject matter and many claimed to have personally witnessed fairies. Fairy tales were now written down, translated, and reproduced in book form. Historians, theologians, scientists, became interested and began to research the topic of fairies. Often, reality and fantasy somehow merged. Fairy painter Charles Doyle, brother of Richard, was one of the true believers.

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66. Gere and Lambourne, 146.

67. Andrew Lycett, *The Man Who Created Sherlock Holmes: The Life and Times of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle*. New York: Free Press, 2007, 356.

68. Engen, 14.

## Chapter 2

## Charles Doyle and the Symbolist Movement in Art

Charles Doyle (1832-1893) painted fairies “just as he saw them” according to his 1889 sketchbook.<sup>1</sup> This sketchbook includes several artworks with intricately drawn plant leaves that have fairies hidden or standing among them. It also includes several watercolor paintings of fairies and large birds (see fig. 8). In this untitled piece there are five fairies riding on the back of a bird as it walks along the beach. A female fairy stands in a long flowing white dress and pulls on the bird’s topknot as though it is a rein. A male fairy in a purple suit lies precariously across the bird and against him leans a female fairy in a pink dress. These two fairies appear to be having a conversation. Leaning against the pink dress fairy’s legs is another male fairy, this one with huge ears, who sits up with his face against his knees as though he is upset, much the same position as a pouting small child. A sinister-looking bearded fairy seems to creep towards the others from a spot farther down on the bird’s tail.

The bird seems to be walking on a beach as the ground is tan in color and a blue expanse much like an ocean is seen in the upper middle left. The bird’s footprints are clearly defined in markings left behind in the sand, and he appears to be headed for the water. The coloring of the bird is remarkable in detail and the long tail, small black half-circle stripes on the neck and reddish-brown breast coloring are similar to pheasant markings. In the background is a towering flowered plant that presents an element of scale for the viewer. Above the bird and fairies are clouds shaped like some sort of winged flying dog or bear. The cloud has a face with a strange expression. The

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1. Silver, 35. Silver quotes from Charles’ sketchbook.



combination of reality and fantasy is not unusual in the fairy painting genre and helped to perpetuate the Victorian belief in fairies.

The elements of nature or the natural world provided a context for the viewer. The recognition of a particular plant, flower, or animal inspired a certain level of comfort for the viewer that would then be interpreted as evidence that the artist was faithfully representing something that he had personally witnessed. As the number of fairy paintings and their exhibitions increased over time, fairies would eventually seem as though they were actual creatures sharing the natural world.

Charles Doyle biographer Michael Baker discovered one of Charles's sketchbooks at London's Maas Gallery in 1977.<sup>2</sup> Apparently the sketchbook had been stored in a playroom at Arthur Conan Doyle's house for more than sixty-five years. An English woman had bought it at an estate auction and held onto it for another twenty-two years before bringing it to the gallery.<sup>3</sup>

The sketchbook is a visual and textual diary of Charles Doyle's thoughts and feelings during his stay at the Montrose Royal Edinburgh Asylum and its frontispiece is dated March 8, 1889. There is also a message at the beginning for the reader of the book,

Keep steadily in view that this Book is ascribed wholly to the produce of a MADMAN. Whereabouts would you say is the deficiency of intellect? Or depraved taste. If in the whole Book you can find a single Evidence of either, mark it and record it against me.<sup>4</sup>

It would seem that Charles was very hopeful that the evidence provided in his sketchbook might permit his release from the asylum. Further down on the same page Charles writes

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2. Michael Baker, *The Doyle Diary: The Last Great Conan Doyle Mystery - The Strange and Curious Case of Charles Altamont Doyle*. New York and London: Paddington Press Ltd., 1978, vi.

3. Ibid.

4. Baker, 1.

instructions for the publication of the sketchbook and throughout makes several comments on the lack of response to those books he had previously sent to his wife for publication.<sup>5</sup> According to Baker, very few outside of the Doyle family would have been aware of the sketchbook until 1977 when Baker discovered it at Maas nearly ninety years after Charles' desperate messages were written. Baker researched Charles Doyle's life and published his biography and the entire contents of the sketchbook as one volume in 1978.<sup>6</sup> It was during his seventeen years of institutionalization that Charles created his series of artwork on the topic of fairies.<sup>7</sup>

By the time this particular sketchbook was completed, Doyle had been essentially incarcerated for more than ten years and so he relied on his recollections of past exhibitions as well as his imagination for his watercolors and ink drawings.<sup>8</sup> His works (see fig. 9) have elements of William Blake (see fig. 1) in the childlike, simplified qualities.<sup>9</sup> His artwork contains many humorous elements and puns such as those utilized by nineteenth century political caricaturists.<sup>10</sup> It is likely that Charles was influenced by both the political caricatures and the fairy artwork of his older brother Richard.<sup>11</sup> The difference between Charles's work and that of Richard (besides the level of technical

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5. Baker, 1, 78, 84, 87.

6. Baker.

7. Wark, 1.

8. It is unknown whether or not he had access to a library. He did have access to newspapers as his works show an awareness of political matters and events of the time period.

9. Wark, 1-2, 9; Baker, 1-77.

10. Wark, 7.

11. Wark, 5, 7, 9; Charlotte Gere and Lionel Lambourne, "Charles Altamont Doyle." In *Victorian Fairy Painting*, by Jeremy Maas et al, edited by Jane Martineau. London: Royal Academy of Arts, 1997, 138.

skill) was that Charles's fairies came from both his imagination and his own "personal" experiences.<sup>12</sup>

Artistic talent would seem to be a gene shared by several generations of the Doyle family. Charles and Richard's father John Doyle (1797-1868) was also an artist. John Doyle specialized in political caricatures and instilled the importance of critical thinking as well as imagination in his children. John Doyle's caricature method was to satirize a political event by contextualizing and transposing it with a classical artistic or literary event.<sup>13</sup> He had several important patrons such as Irish Lord Talbot and artists such as John Everett Millais and Dante Gabriel Rossetti as well as writers Charles Dickens and William Makepeace Thackeray were frequent dinner guests at his home.<sup>14</sup> He required his children to report their observations of the world each week in the form of sketches.<sup>15</sup> Arthur Conan Doyle biographer Owen Dudley Edwards writes that Charles appreciated Ruskin's critical writings and Turner's artwork at the early age of ten.<sup>16</sup>

Charles showed some promise as an artist but was encouraged by his father at age seventeen to take a job in Edinburgh, Scotland as a deputy clerk to a surveyor in the Office of Works at Holyrood Palace.<sup>17</sup> Charles was able to earn some extra money

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12. Maas, 17; Silver, 35.

13. Lionel Lambourne, "The Doyle Family." In *Richard Doyle and His Family*, by Rodney Engen, Michael Heseltine, and Lionel Lambourne. London: Victoria and Albert Museum, 1983, 19.

14. Lycett, 5; Baker, xi.

15. Lycett, 7; Engen, 13.

16. Owen Dudley Edwards, *The Quest for Sherlock Holmes. A Biographical Study of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle*. Totowa, NJ: Barnes and Noble Books, 1983, 39.

17. Lycett, 10; Michael Baker, xii.

through occasional illustration commissions.<sup>18</sup> His artwork was also shown in exhibitions on occasion.

Arthur Conan Doyle biographer Andrew Lycett reports that one of Charles' watercolors, "A Gypsy Camp in the Gloaming" was exhibited in the 1862 Royal Scottish Academy Summer Exhibition. Lycett found that at about this same time however, Charles had begun to develop a drinking problem and that many of his sketches and watercolors were traded at a nearby pub for alcohol. Over the span of the next fifteen years, Charles's mental and physical health would seriously decline and then improve. In 1879, Charles was committed to Blairerno, an institution for alcoholics near what is now Aberdeenshire in Scotland.<sup>19</sup> While institutionalized, Charles was commissioned by his son Arthur Conan to complete six illustrations for the first Sherlock Holmes novel *A Study in Scarlet* (see fig. 10).<sup>20</sup> Charles's illustrations consisted of very faint lines as though drawn by a weak hand and Arthur Conan had to trace over them before they were sent to the engraver.<sup>21</sup>

Because he was a known artist, Charles was also commissioned by other authors to illustrate books while institutionalized: *Three Blind Mice* (1883), *The Two Bears* (1880), and *European Slavery: Scenes from Married Life* (1882).<sup>22</sup> In 1887, Charles sent

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18. Lycett, 17-2, 26-40, 45, 48, 64.

19. Lycett, 26-40, 45, 48, 64.

20. Lycett, 145.

21. Lycett, 145.

22. There is some discrepancy as to the date of *Three Blind Mice*. The Toronto Public Library lists this book as published in 1877 while the Yale Center for British Art lists it as 1883. The *Athenaeum Journal* issue 2772 on Dec. 10, 1880 lists an advertisement for *The Two Bears* on page 793; Lycett, 90. *European Slavery: Scenes from Married Life* is listed by Lycett. The quality of these other illustrations is unknown at this time.

three artworks to the Royal Scottish Academy's annual exhibition.<sup>23</sup> As mentioned earlier, Charles had also sent his sketchbooks to his wife in hopes that they would be published but either she did not follow through with his request or publishers were uninterested because there is no record of their publication.<sup>24</sup> In 1891 Charles was transferred to Montrose Royal Edinburgh Asylum after an incident in which he became drunk and unmanageable.<sup>25</sup>

Lycett reports at that time, Charles "was getting messages from the unseen world."<sup>26</sup> Arthur Conan Doyle biographer Russell Miller reports that Charles was very confused and was committed to Montrose Asylum under Scottish Lunacy Laws which at that time did not require any family consent.<sup>27</sup> It was not uncommon during the nineteenth century for someone to be committed to an asylum without a proper psychological evaluation or even a medical diagnosis of insanity.<sup>28</sup> In 1830, Dr. John Connolly had commented on this unfair practice.<sup>29</sup> According to Connolly, once a person

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23. Lycett, 145.

24. Lycett, 145; Baker, 90. The sketchbooks are not listed in any references to Charles's publications.

25. Baker, xxviii.

26. Lycett, 112.

27. Russell Miller, *The Adventures of Arthur Conan Doyle: A Biography*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 2008, Ch 1.

28. Sarah Wise, *Inconvenient People. Lunacy, Liberty, and the Mad-Doctors in England*. Berkeley: Counterpoint, 2013.

29. John Connolly, M.D. "An Inquiry concerning the indications of insanity: with suggestions for better protection and care of the insane." *The Making of Modern Law* (University of London; Gale, Cengage Learning), 1830.

is confined in an institution, the strongest evidence of insanity is the fact of the very confinement itself and that also “ripens eccentricity.”<sup>30</sup>

Louisa Lowe, herself unjustly detained in an asylum for more than a year, wrote a book in 1883 referring to the asylum as the English Bastille.”<sup>31</sup> Lowe explains that any government mandated reforms of the lunacy laws had not yet been instituted and that the civil rights of the accused were being violated. In 2006, Beveridge found records that Charles was transferred again in 1892 and that Arthur Conan Doyle himself signed off on that move to Crichton Royal Institution.<sup>32</sup>

This transfer paperwork would seem to indicate that Arthur was involved in his father’s medical care and also reveals his professional opinion on the unchanged status of Charles’s mental and physical health. Charles was not the first artist to be institutionalized. As mentioned in chapter one Richard Dadd, also a fairy painter, was confined in a mental institution. According to some researchers, artists and members of their families have a higher incidence of mental illness.<sup>33</sup> Biographer Lycett mentions some evidence of Arthur’s fear of inheriting his father’s mental illness.<sup>34</sup> Whether merited or not, in terms of artistic production, Charles’s institutionalization would seem

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30. Connolly, 17.

31. Louisa Lowe, "The Bastilles of England; Or, the Lunacy Laws at Work." *Archives.org*. 1883. <https://archive.org/stream/bastillesenglan00lowegoog#page/n20/mode/2up> (accessed Feb. 21, 2015), 3.

32. Beveridge, Allan. "What became of Arthur Conan Doyle's father?" *The Journal of the Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh* (University of Dundee) 191 (2006): A22.

33. Jose Guimon, "Art and Madness." Edited by Gianni Vattimo and Santiago Zabala. Trans. Eoin McGitt. *Contemporary European Cultural Studies* (The Davies Group Publishers), 2006, xii.

34. Lycett, 259.

to have been a very constructive time period and many scholars feel that his best work was completed at that time.<sup>35</sup>

As mentioned previously, Charles Doyle illustrated the first book of the Sherlock Holmes series, *A Study in Scarlet*, while institutionalized. The illustrations created for his son's book were very different from his typical subject matter and style which arguably should be considered Symbolist. It is through the Symbolist elements that a connection can be made between his artwork and Arthur Conan's Sherlock Holmes literary works.<sup>36</sup> Robert Barr with *McClure's Magazine* interviewed Arthur Conan at his home in 1894 and saw several of Charles's artworks on the walls.<sup>37</sup> Barr described these as "most weird and imaginative, being in art something like what Edgar Allan Poe's stories are in fiction."<sup>38</sup> It is unclear which of Charles Doyle's artworks that Barr saw in Arthur's study, but his description would seem to fit a number of them. Much like Poe, Charles had a strong interest in mysticism and dreams as well as the supernatural.

The Symbolist movement began in France as a literary movement and later became evident in visual art.<sup>39</sup> Symbolist artists were influenced by the paintings of Gustave Moreau (1826-1898) and Henri Fuseli (1741-1825). Moreau's 1874 painting, "The Apparition" or "Salome and the Head of John the Baptist" (see fig.11) contains

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35. Peter Nahum, *The Victorian Web*. 1997.  
<http://www.victorianweb.org/painting/cdoyle/index.html> (accessed March 31, 2014); Baker, 90; Wark, 7.

36. The Symbolist elements of Doyle's Sherlock Holmes series will be discussed in chapter four.

37. Robert Barr, "'Real Conversations - V. A Dialogue between Conan Doyle and Robert Barr.' Recorded for McClure's Magazine, III, no.6, (November 1894, pp 503-13)." In *Sir Arthur Conan Doyle: Interviews and Recollections*, by Harold Orel, New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991, 113.

38. Barr, 113.

39. Edward Lucie-Smith, "The Symbolist Movement in France." In *Symbolist Art*, by Edward Lucie-Smith. London: Thames and Hudson, Ltd., 1972, 51.

elements of the exotic, morbid, erotic, and occult.<sup>40</sup> Robert Delevoy writes that this painting along with Moreau's painting "Salome" became "a model for the generation of Symbolists of the 1880s."<sup>41</sup> Writer J. K. Huysmans included elaborate descriptions of these paintings in his 1884 work *A Rebours*, a book often considered a Decadent Manifesto (a Symbolist affiliation) because it embodies all of the Decadent theories. Fuseli's painting "The Nightmare" (see fig. 12) is also considered proto-Symbolist and contains elements of the occult, drama, spiritual, and psychology.

As defined by art critic G. Albert Aurier in 1891, a Symbolist work of art is:

1. Ideative, for its unique ideal will be the expression of the Idea
2. Symbolist, for it will express this Idea by means of forms
3. Synthetist, for it will present these forms, these signs, according to a method which is generally understandable.
4. Subjective, for the object will never be considered as an object but as the sign of an idea perceived by the subject.
5. (It is consequently) Decorative...<sup>42</sup>

In Great Britain, the Symbolist movement is conflated with the Aesthetic movement. British Symbolist art was largely inspired by the mystical works of William Blake and those of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. The Pre-Raphaelites created interdisciplinary artworks and depicted subjects from medieval history, literature, and mythology.<sup>43</sup> Pre-Raphaelite and Symbolist works are characterized by portrayals of ambiguous narratives, mystical references, and the paintings often contain psychological

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40. Robert L. Delevoy, *Symbolists and Symbolism*. Translated by Elizabeth Wrightson, Bernard C. Swift Barbara Bray. New York: Rizzoli International Publications, 1982, 42.

41. Ibid.

42. G. Albert Aurier, Excerpt from "Symbolism in Painting: Paul Gauguin." (1893) In *Art in Theory 1815-1900. An Anthology of Changing Ideas*, edited by Charles Harrison and Paul Wood with Jason Gaiger. Oxford and Malden: Blackwell Publishers, 1998, 1028.

43. Lucie-Smith, 33, 36.



elements.<sup>44</sup> Pre-Raphaelite artists include William Holman Hunt, John Everett Millais, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Edward Burne-Jones, and George Frederick Watts.<sup>45</sup> Charles Doyle's paintings would seem to have been inspired by works from Blake, Fuseli, Rossetti, and Burne-Jones.

The "Meditation – A Self Portrait" (see fig. 13) was painted by Charles Doyle between 1885 and 1893 and is a small watercolor on paper. The artist depicts himself sitting in a chair at a table with a bookshelf behind him. His upper body turns toward the viewer while his lower body is angled to the right. His right hand is flat against his face in a gesture of deep thought. His left arm wraps around and clutches the side of the chair as if he needs to hold onto it for stability. Swirling all around him are flying beasts and mysterious creatures. A naked, hairless humanistic fairy creature with pointy ears strides across his desk towards him with an odd smile on his face. Other fairy creatures crawl along the floor towards him. His legs are crossed as though he is comfortable with these strange creatures and they have a familiar coexistence. A female with long blond hair and a flowing dress is one of the more disturbing elements in the work. She is horizontal and seemingly suspended in air directly behind Charles. She seems to be in motion and possibly floating across the room from the left to the right. She is depicted in a manner very similar in hair and dress as well as position to that of the female of Henri Fuseli's "Nightmare" (see fig. 12). Her arms are outstretched and her legs are crossed as though she was asleep when elevated to her floating position. A beam of light comes through the left side of the painting from an unseen source that could be either an early morning

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44. Lucie-Smith, 41-42.

45. Lucie-Smith, 47.

sunbeam or a supernatural force. The work presents some unknown allegory, a mystical dream or hallucination, all popular Symbolist themes.

The work expresses an Idea. It is not a simple portrait of a man at a desk although that is physically represented; it is instead a person consumed by his thoughts, fears, and dreams. The scene presents a tormented man. The forms or symbols presented that impress that understanding are the supernatural creatures and shadowy figures - his psychological demons. The floating woman would have been recognized by nineteenth century viewer from Fuseli's "Nightmare" and thus is a symbol representing a dream. The beam of light is a subjective element. To one viewer it may represent some clarity of mind the man has attained. To another it could represent a supernatural power governing his thoughts. The artwork is also decorative.

Charles Doyle's 1889 sketchbook is full of fairy watercolors as well as other works on Symbolist topics. Many of his figures (see figs.8 & 9) are not dressed in contemporary clothing but instead in more classical attire, much like the figures in Symbolist Puvis de Chavannes' works (see fig.14). Charles's sketchbook reveals a preoccupation with the Sphinx in "The Horrible Fate of the Artist Worried by a Sphinx" (see fig. 15) that is similar to other Symbolists' infatuation with that subject matter such as found in Gustave Moreau's 1864 "Oedipus and the Sphinx" (see fig. 16) or Odilon Redon's lithograph for Flaubert (see fig. 17). Doyle's drawing "Kissing a Sphinx" (see fig. 18) reveals the same sense of intrigue regarding the Sphinx.<sup>46</sup> In addition to fairies, Charles had an unusual preoccupation with death, much like the Symbolist painters, and

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46. Although Doyle portrays a different version of the Sphinx, it is still recognizable.

several pieces from his sketchbook contain skeletal specters or angels ascending to heaven.<sup>47</sup>

Charles may have been aware of the etchings and lithographs of Odilon Redon (1840-1916). Redon published several albums of lithographs from 1879-1896 and is mentioned as a Symbolist artist by numerous art historians.<sup>48</sup> Several of Redon's works (see fig. 19) included imagery of dreams, death, and skeletons. In 1888, 1889, and 1896, Redon responded to Gustave Flaubert's book *The Temptation of St. Anthony* with three separate albums of lithograph illustrations.<sup>49</sup> Two of Charles' works discovered in his 1889 sketchbook (see fig. 20 & 21) depict similar imagery.

Interdisciplinary Symbolist qualities can be found in Charles Doyle's works such as "Little Girls When They Practice Alone" (see fig. 22). The depiction of music within the painting is an interdisciplinary element. The scene contains music, a full moon, and fairies. A girl plays the piano while a group of fairy creatures sing along at the direction of a tall female fairy. There is a full moon in almost the center of the work as well as a hidden fairy creature behind the girl's piano. It is not simply an artwork about a girl playing the piano, but instead reflects an idea regarding the creative process. The full moon which lights the scene could represent supernatural inspiration or symbolize something more ominous. There is a sense of harmony represented in the coordination between the girl's piano music and the fairy singers. The hidden fairy behind the piano could represent an idea that has not yet matured or an evil force of discord. Much like his

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47. Baker, 1-77.

48. Lucie-Smith, 72; Delevoy, 61-63.

49. Cantor Arts Center at Stanford University, *Iris B. and Gerald Cantor Center for Visual Arts at Stanford University*. 2013. [http://museum.stanford.edu/news\\_room/redon.html](http://museum.stanford.edu/news_room/redon.html) (accessed March 16, 2015).

painting “Meditation,” Charles has employed a nearly monotone palette. The scene presents an ambiguous narrative as to whether a horror is about to take place or if this is merely an innocent child’s dream.

Another ambiguous, unknown narrative is represented in “Untitled” (see fig. 23) a drawing and watercolor work from the Royal Montrose sketchbook diary which features a night scene of a tall building from which horses and fairies tumble or fly from the top stories. An open door at the bottom of the building suggests escape. There is an economical use of color in the gray, black, brown, white and blue tones. The representation of the building’s architecture is rather skillfully executed with very precise windows, corners, blocks, and shadows while the fairies are very vaguely defined. As architectural drafting was Charles Doyle’s job for thirty years, it would make sense that his representations of building would be more precise than his representations of facial features. There is at least one similar version of this work and on the back of that piece is inscribed, “*What probably no one ever saw swirl over the Sunnyside gable and disappear round the corner. The constellation under which this appearance was it observed, was the Great Bear.*”<sup>50</sup> It would follow that both of these pieces were completed at roughly the same time and represent a mystical vision that Charles could not dismiss from his mind and needed to recreate.

Biographer Lycett reports that Charles’s illustrations for *A Study in Scarlet* “appeared to depict himself lank and bearded, as Sherlock Holmes, as if pleading from the asylum for recognition.”<sup>51</sup> That was quite true as his sketchbook notes attest that

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50. “The Spirits of the Prisoners. Charles Altamont Doyle 1832-1893.” *Lowell Libson, Ltd. British Art*. 2014. <http://www.lowell-libson.com/pictures/the-spirits-of-the-prisoners> (accessed Dec. 19, 2014).

51. Lycett, 145.

Charles was hopeful his artwork would be published.<sup>52</sup> Although Charles's sketchbook visions of fairies were not published or publicly exhibited during his lifetime, in 1924 his son Sir Arthur Conan Doyle held an exhibition of these artworks.

The title of the exhibition was "Drawings and Studies, The Humorous and The Terrible By the Late Charles Doyle."<sup>53</sup> To clarify this, while today the word terrible would never be used in an art exhibition title, Doyle's reference in this instance was to specific subject matter and not artistic skill. There were disturbing elements in many of the paintings in their references to death, alcoholism, and misfortune.

The exhibition catalog lists 124 drawings and watercolors in the show which was held at Brooks Street Galleries in London.<sup>54</sup> Unsigned 1924 newspaper reviews describing the show point out Charles' "whimsical imagination," "attractively simple and childlike mind," and his "curious fascination" with fairies.<sup>55</sup> An unidentified art correspondent began an article titled "Charles Doyle Memorial Exhibition in London: Faith at Play" with, "Charles Doyle should by acclamation be elected for a considerable term of years British painter-in-chief on this earth of ours to the Queen of the Fairies..."<sup>56</sup> This reviewer compared several of the drawings with William Blake's work. A preview article about the show included images of four of the works, all of which included fairies.<sup>57</sup>

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53. Baker, 78, 84.

53. Charles Seaborn, *Drawings and Studies. The Humorous and The Terrible By The Late Charles Doyle*. London: Brooks Street Galleries, 1924.

54. Seaborn.

55. Unknown, "Remarkable Drawings. A Talented Family." *Unknown Newspaper*, Jan. 1924.

56. Unknown. "Charles Doyle Memorial Exhibition in London "Faith at Play"." *Unknown*, Feb. 1924.

57. Unknown. "Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's Tribute to his Father's Art." *Unknown*, Jan. 1924.

Unfortunately for scholars, the exhibition catalog did not include any images and the listed titles of the pieces do not all exactly match with known works.

Of the 124 works, twenty have titles that include the words fairy or elf and are references to the supernatural world. Many of the other works, although not specifically designated in title, are known to also include fairies. For example, listed in the catalog are the works “Meditation” (see fig. 13) and “Eavesdroppers” (see fig. 9) discussed earlier and which contain fairies. These occult or supernatural elements as well as Charles’ frequent allusion to dreams and the dream state seem to refer to Symbolist intentions.

Nineteenth century art critic Aurier wrote on Symbolist Vincent Van Gogh’s mental instability and the “extraordinary sensitivity” he considered Van Gogh’s paintings to have as a result of his “suffering.”<sup>58</sup> Much like Richard Dadd, Charles was allowed to continue to paint and draw while institutionalized. Charles Doyle’s sketchbook diary certainly reveals his unusual artistic talent as well as the musings of a tormented man.

Charles is described by Baker as eccentric yet intelligent.<sup>59</sup> He believed in fairies because he had, as he wrote on one of his drawings, seen them with his own eyes.<sup>60</sup> Although his son Arthur Conan had never personally seen fairies, he shared in his father’s belief. In hopes of reviving the topic, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle wrote a book containing his research on the topic titled *The Coming of the Fairies* (1922). In this book he presented “confirmed” reports and photographic evidence to enforce the case for the

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58. G. Albert Aurier. "The Lonely Ones - Vincent van Gogh." (1890) In *Symbolist Art Theories - A Critical Anthology*, ed. Henri Dorra. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1994, 222.

59. Baker, x.

60. Baker, vii.

existence of fairies.<sup>61</sup> However, instead of respect for his scientific achievement, Doyle was ridiculed for his stance.<sup>62</sup>

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61. The photos in question would come to be known as the Cottingley photos. These fairy photographs were taken by two young girls in the countryside of Cottingley at Yorkshire in 1917 and 1922. Sophie Schmit, "Conan Doyle A Study in Black and White." In *The Perfect Medium Photography and the Occult*, by Pierre Apraxine et al. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2004, 92-95.

62. Lambourne, "The Doyle Family,"7.

## Chapter 3

Arthur Conan Doyle: *The Coming of the Fairies* and Spiritualism

It was late in his writing career that Arthur Conan Doyle (1859-1930), son of Charles Doyle and grandson of John Doyle, wrote on the topic of fairies. His book on fairies, *The Coming of the Fairies*, although barely remembered today, received much critical hostility and ridicule at the time. In fact, today almost all of Arthur Conan Doyle's writings on topics other than Sherlock Holmes are largely forgotten. It is important to understand Doyle's personal history and the entire range of his writing in order to recognize what he was trying to accomplish with his book on fairies.

Although Arthur Conan Doyle is best known as the author of the Sherlock Holmes series, he also wrote non-fiction, historical fiction, books on Spiritualism and the supernatural. Interestingly, Doyle's education was not in literature at all but in the medical field. As a young man, Arthur Conan attended Stonyhurst, a Jesuit boarding school in Preston, Scotland.<sup>1</sup> Biographer Lycett reports that while there, Doyle was often telling stories to his classmates and attempted to start a couple of literary magazines.<sup>2</sup> Eager for the opportunity to improve his German, Doyle went to Feldkirch secondary school in Austria.<sup>3</sup> Doyle entered Edinburgh University in 1876 and by alternating between working and taking classes he was able to complete his medical degree in 1881.<sup>4</sup>

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1. Lycett, 27.

2. Lycett, 39.

3. Lycett, 45.

4. Jon L. Lellenberg, "Introduction." In *The Quest for Sherlock Holmes: Thirteen Biographers in Search of a Life*. Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1987, 6.



While in medical school Doyle was also writing and in fact publishing fiction. In 1879 he had a short story “The Mystery of Sasassa Valley: A South African Story” published by *Chamber’s Journal of Popular Literature, Science and Art*.<sup>5</sup> In 1880, Doyle had four short stories published in “London Society.”<sup>6</sup> By 1885 Doyle had experienced some steady success with his writing but also continued to practice medicine. After a failed attempt at setting up a practice with another doctor he set up his own small medical practice in Southsea, Portsmouth on the British Isle of Portsea.<sup>7</sup> Doyle’s income from his medical practice began to grow at a steady rate but he also kept writing in hopes of getting a novel published.

Much of Doyle’s early fiction contained paranormal or supernatural events. Despite his Jesuit and medical school training, as a young man Doyle had become interested in the occult. The occult had slightly different connotations in the nineteenth century when compared with our contemporary concept of the topic. Occult phenomena at that time included unexplained activities of the mind such as hypnotism, telepathy, and clairvoyance. Many late nineteenth century scientists and intellectuals were performing paranormal experiments in order to study these incidents.<sup>8</sup>

In 1884 Doyle wrote “John Barrington Cowles,” the story of a student who falls in love with a beautiful Indian woman named Kate who has some unusual mental

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5. Douglas Sladen, “Twenty Years of My Life (London: Constable, 1914) pp. 76-7, 156-7,” In *Sir Arthur Conan Doyle Interviews and Recollections*, edited by Harold Orel. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991, 150; Arthur Conan Doyle, “Chamber's Journal 1854-1910 Indexes to Fiction.” *Victorian Fiction Resource Guides 17*. Vol. 4. Edited by Sue Thomas. Jan. 4 - Dec. 27, 1879.

6. Lycett, 86.

7. Lycett, 108-113. Also, Jon Lellenberg, Daniel Stashower and Charles Foley. *Arthur Conan Doyle A Life in Letters*. London: Penguin Group, 2008, 239.

8. Lycett, 135. Lycett specifically mentions Franz Anton Mesmer. Doyle later became interested in communicating with spirits of the dead or Spiritualism, another field of the occult.

powers.<sup>9</sup> The story is narrated by a friend of Cowles, John Armitage, who relays the events surrounding Cowles' death after his engagement to Kate. John Armitage is a classmate of Cowles and discovers Kate's powers of hypnosis and mesmerism but is threatened by her not to reveal that secret. Because he has no way of proving her supernatural abilities have been or will be used for harm and because he fears her threat, he does not reveal his suspicions about her dark intentions to anyone. Armitage has no physical evidence, only observation. When Cowles learns of Kate's supernatural powers the night before the wedding, he cancels it. Shortly thereafter Cowles begins to act irrationally, alternating between claiming to love Kate and greatly fearing her. One night he has a vision of Kate off in the distance and he runs towards it falling straight off of a cliff, thus suffering the same ill fate as her two previous fiancées who also cancelled their engagements. The story presents the exotic through an Indian character with mystical powers as well as emphasizing the difficulties in gathering scientific proof of occult activities. The story references Doyle's interest in what would at the time have been very new studies of hypnotism and mental telepathy.<sup>10</sup>

Doyle's "Captain of the "Polestar" (1884) is another supernatural story and relays the narrator's brief occupation as a medical doctor on an Arctic fishing voyage.<sup>11</sup> In the story, the captain keeps the ship and his crew out in the icy sea until very late in the

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9. Arthur Conan Doyle, "John Barrington Cowles." *Project Gutenberg*. 1884. <http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/294> (accessed Dec. 22, 2014).

10. Douglas Kerr, *Conan Doyle Writing, Profession, Practice*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013, 215.

11. Arthur Conan Doyle, "Captain of the Polestar and Other Tales." *Project Gutenberg*. 1884. <http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/294> (accessed Dec. 22, 2014); Lycett, 71; Lellenberg, *The Quest for Sherlock Holmes*, 6. Doyle himself had taken such a job during his medical school training.

fishing season. The crew fear being stuck in the encroaching ice and notice their rapidly depleting food supply. The men begin to hear strange sounds and see some eerie visions in the middle of the night. The captain starts to act very strangely, talking to himself and seeing things. One night he appears to see something in the distance, jumps overboard onto the ice floes, and runs across the ice. The crew and the doctor-narrator chase after him and but do not find him until the next day and he is dead. While standing over his body, the men see a wispy mist in the shape of a woman bend over to the captain and kiss him before floating away. Eerily, when they go to the captain's cabin to collect his effects, the picture of his recently deceased fiancé is missing from its frame. This story captures some of the sentiment of the nineteenth century about death and communication from the afterlife and is a topic that Doyle researched in depth for his later writings and lectures.

As discussed earlier, the era was one of religious upheaval instigated in part by Darwin's 1859 theory about human origins.<sup>12</sup> The religious faith of many Victorians was shaken by this discovery. The idea that one's spirit continued to exist after death and that communication was possible from the beyond provided comfort to many that perhaps there was more than simple biological evolution involved in the human experience. This became the foundation for the Spiritualist movement. Following Darwin's discoveries, many new areas of scientific research emerged such as anthropology and the study of the paranormal.

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12. Silver, 31.

Doyle had rejected his family's strict Irish Catholic faith while at Edinburgh University.<sup>13</sup> Dr. Bryan Waller, a medical doctor and supporter of Emerson's transcendental philosophy, may have been somewhat influential in Doyle's reconsideration of his faith.<sup>14</sup> During the difficult time of his father's alcoholism Waller had been a boarder at the Doyle residence and later became a fixture by providing housing for Arthur Conan's mother and her small children after his father was institutionalized.<sup>15</sup> Many scholars, most notably Richard Lancelyn Green and Andrew Malec, believe that Doyle's disavowal of Christianity was influenced by his father's otherworldly drawings and paintings.<sup>16</sup> Charles Doyle's sketchbook however, seems to reveal his Christian faith as a constant feature along with his belief in the existence of a spirit world.<sup>17</sup> In his later writings, Arthur Conan Doyle provided his own explanation for the disregard of Irish Catholicism and his subsequent conversion to Spiritualism.

In *The Vital Message* (1919) Doyle outlines his thoughts on religion and discusses the many inconsistencies and contradictions in the Bible which he felt had put too much emphasis on the death of Christ.<sup>18</sup> Doyle's search for scientific evidence of the spirit or unseen world and afterlife led him away from any religious theories that could not be

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13. Lycett, 66; Edwards, 54.

14. Lycett, 67-68.

15. Lycett, 45-46, 106-107.

16. Julian Symons, *Conan Doyle: Portrait of an Artist*. New York: The Mysterious Press, 1979, 111; Richard Lancelyn Green, "His Final Tale of Chivalry: Memories and Adventures of Arthur Conan Doyle." In *The Quest for Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. Thirteen Biographers in Search of a Life*, edited by Jon L. Lellenberg. Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1987, 53; Andrew S. Malec, "Commitment to Great Causes. Western Wanderings and a Visit to Three Fronts." In *A Quest for Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. Thirteen Biographers in Search of a Life*, edited by Jon L. Lellenberg. Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1987, 67.

17. Baker.

18. Arthur Conan Doyle, *The Vital Message*. London: Project Gutenberg, 1919.

proven.<sup>19</sup> Doyle considered his lectures and books on the topic of Spiritualism to be the most important work of his life and writes, "...that all other work which I had ever done, or could ever do, was as nothing compared to this"<sup>20</sup> All in all, it seems logical that a doctor of medicine, someone whose daily duties revolve around saving human lives, would be very interested in what happens when those efforts fail and the patient dies.

Spiritualism is the belief that the soul continues to live after death and that it is possible to communicate with those who have passed. While in Southsea, Doyle and his wife attended a number of séances, a method of spirit communication through a medium that was then a very popular form of Victorian entertainment.<sup>21</sup> Doyle had an interest far beyond that of entertainment however, and specifically began researching Spiritualism.<sup>22</sup> He joined the Portsmouth Literary and Scientific Society where he met Alfred Drayson, president of the Society for Psychical Research, an organization whose mission was to scientifically investigate and gather research on paranormal or psychic phenomena.<sup>23</sup> S.P.R. members included prominent scholars such as philosopher Henry Sidgwick and psychologist Frederick Myers.<sup>24</sup> After personally observing occult phenomena and several discussions with Grayson, Doyle decided to join the S.P.R. in 1893.<sup>25</sup>

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19. Michael W. Homer, "Spiritualism and "New Religions." *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*, 1999: 98-99; Arthur Conan Doyle, "The Wanderings of a Spiritualist." *Project Gutenberg*. 1920. <https://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/39718> (accessed Dec. 23, 2014).

20. Doyle, *Wanderings*, Kindle locations 146-147.

21. Lycett, 134; Harold Orel, "Introduction." In *Critical Essays on Sir Arthur Conan Doyle*, by Harold Orel. New York, NY and Don Mills, Ontario: G.K. Hall & Co., 1992, xiv.

22. Lycett, 137; Homer, 104; Oxford English Dictionary definition.

23. Lycett, 105,136; Zofia Weaver, *Society for Psychical Research*. 2009. <http://www.spr.ac.uk/page/overview-psychical-research-parapsychology> (accessed Dec. 24, 2014).

24. Kerr, 216.

25. Lycett, 200; Lellenberg, *A Life in Letters*, 269.

Doyle's book *The Stark Munro Letters* (1895) is considered by some scholars to be a semi-autobiography of his early years as a doctor.<sup>26</sup> Munro states in the introduction that he hopes the letters can give strength to other young men "harassed by the needs of this world and with doubts of the next."<sup>27</sup> Throughout the book, which is presented as a series of letters written by Dr. Munro, events in Munro's life as well as his views on the universe and religion are discussed. Many of these are suspiciously similar to interests and events in Doyle's early career.<sup>28</sup>

Early in the book, Stark Munro discusses Thomas Carlyle's writings and how these affected his views on religion.<sup>29</sup> Munro also discusses the Bible as "Christian folklore" lacking in reason and evidence.<sup>30</sup> Narrator Munro later explains that "True science must be synonymous with religion since science is the acquirement of fact; and facts are all that we have from which to deduce what we are and why we are here."<sup>31</sup> As a medical doctor and scientist, Doyle's methods of questioning, gathering data, observation, and experimentation (the standard application of the scientific or empirical method) were employed in his search for answers to this important question. *The Stark Munro Letters* publication date of 1895 coincides with Doyle's early involvement with the S.P.R.

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26. Edwards, 18, 32; Lycett, 49.

27. Arthur Conan Doyle, "The Stark Munro Letters." *Project Gutenberg*. 1895. <http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/290> (accessed Dec. 23, 2014).

28. Edwards, 18,32; Lycett, 49.

29. Lycett, 73,128; Edwards, 127; Lellenberg, *A Life in Letters*, 141, 207. Doyle had read and was fascinated by Carlyle's transcendental theories while in medical school.

30. Doyle, "The Stark Munro Letters," Letter dated 15 October, 1881.

31. Doyle, "Stark Munro," Letter dated 12 June, 1882.

In 1891, after great success with the third Sherlock Holmes book, *A Scandal in Bohemia*, Doyle had found that he was able to make a living from his writing and closed his medical practice.<sup>32</sup> As mentioned, Doyle had begun writing fiction with elements of the supernatural as early as 1884. He had also been researching the occult for many years and publicly announced his conversion to Spiritualism in 1916.<sup>33</sup> In 1922, Doyle went a step farther and wrote a book on his research and belief in the unseen spirit world of fairies. Doyle's research methods are relayed step-by-step in his book *The Coming of the Fairies*.

In 1920, Doyle was commissioned by *Strand* magazine to write a series of articles about fairies and he began to research eyewitness accounts of the creatures.<sup>34</sup> At the same time what are now known as the Cottingley fairy photographs were brought to his attention. In 1917, two young girls, Elsie Wright and Frances Griffiths, insisted to their parents that they could see fairies in a glen near one of girls' houses in Cottingley, Yorkshire and the girls decided to provide evidence. The Cottingley fairy photographs were taken one afternoon by the two girls using their father's camera.<sup>35</sup> There were two photographs: one photograph was of Elsie and a single dancing fairy (see fig.24) and the other was of Frances and a group of musical fairies (see fig. 25). Over time, reports of these fairy photos spread to theosophical, spiritualist, and psychic groups. Doyle was first contacted about the photos by the sister of theosophist Edward L. Gardner. Doyle later

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32. Sladen, 150.

33. Lellenberg, *A Life in Letters*, 269; Lycett, 390.

34. The *Strand* article is reproduced in the 1922 book.

35. Arthur Conan Doyle, *The Coming of the Fairies*. Edited by Matthew Vossler for Oaklight Publishing. New York, Toronto, and London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1922, 17-26.

wrote directly to Gardner about his desire to start an official investigation on the validity of the photos.<sup>36</sup>

By 1922 photography had been in existence for nearly one hundred years.<sup>37</sup> Photographs were being used not only for portraiture and archival documentation but also for a variety of artistic, scientific, and educational purposes.<sup>38</sup> Between 1870 and 1930, photography was routinely utilized in occult research.<sup>39</sup> The manipulation of photos was also well known at this time and these images were no longer trusted as depictions of reality.<sup>40</sup>

Doyle showed the photos to Sir Oliver Lodge, a colleague of his at the Athenaeum Club whom he trusted implicitly with psychic matters.<sup>41</sup> Lodge was very skeptical of the photos but Doyle was determined to continue the investigation, even without Lodge's validation. Gardner had the negatives examined and interviewed the person who developed the negatives. It was at that point determined that there was only one exposure and also that the figures had moved during the exposure. Doyle then took the negatives to the Kodak film offices which could find no evidence of trickery in the exposure or development but also refused to validate the photos.<sup>42</sup> Doyle and Gardner

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36. All of the events that led to Doyle's writing of the book are discussed within the book.

37. Naomi Rosenblum, *A World History of Photography*. New York: Abbeville Press, 2007, 14. Photography began in 1839.

38. Rosenblum, 393.

39. Pierre Apraxine and Sophie Schmit. "Photography and the Occult." In *The Perfect Medium. Photography and the Occult*, by Pierre Apraxine et al. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2004, 15.

40. Rosenblum, 393-438.

41. Doyle, *Fairies*. Each step of Doyle's research is documented in the book and relayed here in the next several paragraphs.

42. Doyle, *Fairies*, 32-40; Kerr, 241.



decided that since the photos did not seem to be retouched in any way, all that was left to do was to interview the girls and visit the glen where the events took place.

Gardner went to Yorkshire to interview the girls and their parents and found them to be straightforward and honest which convinced him that the photos contained actual fairies. Doyle never personally interviewed the girls or visited the area but in light of Gardner's impeccable credentials, Doyle believed in his evaluation of the girls' character and the setting in which the photos were taken.<sup>43</sup> Together they determined that neither the girls nor their parents were skillful enough in art or photography to forge the photos.<sup>44</sup>

Doyle's article for *Strand* magazine was written before the book. Doyle began that article by advising the public that he is simply providing the evidence and that they will need to form their own opinion on the existence of fairies based on the facts presented.<sup>45</sup> After the article was published, journalists swarmed the Yorkshire area searching for the girls as Doyle did not reveal their real names.<sup>46</sup> The story became very popular and more evidence was sought. In 1921 the girls, in the company of a clairvoyant, went back to the glen with the specific mission to take more fairy photographs.<sup>47</sup> The group returned with similar reports of fairy sightings but the photos did not properly expose so there was no photographic evidence from that venture. A later

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43. Bruce Beydt, "The Adventure of the Cottingley Fairies." *British Heritage* 26, no. 1 (2004): 23-24.

44. Doyle, *Fairies*, 35.

45. Doyle, *Fairies*, 40. Doyle himself appears to be convinced.

46. Doyle, *Fairies*, 74-78.

47. Doyle, *Fairies*, 106.

attempt with only the girls as witnesses produced three more photographs.<sup>48</sup> Spiritualists became worried that reports of these “subhuman creatures” would “complicate the spiritual controversy”<sup>49</sup> The Spiritualists would not want potential members to think that fairies were an essential part of their belief system. Because Doyle was the best-known member of the Spiritualists, often lecturing and writing about the topic, his belief in the photos as proof of the existence of fairies could be viewed as distracting for their cause.<sup>50</sup>

The *Strand* article, the news reports that followed it, and the clairvoyant’s report were all incorporated in Doyle’s 1922 book *The Coming of the Fairies*. In order to distinguish the work, Doyle states in the introduction that the topic of fairies “has nothing to do with the larger and far more vital question of Spiritualism.” He mentions that it is “not scientifically impossible” for some people to be able to see “that which is invisible to others” and attributes clairvoyance to differences in vibration levels.<sup>51</sup> Later in the book, Doyle writes of his opinion that once fairies are acknowledged then other psychic phenomena will also be accepted. He quotes from other sources such as Kirk and Lang’s *Secret Commonwealth* on the varieties of fairies and fairy customs that exist in different areas of the country. Although Doyle himself had never seen a fairy, he was aware of his father’s supernatural claims and was likely very eager to find out whether or not his father was delusional.<sup>52</sup>

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48. Lycett, 414; Ralph D Blumenfield, “‘The Father of Sherlock Holmes,’ *RDB’s Procession* (London: Ivor Nicholson and Watson, 1935) ch. 35 (pp.185-92).” In *Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. Interviews and Recollections*, edited by Harold Orel. New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1991, 228-233.

49. Doyle, *Fairies*, 27.

50. Doyle realizes this in the introduction to the book.

51. Doyle, *Fairies*, 14.

52. Lycett, 409.

In a chapter of the book titled “Independent Evidence for Fairies,” Doyle lists various accounts of fairy sightings. Doyle seems to have gathered these accounts from a combination of books on the topic and personal interviews that he conducted. In *A Book of Folklore* (1913), Rev. S. Baring-Gould wrote of a personal experience that he had in 1838. Doyle included Baring-Gould’s memory of that encounter in his chapter on “Pixies and Brownies”:

When I was a small boy of four years old, we were driving to Montpelier on a hot summer day over the long straight road that traverses a pebble-and-rubble-strewn plain, on which grows nothing save a few aromatic herbs. I was sitting on the box with my father when, to my great surprise, I saw legions of dwarfs of about two feet high running along beside the horses; some sat laughing on the pole, some were scrambling up the harness to get on the backs of the horses. I remarked to my father what I saw, when he abruptly stopped the carriage and put me inside beside my mother, where, the conveyance being closed, I was out of the sun. The effect was that, little by little, the host of imps diminished in number till they disappeared altogether.”<sup>53</sup>

Doyle also includes a report from well-known Victorian psychic Violet Tweedale who saw a leaf moving in the wind and a tiny green man on top of it about five inches tall wearing green boots and a red hat. Doyle noticed that Tweedale’s description of a fairy matched exactly with a report by Baring-Gould’s son. Doyle also includes the report of two respectable mediums, Mr. Turvey and Mr. Londale who together experienced a fairy sighting and Doyle transcribes Londale’s conversation with him about the event:

Suddenly I was conscious of a movement on the edge of the lawn... Looking closely, I saw several little figures dressed in brown peering through the bushes... In a few seconds a dozen or more small people, about two feet in height, in bright clothes and with radiant faces, ran on to the lawn, dancing hither and thither... These fairies played about, gradually approaching the hut. One little fellow, bolder than the others, came to a croquet hoop close to the hut and, using the hoop as a horizontal bar, turned round and round it, much to our amusement. Some of the others watched him, while others danced about, not in any set dance,

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<sup>53</sup> Doyle, *Fairies*, 128-142; Sabine Baring-Gould, “A Book of Folk-Lore.” *Sacred Texts*. 1913; repr., <http://www.sacred-texts.com/neu/celt/bof/index.htm> (accessed Dec. 26, 2014), Chapter Nine.

but seemingly moving in sheer joy. This continued for four or five minutes, when suddenly, evidently in response to some signal or warning from those dressed in brown, who had remained at the edge of the lawn, they all ran into the wood. Just then a maid appeared coming from the house with tea. Never was tea so unwelcome, as evidently its appearance was the cause of the disappearance of our little visitors."<sup>54</sup>

A report from Dr. Vanstone whom Doyle credits as an intellectual as well as gifted in psychic abilities relays Vanstone's admittance of being aware of minute fairy creatures existing among plant life in nature. Together these reports and several others constitute what Doyle refers to as "solid and practical and successful" witnesses to fairy phenomena.<sup>55</sup>

To emphasize his argument, Doyle includes information from the editor of *Light*, a journal of the London Spiritualist Alliance.<sup>56</sup> *Light* editor David Gow relays his Darwin-like approach to fairies in that he considers them to have "developed along some separate line of evolution" and morphed into human shape through the mysterious forces of Nature.<sup>57</sup> By including accounts from other respected men of science, perhaps Doyle felt his integrity as a researcher was somehow upheld and this practice was continually employed in his research methods throughout his career.<sup>58</sup>

Doyle feels there is credibility to the fairy stories since none of his phenomena observers were paid for their stories.<sup>59</sup> He received a number of letters citing fairy reports after the *Strand* article was published and these accounts were investigated. Several were

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54. Doyle, *Fairies*, 134-135.

55. Doyle, *Fairies*, 141.

56. Lycett, 133, 251; Doyle, *Fairies*, 148.

57. Doyle, *Fairies*, 148.

58. Kerr, 216.

59. Doyle, *Fairies*, 152.

discarded as unreliable. Doyle ends his book with remarks on the fairy life cycle by Theosophist Gardner who describes these elemental creatures in depth.<sup>60</sup>

Gardner's highly imaginative findings on fairies, such as the material substance of their bodies and wings, their life cycles, language, and their essential purposes in nature are reported by Doyle as though they are the proven scientific facts of an expert. Gardner, as previously mentioned, originally brought the Cottingley photos to Doyle, conducted all the eyewitness interviews, and went to check out the glen where the girls had taken the photographs. Doyle relied very heavily on Gardner's reputation in the theosophist community and took all of his information and evidence as fact. Doyle concludes the book by stating that the evidence is not as "overwhelming as in the case of spiritualistic phenomena" but is substantial enough to "convince reasonable men that the matter is not one which can be readily dismissed."<sup>61</sup> With this concluding statement, it would certainly seem that Doyle himself was convinced that fairies existed from the evidence he presented.

In the early 1980s, more than fifty years after Doyle's death, the surviving Cottingley fairy photographer Frances Griffiths admitted that although she and her cousin had witnessed fairy phenomena, they had faked four of the five photographs.<sup>62</sup> The girls had reproduced fairy imagery from the magazine *Princess Mary's Gift Book* and then pinned them to various plants.<sup>63</sup> Griffiths continued to insist that the last photograph was

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60. Doyle, *Fairies*, 172-186.

61. Doyle, *Fairies*, 195-196.

62. Beydt, 25.

63. Lycett, 414.

real.<sup>64</sup> In his article “Borderland Forms: Arthur Conan Doyle; Albion’s Daughters and the Politics of the Cuttingly Fairies,” Alex Owen describes the presentation of *The Coming of the Fairies* in the form of leads and clues as similar to the manner of the detective Sherlock Holmes.<sup>65</sup> Owen writes that Doyle’s strong belief in Spiritualism is essential to understanding how it could be that this highly respected medical doctor and author believed in fairies.<sup>66</sup> The Victorians’ ongoing interest in fairies was the reason that *Strand* magazine had originally approached Doyle about a story. Doyle may have felt that his work confirmed that of earlier writers such as Robert Louis Stevenson and W. B. Yeats who shared his belief in the unseen or spirit world.<sup>67</sup> That a belief in fairies by the Scottish, Irish, and English had been established centuries earlier would not have been enough to convince Doyle. He had earlier disregarded Christian belief for its unproven and illogical aspects. It was the sequential unfolding of events: *Strand* magazine’s approaching him with the project, reports of the fairy photographs and contemporary eyewitness sightings, the steadfast fairy belief of respected scientific men, and Doyle’s own Spiritualist beliefs that led him to write the book.

Acting the complete opposite of his rational and logical fictional character Sherlock Holmes, Doyle seems to have taken everyone at their word.<sup>68</sup> He never saw a fairy himself but people that he trusted had seen fairies. Without personally interviewing them, he relied on the “honest” reputations of the two girls who took the photographs.

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64. Beydt, 25.

65. Owen, 63.

66. Owen, 66.

67. Kerr, 237.

68. This observation has been mentioned by numerous Doyle scholars.

The fact that no one else had ever taken a photo of a fairy did not make Doyle stop and question that it was possible. Much like a large pharmaceutical corporation might skew their test results to be favorable for their product, Doyle wanted fairies to be real creatures and so he interpreted and presented the evidence in that manner. Even though Doyle had made repeated references to supernatural topics in his past writings, his reputation suffered greatly with this particular publication.

Ralph Blumenfield, London's *Daily Express* newspaper editor from 1902-32, writes of Doyle that although he was seriously ridiculed for his supernatural views, he always stood his ground and unwaveringly continued with his research.<sup>69</sup> Letters from his mother reveal her concern with his damaged reputation but Doyle refuses to back down from his opinion.<sup>70</sup> Doyle had utilized what he felt were proper procedures according to the empirical scientific method and had determined the fairy photographs to be valid. Unlike his investigations into paranormal activity in which he himself personally witnessed the phenomena, in the case of the fairy photographs Doyle unfortunately took the word of authorities that he respected on the topic.

From 1919 until his death in 1930, Doyle's writings were primarily on Spiritualism and were very successful in Great Britain according to his publisher George H. Doran.<sup>71</sup> In conjunction with his Spiritualist writings, Doyle lectured all around the

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69. Blumenfield, 229.

70. Lellenberg, *A Life in Letters*, 668.

71. Doyle wrote seventeen books in the years spanning 1919 to 1930 and eleven were on the topic of Spiritualism. *The Three of Them* (1923) was written about his children; *The Casebook of Sherlock Holmes* (1927) was his last Sherlock Holmes; *The Land of Mist* (1926) was the last of his series of Professor Challenger science fiction; *Memories and Adventures* was an autobiography; and *The Maracot Deep and Other Stories* (1929) was a science fiction novel and a collection of his poetry published in 1922; Doran, 258; George H. Doran, *Chronicles of Barabbas: 1884-1934*. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1935, 240.

globe on the topic and primarily at his own expense.<sup>72</sup> He opened his own Psychic Bookshop and Museum in 1925 which contained documentation of paranormal activity, spirit photographs, as well as copies of the Cottingley fairy photographs.<sup>73</sup> His involvement with Spiritualism had grown from a research interest into an obsessive passion, so much that Doyle felt it was vitally important to share his findings with the entire world. As scholar Michael Saler writes, "The wonderful irony of this situation is that at the same time that Doyle was criticized for claiming that fairies were real, many of his readers were claiming that Sherlock Holmes was real."<sup>74</sup>

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72. Doran, *Chronicles*, 240.

73. Lycett, 434.

74. Michael Saler, "Clap if You Believe in Sherlock Holmes: Mass Culture and the Reenchantment of Modernity." *The Historical Journal* 46, no. 3 (2003): 600.



## Chapter 4

## Sherlock Holmes and the Symbolism Movement in Literature

Sherlock Holmes is one of the best known fictional characters in all of literary history. This series of mystery stories was set in Victorian London and revolved around Holmes and his assistant Dr. Watson who were hired to solve various “whodunit” crimes such as murder, blackmail, theft, and missing person cases. Dr. Watson is the narrator and the stories are presented as his eyewitness accounts. I posit that Sir Arthur Conan Doyle was acutely aware of the Symbolist movement and that these stories contain a number of Symbolist elements and references. The Symbolist elements provide a connection between Arthur Conan’s literary works and the artwork of his father Charles, artwork that to date has not been studied in association with that art movement.

Symbolism was a pan-European movement that occurred in both art and literature and originated in France during the late nineteenth century in the poetic circle of Mallarmé but quickly spread throughout Europe. The Symbolist literary movement was influenced by decadent French poetry such as that of Charles Baudelaire (1821-1867).<sup>1</sup> The decadent poets, whose works were later termed Symbolist, specifically adopted many of Baudelaire’s techniques.<sup>2</sup> Baudelaire’s “theory of correspondences” was a theory based on relationships between the tangible and intangible; for example, the

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1. Henri Dorra, "Prologue: Baudelaire, Delacroix, and the Premises of Symbolist Aesthetics." In *Symbolist Art Theories. A Critical Anthology*, by Henri Dorra. Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1994, 1.

2. Ibid.

relationships between the physical and the spiritual world.<sup>3</sup> This is also referred to as “synaesthesia” and involves sensory connections; the ability of words to evoke sensations, emotions, scents, or sounds.<sup>4</sup> Synaesthesia proposes that every word or image has a correlating sensation that each of us perceives differently.<sup>5</sup> For example, a color can evoke an emotion, or an emotion can invoke a color. While one person may relate the color red to the emotion of anger, another may find red to be soothing. The corresponding effects of the word on the reader were considered to be spiritual as well as psychological.<sup>6</sup> Baudelaire’s emphasis on intentional ambiguity and his “play of associations” or the conflicting meanings that vivid metaphor can provide for the reader were additional features adopted as elements of decadent works.<sup>7</sup> Leo Tolstoy wrote of the Decadent poets that “their dogma is obscurity” specifically citing the works of Baudelaire, Verlaine, and Mallarmé in his 1898 essay “What is Art.”<sup>8</sup> In 1886, writer Jean Moreas re-termed the Decadence movement as Symbolism.<sup>9</sup>

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3. Dorra, 1; Katherine Oliver Mills, *Poetry Foundation: Charles Baudelaire Biography*. <http://www.poetryfoundation.org/bio/charles-baudelaire> (accessed March 22, 2014).

4. Dorra, 1.

5. Lionel Lambourne, *The Aesthetic Movement*. London: Phaidon Press Limited, 1996, 64.

6. Henri Dorra, "Charles Baudelaire. Correspondences" (1857), In *Symbolist Art Theories. A Critical Anthology*, by Henri Dorra. Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1994, 9.

7. Dorra, Prologue, 5-7; Henri Dorra, "Jean Moreas A Literary Manifesto-Symbolism" (1886), In *Symbolist Art Theories A Critical Anthology*, by Henri Dorra. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1994, 150.

8. Leo Tolstoy, "What is Art?" (1898), In *Art in Theory 1815-1900. An Anthology of Changing Ideas*, translated by Aylmer Maude. Oxford and Malden: Blackwell Publishers, 1998, 817; Leo Tolstoy, "What is Art?," *Archive.org*. [https://archive.org/stream/whatisart00tolsuoft/whatisart00tolsuoft\\_djvu.txt](https://archive.org/stream/whatisart00tolsuoft/whatisart00tolsuoft_djvu.txt) (accessed Dec. 31, 2014).

9. Charles Harrison, and Paul Wood with James Gaiger, "Jean Moreas (1856-1910) 'Symbolism - a Manifesto.'" (1886), In *Art in Theory 1815-1900. An Anthology of Changing Ideas*, Oxford and Malden: Blackwell Publishers, 1998, 1014.

Moreas wrote and published his “Literary Manifesto” of Symbolism in 1886 in which he listed the qualities of Symbolist work based on the teachings of its primary mentor, poet Stéphane Mallarmé.<sup>10</sup> In an 1891 interview Mallarmé stated the goal of a Symbolist work:

To name an object is to suppress three-quarters of the enjoyment of the poem, which derives from the pleasure of step-by-step discovery; to *suggest*, that is the dream. It is of perfect use of this mystery that constitutes the symbol to evoke an object little by little, so as to bring to light a state of the soul or, inversely, to choose an object and bring it out of a state of the soul through a series of unraveling.<sup>11</sup>

Moreas’ manifesto also included Baudelaire’s contributions to the movement and explained the Symbolist “disdain for naturalism” in favor of subjectivity.<sup>12</sup>

Comparative literature critic René Wellek writes in 1970 that Symbolist poetry includes metaphors, allegories and symbols, not for beautification but as organizing principles; and there is within the poets a desire for musical verse.<sup>13</sup> Wellek writes that in a wider sense Symbolism is “justified by an occult view of the world” in which “everything reflects everything else.”<sup>14</sup> At the same time that Wellek proposes the time span for Symbolism as 1885 to 1914, he also points out the difficulties in assigning Symbolist status to works. Often within the same work, elements of preceding ideology

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10. Jean Moreas, "A Literary Manifesto - Symbolism." (1886), In *Symbolist Art Theories - A Critical Anthology*, by Henri Dorra. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1994, 150-151; Harrison, 1014.

11. Stéphane Mallarmé, "Jules Huret Interview with Stéphane Mallarmé." (1891), In *Symbolist Art Theories. A Critical Anthology*, edited by Henri Dorra. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1994, 141.

12. Moreas, 150-151.

13. Rene Wellek, "The Term and Concept of Symbolism in Literary History." *New Literary History. A Symposium on Periods* (The Johns Hopkins University Press) 1, no. 2 (1970): 264.

14. Wellek, 264.

(romanticism, naturalism, or realism) as well as following ideology (futurism or surrealism) may be present.<sup>15</sup> Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes series of mystery novels would seem to fall in dual categories with elements of both Romanticism and Symbolism.

The Symbolist movement spread from France to Great Britain and across Europe. In Great Britain, it was first referred to as the Aesthetic movement.<sup>16</sup> Great Britain's Symbolist authors include William Butler Yeats, Oscar Wilde, Arthur Symons, and Robert Louis Stevenson. It would seem that as Symbolist ideas spread, literary critics in the newly infiltrated areas felt the need to write their own synopsis of the movement and its leading authors. In 1893, British poet and critic Arthur Symons wrote a series of essays on several of the leading Symbolists including, among others, Baudelaire, Mallarmé, and W. B. Yeats and he detailed the Symbolist qualities of each of their works.<sup>17</sup> Symons originally titled his work *The Decadent Movement in Literature* but changed the title to *The Symbolist Movement in Literature* when the book was republished in 1899. Symons begins his discourse with a quote from Thomas Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus* (1831), "It is in and through the Symbols that man consciously or unconsciously lives, works and has his being: those ages moreover are accounted the

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15. Wellek, 270.

16. Henri Dorra, "Walter Pater. Poems by William Morris." (1868), In *Symbolist Art Theories. A Critical Anthology*, edited by Henri Dorra. Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1994, 26; Harrison., 1014.

17. Stefan Evangelista, "The Yellow Nineties Online. Arthur Symons (1865-1945)." *The Yellow Nineties Online*. Edited by Dennis Denisof and Lorraine Janzen Kooistra. 2011. [http://1890s.ca/PDFs/symons\\_bio.pdf](http://1890s.ca/PDFs/symons_bio.pdf) (accessed Jan. 1, 2014), 1.

noblest which can the best recognize symbolical worth and prize it the highest.”<sup>18</sup>

Symons compares a few of the philosophical ideas expressed in the early 1800s by Carlyle with those of the latter nineteenth century Symbolists.<sup>19</sup> An example of this is Carlyle’s statement “in a symbol there is concealment and yet revelation...”<sup>20</sup> Symons describes Symbolist literature as, “A literature in which the visible world is no longer a reality and the unseen world is no longer a dream...an attempt to spiritualize literature...the description is banished that beautiful things might be evoked magically.”<sup>21</sup> He mentions (just as Mallarmé had stated) that for the Symbolists, suggestion is a creation, and naming is a destruction.<sup>22</sup> Symons concludes that Symbolist literature is very concerned with the doctrine of mysticism and the formulation of a theory for the meaning of life.<sup>23</sup>

The manifestos written by Moreas and Mallarmé, and essays by Tolstoy and Symons all present essentially the same summarization of Symbolist concepts.<sup>24</sup>

Symbolist works include references to the tangible and intangible, synaesthesia, play of associations, intentional ambiguity, an emphasis on subjectivity, disdain for naturalism,

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18. Arthur Symons, "The Symbolist Movement in Literature." *Archive.org*. (1919; <https://archive.org/details/symbolistmovemen00symouoft> (accessed Aug. 22, 2014)), 1; Thomas Carlyle, "Sartor, Resartus. The Life and Opinions of Herr Teufelsdröckh" (1831), <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/1051/1051-h/1051-h.htm> (accessed Dec. 27, 2014)), 158-159.

19. A. Symons, 1-4.

20. Ibid.

21. A. Symons, 4, 8.

22. A. Symons, 196.

23. A. Symons, 326-327.

24. Contemporary writers Delevoy, Lucie-Smith, Dorra, and Wellek seem to have synthesized information from these primary sources.

and a mystical or occult viewpoint of the world. There are also interdisciplinary aspects to Symbolist works and the arts often share subject matter. Artwork may reference literature; theater may reference literature; or vice versa.

Arthur Conan Doyle's first Sherlock novel, *A Study in Scarlet* was published in the periodical *Beeton's Christmas Annual* and sold out before Christmas in 1887.<sup>25</sup> It was later released in book form and that version included the six illustrations by Arthur Conan's father, artist Charles Doyle. By title, *A Study in Scarlet* would seem to allude to a painting, not a mystery fiction novel.<sup>26</sup> However, it would seem that Doyle's reference to visual art in the title was intentional. Doyle scholar Paul Barolsky writes that scarlet was the "color par excellence of the 1890s and (Doyle's) adaptation of Whistler's titles of paintings (as studies in various colors) appositely aestheticizes murder in the very *mots justes* of the day."<sup>27</sup> Many of Whistler's paintings were titled as studies or arrangements in different colors and Doyle was surely aware of Whistler's work. Doyle's reference would seem to point to his awareness of the Aesthetic movement (later conflated with Symbolist) and its interdisciplinary elements.

Dr. Watson remarks in the first pages of *A Study in Scarlet*, "I naturally gravitated to London, that giant cesspool into which all the loungers and idlers of the Empire are irresistibly drained."<sup>28</sup> Doyle's "giant cesspool...irresistibly drained" employs a play of associations. There are sensory elements of smell associated with a cesspool as well as

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25. William S. Baring-Gould, *The Annotated Sherlock Holmes*. Vol. 1. New York: Clarkson N. Potter, Inc., 1967, 13; Lycett, 145. *Beeton's Christmas Annual* was published by Ward, Lock & Co.

26. Paul Barolsky, "The Case of the Domesticated Aesthete." In *Critical Essays on Sir Arthur Conan Doyle*, by Harold Orel. New York: G.K. Hall & Co., 1992, 92.

27. Barolsky, 92.

28. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, "A Study in Scarlet." (1887), In *Sherlock Holmes: The Complete Novels and Stories Volume I*, by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. New York: Bantam Dell, 2003, 4.

the visual evocation of the repulsive. These are contrasted with the pleasant connotation of the word “irresistible.” Doyle communicates an abstract idea that has visceral qualities, constructions comparable to synaesthesia in Symbolist poetry such as “Baudelaire’s Tombeau” by Mallarmé or “Spleen” in *Fleurs du Mal* by Baudelaire.<sup>29</sup> A section of verse from Baudelaire’s poem “Spleen” reads:

When skies are low and heavy as a lid  
over the mind tormented by disgust,  
and hidden in the gloom the sun pours down  
on us a daylight dingier than the dark...<sup>30</sup>

There are visceral qualities in the line “over the mind tormented by disgust” and contrasting imagery with “gloom” and “sun.” Baudelaire’s verse seems to evoke dismal, depressing imagery yet specific interpretation is left to the reader. Doyle’s sentence in the first pages of *A Study in Scarlet* also produces those effects.

It is also possible that Doyle was alluding to the Decadents or Symbolists, without specifically naming them, in his reference to the “loungers and idlers of the Empire.”<sup>31</sup> In 1882, Walter Hamilton wrote of the English Aesthetic movement as largely a “union of persons of cultivated tastes” who “define and decide what is to be admired and their followers must aspire to that standard...”<sup>32</sup> Doyle could be referencing the intellectual elitism and bourgeois class status of many members of the movement.

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29. Stéphane Mallarmé, “Tomb of Baudelaire trans. by Henry Weinfield.” *Poetry Foundation*. 1895. <http://www.poetryfoundation.org/poem/241188> (accessed January 28, 2014).

30. Charles Baudelaire, “Charles Baudelaire.” (1861), *Poets.org*. Edited by Translated by Richard Howard. <http://www.poets.org/poetsorg/poem/spleen> (accessed Jan. 24, 2015).

31. More specifically perhaps Doyle was referring to Oscar Wilde considered a dandy or idler and known to be a writer affiliated with the Decadents or Symbolists.

32. Walter Hamilton, *The Aesthetic Movement in England*. London: Reeves and Turner, 1882, Kindle Location 73 of 2931.

Regarding the crime committed in *A Study in Scarlet*, Sherlock Holmes remarks, “There’s the scarlet thread of murder running through the colorless skein of life and our duty is to unravel it, and isolate it and expose every inch of it.”<sup>33</sup> This is a remarkably poetic statement for any character in literature to make. Within this sentence there is the play of associations in the reference to the macabre or decadent (murder), the visual notion of color (scarlet) as well as colorlessness, and an ambiguous reference to both physical and intellectual activity in the terms “unravel, isolate, and expose.” Jean Moreas wrote in his 1886 literary Symbolist Manifesto of the Symbolist goal of, “Clothing the Idea in a form perceptible to the senses that nevertheless does not constitute an ultimate goal in itself but while helping to convey the Idea, remains subordinate.”<sup>34</sup> In this instance, Doyle would certainly seem to be incorporating Moreas’ ideas.

The reader of Doyle’s sentence envisions a stream of blood wound within a ball of yarn, yet the words do not specifically say that, they only allude to that with the “scarlet thread of murder.” Personal experience is involved in interpreting “colorless skein of life” – is that a reference to a dull life or an ideal life? The phrasing is both poetic and ambiguous.

Doyle scatters French phrases throughout *A Study in Scarlet*. Although not mentioned as an element of Decadent literature at the time, in 1978 Fletcher and Bradbury write in *Decadence and the 1890s* of the tendency for French decadent poets to scatter English phrases in their works and of the English decadents to scatter French

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33. Doyle, *A Study in Scarlet*, 37.

34. Moreas, 150.



throughout theirs.<sup>35</sup> In describing the potential apprehension of the criminal by the police, Sherlock remarks, “Un sot trouve toujours un plus sot qui l’admire.”<sup>36</sup> The English translation of the phrase is not provided by Doyle, and for that reason is perhaps directed towards the better educated readers. It could also be an attempt by Doyle to ally his work with that of the Decadents. His second Sherlock book furthers a Symbolist association.

In August of 1889 Doyle met with Joseph Stoddart at the Langham Hotel.<sup>37</sup> Stoddart was the managing editor of the American periodical *Lippincott’s Monthly Magazine*. A British edition of that magazine was in the works and Stoddart was looking for contributors.<sup>38</sup> Also in attendance at the meeting was Oscar Wilde and both authors were offered contracts for stories that had not yet been written.<sup>39</sup> Wilde proceeded to write *The Picture of Dorian Gray* while Doyle wrote *The Sign of Four*, his second Sherlock Holmes mystery.

Doyle’s *The Sign of Four* appeared in Lippincott’s in February 1890. The opening sentences read:

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 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

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35. Ian Fletcher, "Preface." In *Decadence and the 1890s*, edited by Ian Fletcher. London: Edward Arnold, Ltd., 1979, 12.

36. Doyle, *A Study in Scarlet*, 46. “A fool always finds a bigger fool to admire him.” Among other Sherlock books, un-translated French phrases can be found in *The Sign of Four* and *The Red Headed League*.

37. Baring-Gould, 13; Harold Orel, *Sir Arthur Conan Doyle Interviews and Recollections*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991, 18-19; Lycett, 159.

38. Baring-Gould, 13.

39. Lycett, 160.

home, pressed down the tiny piston, and sank back into the velvet-lined armchair with a long sigh of satisfaction.<sup>40</sup>

The reader learns from this passage that Sherlock Holmes has a drug addiction. The puncture scars all over his arms are evidence. Doyle provides what seem to be very intimate details on the method of ingestion as well as the immediate effects of the drug on Sherlock. Russell Goldfarb quotes Jerome Hamilton Buckley when he writes that Decadent literature explored a “dark underside of experience.”<sup>41</sup> Immoral behavior and evil were elements utilized by the Decadent writer and are recurring features of the Sherlock series.

This imagery of the above paragraph is evocative of an action someone like the character Des Esseintes would commit.<sup>42</sup> Formerly a Naturalist writer, J. K. Huysmans' Decadent book *A Rebours* (1884) presents Des Esseintes as a self-absorbed hermit with eccentric tastes and habits through highly sensual terminology. He is described as having experimented with opium and hashish but adverse reactions required him to discontinue usage.<sup>43</sup> Although more grounded than Des Esseintes, Doyle's Sherlock Holmes certainly has some equally unusual and seemingly decadent habits. The temporary escape by the character Sherlock from the crises of modern industrial society to an altered, ideal state could be considered reflective of the bohemian attitude popular with artists and writers of

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40. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, "The Sign of Four." (1890), In *Sherlock Holmes The Complete Novels and Stories Volume 1*, by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. New York: Bantam Dell, 2003,123.

41. Russell M. Goldfarb, "Late Victorian Decadence." *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 20, no. Summer (1962): 369-373; Jerome Hamilton Buckley, *The Victorian Temper* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1951), 230-231.

42. See Joris Karl Huysmans, "Against the Grain." *Project Gutenberg*. 1884. [www.gutenberg.net](http://www.gutenberg.net) (accessed January 25, 2014).

43. Huysmans, location 2356-2359 of 3244.

the time period.<sup>44</sup> Narrated by Dr. Watson, a discussion of Sherlock's addiction to opiates continues for more than one page.

As a medical doctor, Doyle would have had significant knowledge of cocaine and its effects. Opiate and cocaine drug use was widespread in the Victorian era but it was not discussed in polite society after the 1868 Pharmacy Act when opiate distribution became somewhat more regulated than it had been prior to that year.<sup>45</sup> There are a number of nineteenth century Symbolist artists and writers rumored to have been opiate drug addicts such as Dante Gabriel Rossetti, John Anster Fitzgerald, Edgar Allen Poe, and even Oscar Wilde.<sup>46</sup> These writers often included allusions to addictions in their works.<sup>47</sup> Doyle both called himself "bohemian" and was referred to as "bohemian" on more than one occasion; a term which at the time was considered a derogatory description of an irresponsible artist.<sup>48</sup> It certainly cannot be said that Doyle was an opiate user, but his character Sherlock Holmes would continue to be plagued with narcotic addiction throughout nearly the entire series. Sherlock exhibited many other decadent

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44. Lycett, 62.

45. Virginia Berridge. "Opium Over the Counter in Nineteenth Century England." *Pharmacy in History* (American Institute of the History of Pharmacy) 20, no. 3 (1978): 91-100; Gere, 68. Gere mentions that the 1868 Pharmacy Act limited opium sales to professional pharmacists.

46. Roger S. Platizky, "Like a Dull Narcotic: Speculations on Tennyson and Opium." *Victorian Poetry* (West Virginia University Press) 40, no. 2 (2002): 209-215.

47. Platizky, 210. These allusions were often misinterpreted.

48. Lycett, 62,72; Lellenberg, Stashower and Foley,101. O.E.D. definition of bohemian: A gipsy of society; one who either cuts himself off, or is by his habits cut off, from society for which he is otherwise fitted; especially an artist, literary man, or actor, who leads a free, vagabond, or irregular life, not being particular as to the society he frequents, and despising conventionalities generally. Used with considerable latitude, with or without reference to morals.

characteristics, often, according to Doyle scholar Barolsky “mimicking other aesthetes.”<sup>49</sup>

According to scholar Barry McCrea who references Graham Robb’s *Strangers: Homosexual Love in the Nineteenth Century*, Doyle set out “deliberately to portray Holmes as gay.”<sup>50</sup> The reasons set forth by Robb include that Holmes was depicted as a bachelor who disliked women; he lived with a man (Watson); and details of his personal background were never revealed.<sup>51</sup> Doyle scholar Barrie Hayne explains the relationship of Holmes and Watson as a marriage.<sup>52</sup> Scholars Barolsky and Samuel Rosenberg point to Oscar Wilde as an influence on the character.<sup>53</sup> A sense of Holmes’ isolation from society is emphasized in the books through his complete lack of a social life outside of his occupation as a detective.

In Doyle’s *The Five Orange Pips*, when the doorbell rings Watson asks Sherlock if he is expecting a friend. Sherlock replies, “Except yourself I have none. I do not encourage visitors.”<sup>54</sup> The alienation of the individual was a topic often expressed in Decadent or Symbolist literature. Huysmans’ character Des Esseintes completely shuns

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49. Barolsky, 94.

50. Barry McCrea, "In the Company of Strangers: Family and Narrative in Dickens, Conan Doyle, Joyce and Proust." (Columbia University Press) 2011, 67-92. McCrea was referencing Graham Robb. "Strangers: Homosexual Love in the Nineteenth Century." (WW Norton & Company) 2003. Homosexuality was illegal and prosecuted in the nineteenth century.

51. Ibid.

52. Barrie Hayne, "The Comic in the Canon: What's So Funny about Sherlock Holmes?" Edited by Harold Orel, 138-159. New York: G.K.Hall & Co., 1992, 140-141.

53. Barolsky, 94; Samuel Rosenberg, *Naked is the Best Disguise: The Death and Resurrection of Sherlock Holmes*. New York and Baltimore: Penguin Books Inc., 1974, 12, 101, 215. Wilde was incarcerated for a period of time for homosexuality. For his account see Oscar Wilde, "The Ballad of Reading Gaol." *Project Gutenberg*. 1896. <http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/301> (accessed Feb. 21, 2015).

54. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, "The Five Orange Pips." (1891), In *Sherlock Holmes the Complete Novels and Stories Volume I*, by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. New York: Bantam Dell, 2003, 332.

the outside world, preferring to live as a hermit amidst his exotic possessions and eccentric decor.

Doyle provides very little personal background of Sherlock Holmes throughout the series. Jan Gordon writes in her chapter of *Decadence and the 1890s* of the aesthete's preference in manufacturing a "history-less" existence.<sup>55</sup> This seems to correlate with the Symbolist goal of the suggesting rather than clarifying an Idea. By largely omitting Sherlock's background, information that Naturalist writers would certainly have included, Sherlock's personal history remains mysterious and Doyle's series seems more aligned with the Symbolist writers.

There are instances where Symbolist authors have borrowed from Doyle's Sherlock stories. Scholar John Hodgson found that Oscar Wilde likely borrowed from Doyle's *A Study in Scarlet* for his book *The Picture of Dorian Gray*.<sup>56</sup> Similar to Doyle's text and imagery, Wilde writes of Dorian Gray, "He was trying to gather up the scarlet threads of life and to weave them into a pattern; to find his way through the sanguine labyrinth of passion through which he was wandering..."<sup>57</sup>

In 1886 when Doyle was writing *A Study in Scarlet*, America was viewed by the British as a very primitive, exotic, and dangerous place.<sup>58</sup> Holmes investigates a murder case in that book where the suspected perpetrator came from the desert of Utah to the city

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55. Jan B. Gordon, "Decadent Spaces': Notes of a Phenomenology of the Fin de Siecle." In *Decadence and the 1890s*, edited by Ian Fletcher. London: Edward Arnold Ltd., 1979, 36.

56. John A. Hodgson, "An Allusion to Arthur Conan Doyle's *A Study in Scarlet* in the *Picture of Dorian Gray*." *English Language Notes* 34, no. 2 (Dec. 1996), 43.

57. Oscar Wilde, "The Picture of Dorian Gray." *Project Gutenberg*. 1890; repr.2008. <http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/174> (accessed Oct. 22, 2014), Kindle Location 1316 of 3202.

58. Christopher Clausen, "Sherlock Holmes, Order and the Late Victorian Mind." In *Critical Essays on Sir Arthur Conan Doyle*, by Harold Orel, New York: G.K. Hall & Co., 1992, 77-79.

of London to avenge the persecution and murder of his fiancé and future father-in-law by the “violent and polygamous Mormons.”<sup>59</sup> Scholar Christopher Nassaar discusses the many confusing religious opinions that were spread around in the Victorian era in his essay “Wilde’s Salome and the Victorian Religious Landscape.”<sup>60</sup> Religious tyranny in an exotic far away land was a favorite topic of decadent Symbolist literature and one which Wilde referenced in his 1892 play “Salome.”<sup>61</sup> Doyle mocked the Mormon religion in his book and Wilde later mocked the Christian religion in his play.<sup>62</sup> While Oscar Wilde has always been associated with the Symbolist movement, these two examples show Doyle’s influence on Wilde’s works. It is possible that Wilde considered elements of Doyle’s work to be of the same literary genre as his own works.

In chapter four of *The Sign of Four*, Sherlock and Watson are led by an Indian man to what appears to be a dilapidated, seedy apartment from its exterior. Once inside, they were surprised to find it luxuriously furnished and decorated. Watson describes it:

The richest and glossiest of curtains and tapestries draped the walls, looped back here and there to expose some richly mounted Oriental vase. The carpet was amber and black, so soft and so thick...Two great tiger-skins thrown athwart 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 almost invisible gold wire in the centre of the room. As it burned it filled the air with a subtle and aromatic odor.<sup>63</sup>

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59. Doyle, *A Study in Scarlet*, 80.

60. Christopher S. Nassaar, "Wilde's Salome and the Victorian Religious Landscape." *The Victorian Web*. 2002. <http://victorianweb.org/authors/wilde/nassaar> (accessed February 11, 2014). Carole Silver and other scholars also discuss this.

61. Ibid.

62. Ibid.

63. Doyle, *The Sign of Four*, 141-142.

These exotic objects would have been unusual furnishings in a typical Victorian house. Huysmans' description of the unremarkable exterior yet lavish interior of Des Esseintes' house has a similar effect on the reader. In addition, Des Esseintes' dressing room is described as covered in deep red tapestries and with plans to "spread the pelts of wild beasts and the skins of blue fox on the floor."<sup>64</sup> Huysmans' descriptions seem comparable with Doyle's. A few paragraphs later, Watson mentions the "balsamic" scent of Eastern tobacco.<sup>65</sup> In these passages, Doyle emphasizes the exotic and the sensation of scent, elements expressed in Baudelaire's poetry and also in Huysmans' book.<sup>66</sup>

The popularity of Sherlock Holmes became apparent to Doyle when he had steadily become very tired of writing about the character and decided to kill him off in 1893 in the book *The Final Problem*.<sup>67</sup> Readers were upset and Doyle heard of "many who wept and of men who even went to their work wearing mourning bands."<sup>68</sup> Doyle was even asked by a newspaper reporter about the "murder" he had committed to whom he cleverly responded, "Ah, but I did it in self defense, since if I had not killed him, he would certainly have killed me."<sup>69</sup>

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64. Huysmans, location 236-238 of 3244.

65. Doyle, *The Sign of Four*, 142-143.

66. Huysmans, location 1520-1554 of 3244. Huysmans spends an entire chapter on scents.

67. Baring-Gould, 15-17.

68. Baring-Gould, 15-17; Lycett, 209.

69. Conan Doyle. "Conan Doyle in his Study: Theory of Sherlock Holmes Concerning the Whitechapel Murder," *Cincinnati Commercial Gazette*, 10 June 1894, p.17." In *Sir Arthur Conan Doyle Interviews and Recollections*, ed. Harold Orel. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991, 71-72.

In *The Final Problem*, Dr. Watson narrates the attempt by Sherlock Holmes to capture the elusive and evil Professor Moriarty.<sup>70</sup> In the story, Moriarty is a criminal mastermind who has been trying to get rid of Sherlock Holmes in order to continue his activities without interruption. Holmes and Watson travel from London to Switzerland and all along the way various catastrophic incidents occur that very nearly kill Holmes. When Watson and Holmes arrive at Reichenbach Falls, a trick sends Watson back to the hotel leaving Holmes alone at the Falls. When Watson later runs back to the area, Holmes is nowhere in sight. Watson finds only Holmes' cigarette case which contains a note outlining Holmes' intention to rid the world of Moriarty. That note alludes to Holmes's plan requiring great self-sacrifice. Watson and the reader are left to surmise that both Holmes and Moriarty have fallen into the water to their death yet Doyle never specifically writes that event has happened. Doyle suggests this idea without naming it, a Symbolist goal specified in Moreas' Symbolist literary manifesto. Doyle's choice of Reichenbach Falls as the setting for Holmes' apparent demise may also have another Symbolist quality.

Reichenbach Falls is an actual and very picturesque place in Switzerland but Reichenbach is also the name of a German philosopher and chemist who discovered the "odinic field."<sup>71</sup> Baron Karl von Reichenbach (1788-1869) discovered a life force field of energy consisting of electricity, magnetism, and heat that surrounds all living beings but

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70. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, "The Final Problem." (1892), In *Sherlock Holmes The Complete Novels and Stories Volume I*, New York: Bantam Classic, 2003, 736.

71. Amy L. Lansky, PhD, *Active Consciousness: Awakening the Power Within*. Portolla Valley: R. L. Ranch Press, 2011, 132.



that is observable only by clairvoyants.<sup>72</sup> Reichenbach's research also involved the study of somnambulists (sleep-walkers) and connected mesmerism or hypnotism to the laws of physics.<sup>73</sup> Reichenbach's discoveries were ridiculed by his peers.<sup>74</sup> Doyle was very aware of Reichenbach's research.<sup>75</sup> The occult element of Reichenbach's research would have strongly appealed to Doyle.<sup>76</sup> In 1893, Doyle visited Reichenbach Falls and while there he was corresponding with Oliver Lodge of the Society of Psychical Research on the topic of paranormal activities, in particular, mesmerism.<sup>77</sup> There must be significance in Doyle's choice of that particular area for the ambiguously referenced "death" of Holmes.

In his book *Naked is the Best Disguise: The Death and Resurrection of Sherlock Holmes*, Samuel Rosenberg recognizes a number of the characters in Doyle's Sherlock Holmes series as actual people of Doyle's time period.<sup>78</sup> Rosenberg points out the similarities between Doyle's astute character Moriarty and the philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900) in the book, *The Final Problem*.<sup>79</sup> Rosenberg found that Nietzsche had famously visited Reichenbach Falls in 1877, several years before Doyle.<sup>80</sup>

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72. John Ashburner, "Preface." In *The Dynamics of Magnetism, Electricity, Heat, Light, Crystallisation, and Chemism in Their Relation to Vital Force*, by Baron Karl von Reichenbach, translated by Unknown, vii-xx. London: Wilson and Ogilvy, 1850, ix-xi.

73. Ashburner, xi.

74. Ashburner, ix.

75. Lycett, 102.

76. As previously discussed, it was in 1893 that Doyle joined the Society for Psychical Research.

77. Leallenberg, 330-332; Lycett, 213-214.

78. Rosenberg, 12. Rosenberg finds characters similar to William Morris, Van Gogh, and several friends of Oscar Wilde in various Sherlock Holmes stories.

79. Rosenberg, 34-50.

80. Rosenberg, 34.

According to Rosenberg, the physical and intellectual characteristics of Moriarty as described by Doyle are remarkably similar to written descriptions of Nietzsche by his friend F. Schuré. Nietzsche is well known both then and now as the philosopher claiming “god is dead” and the need for proof in order to form belief systems.<sup>81</sup> It would seem that the use of the name Reichenbach was a surreptitious reference for Doyle with multiple Symbolist connotations.

Doyle was forced by public opinion (and likely also by his publisher) to revive Holmes in 1902 in what became his most popular as well as mysterious novel, *The Hound of the Baskervilles*. The storyline of this book revolves around a supernatural giant hound that terrorizes a moor and is rumored to be involved in the death of Charles Baskerville.<sup>82</sup> There are several references made by Holmes to the “supernatural” in this book, a type of reference not mentioned very often in the previous books but quite appropriate for Sherlock’s “reincarnation.”<sup>83</sup> The repeated element of the supernatural here forms a strong connection between Doyle’s occult beliefs, Sherlock Holmes, and Symbolism. Before this, as has been discussed, Doyle’s allusions to Symbolism and the occult were more disguised.

In the first pages of *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, Dr. James Mortimer remarks to Sherlock about the supernatural aspects of the murder, “There is a realm in which the

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81. Dale Wilkerson, "Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900)." *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy A Peer-Reviewed Academic Resource*. <http://www.iep.utm.edu/nietzsch/> (accessed Sept. 13, 2014).

82. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, "The Hound of the Baskervilles" (1902), In *Sherlock Holmes The Complete Novels and Stories Volume II*, by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. New York: Bantam Dell, 2003.

83. Doyle, "The Hound", 21, 22, 37. The title of Rosenberg’s book refers to Sherlock’s resurrection.

most acute and most experienced of detectives is helpless.”<sup>84</sup> Later, however, the villain is revealed not to be a supernatural beast but a man named Stapleton, referred to continuously in the story as a naturalist. Although Stapleton was not a Naturalist writer but an entomologist, it is possible that Doyle was making a sly reference to Naturalist writers. The supernatural aspects of this novel seem to separate it from the other Sherlock stories. It seems too much of a coincidence that the villain in this novel happens to be a naturalist. The Symbolists had disdain for the Naturalists’ theories and thus perhaps this is a disguised as well as humorous Symbolist element.

During a lengthy interview conducted by Robert Barr for McClure’s Magazine in 1894, Doyle remarked:

I think the age of fiction is coming – the age when religious and social and political changes will all be effected by means of the novelist. Look, within recent years, how much has been done by such books as *Looking Backward* or *Robert Elsmere*. Everyone is educated now, but comparatively few are very educated. To get an idea to penetrate to the masses of people you must put fiction around it, like sugar round a pill.<sup>85</sup>

Doyle’s statement was made shortly after he had killed off Sherlock Holmes and had not yet planned to write any more stories with the character. The statement seems to indicate that Doyle included pedagogical elements within his literature like those found in the two popular novels that he mentions by title. As discussed, the Sherlock Holmes series seems to contain scattered codes for the sophisticated reader to decipher. Doyle’s use of Decadent elements, French phrases, the ambiguous sexuality and personal history of Sherlock, Sherlock’s decadent drug addiction, the Whistler reference in the title of *A Study in Scarlet*; all of these elements point to Symbolist associations. While no other

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84. Doyle, “The Hound,” 21.

85. Barr, 112.

scholar has specifically identified Arthur Conan (or Charles) as Symbolist, Barolsky's writings come the closest with his observations of characteristics in Sherlock Holmes that point to Holmes as an Aesthete.<sup>86</sup> Scholar Hayne points to Holmes' drug use as "closest in spirit to the Decadent movement."<sup>87</sup> Samuel Rosenberg finds allusions to aestheticism through some of Doyle's characters.<sup>88</sup> While an author is never confined to any one genre, an author that writes a book about fairies and considers it nonfiction is very odd. When that author happens to be Arthur Conan Doyle, a medical doctor and the successful writer of the rational yet fictional character Sherlock Holmes, it seems much stranger. A Symbolist movement affiliation connects Doyle's fictional Sherlock series, his "non-fictional" book on fairies, and the fairy artwork of his father, Charles.

As we have seen, fairies were a topic of conversation in both the art and literature of the era. The Doyle family had a serious preoccupation with fairies as evident in both Arthur Conan's uncle Richard and his father Charles's artwork. Although their father-son relationship does not seem to have been a close one, the evidence shows that Arthur Conan and his father each used Symbolist vocabulary in their work.

Doyle's literary associates should also be considered while considering his Symbolist status. In his personal letters, Arthur Conan mentions being influenced early on by the works of Robert Louis Stevenson (1850-1894).<sup>89</sup> The two began corresponding frequently and in 1892, Stevenson referred to Doyle as "fellow-spookist" because of their

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86. Barolsky, 92.

87. Hayne, 151.

88. Rosenberg, 101,166.

89. Lellenberg, *Letters*, 246; Lycett, 108,151.

shared interest in the occult.<sup>90</sup> As discussed, Stevenson wrote a book of fairy tales and his 1886 book *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* contains multiple Symbolist elements. Stevenson alludes to numerous crimes committed by Hyde but never specifically states them; there is decadence in the mysterious powder (like a narcotic) that changes Dr. Jekyll into Mr. Hyde, and also references to the subconscious.<sup>91</sup> It is interesting to note that Stevenson attributed this book to a vision he had of a specific type of fairy.<sup>92</sup>

Another Symbolist associate of Doyle was William Butler Yeats.<sup>93</sup> Yeats was a poet who also wrote about fairies.<sup>94</sup> Biographer Ellman writes that Yeats had assisted Arthur Symons in the writing of his book *The Symbolist Movement in Literature* and held regular discussions of literature and poetry on Monday nights at his home in London, much like Mallarmé's weekly Paris Symbolist gatherings.<sup>95</sup> Yeats was ridiculed for his belief in fairies much like Doyle.<sup>96</sup> Yeats was also a believer in the occult and thought that his study of mysticism was the most important work of his life.<sup>97</sup> Similarly, Doyle

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90. Lycett, 200; Lellenberg, *Letters*, 430.

91. Paul Barnaby and Tom Hubbard, "The International Reception and Literary Impact of Scottish Literature of the Period 1707-1918." In *The Edinburgh History of Scottish Literature: Enlightenment, Britain and Empire 1707-1918*, edited by Thomas Clancy, Susan Manning, Murray Pitcock Ian Brown. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University, 2007, 41; Belinda Thomson, "A Frenchman and a Scot on the South Seas: Paul Gauguin and Robert Louis Stevenson." *Van Gogh Museum Journal*, 2003: 57.

92. Alan Sandison, *Robert Louis Stevenson and the Appearance of Modernity: A Future Feeling*. New York: St. Martin's Press, Inc., 1996, 256.

93. Lycett, 252.

94. Ellman, 119.

95. Ellman, 143.

96. Mattar, 137.

97. Ellman, 97.

felt his work on Spiritualism was his most important work. Doyle and Yeats were both members of the Irish Literary Society and worked together on a defense case for Roger Casement who had been accused of treason and homosexuality.<sup>98</sup> It is apparent that Doyle not only knew of Yeats' work but would also have felt him to be a kindred spirit.

The Symbolist movement connects Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes series and his book on fairies. The Sherlock stories contain specific Symbolist elements while *The Coming of the Fairies* identifies with the Symbolist interest in the supernatural and the occult. Throughout his entire career Doyle was involved in both intellectual literary and psychical research groups. When considered in alliance with a specific movement in art and literature, these two books do not seem as widely disparate.

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98. Lycett, 242, 390.

## Conclusion

It does not seem so far-fetched that Charles Doyle, a patient in a mental institution could believe in fairies but how could Arthur Conan Doyle who was so highly educated and wrote such complex fictional narratives, how could he believe in fairies? His primary evidence was a set of photographs that are very obviously manufactured. As we have seen, Arthur Conan's family history would have played a part in his belief. His uncle Richard contributed a number of fairy paintings to publications and exhibitions and his father's sketchbook was filled with fairy imagery. Biographer Richard Lancelyn Green described Arthur Conan as having inherited from his father "a creative power that inclined to the bizarre and hovered on the dream fringes of the real world."<sup>1</sup>

Arthur Conan's medical background also would have played a part. In his writings on Spiritualism, he projects the idea that the information he presents is world-shattering and must be acknowledged as such.<sup>2</sup> He felt that fairies were a significant scientific discovery as well. In chapter one, it was discussed that Andrew Lang's primary purpose in creating the Folklore Society was to merge the studies of folklore and science.<sup>3</sup> Lang and Arthur Conan were well acquainted with each other's works and with that in mind, it does not seem too much of a stretch to think that Arthur Conan might have imagined his discovery to be of similar importance to Darwin's.<sup>4</sup> He considered his

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1. Lancelyn, 53.

2. Doyle, *The Vital Message*.

3. Gere, "In Fairyland," 67.

4. Lycett, 150-151, 230. Doyle's professional relationship with Lang is discussed in Lycett.

books and lectures on Spiritualism to be his most important works and his firm belief in the supernatural or spirit world would certainly have influenced his fairy research.

Contemporary artist and philosophy professor Hito Steyerl's work involves the effects of images in this digital age of image bombardment. Through video, she investigates the political relationships of images and the ethics of image production and reception; for example how an image can both reflect and actively produce an opinion on a topic.<sup>5</sup> This is exactly what occurred with Doyle and the fairy photographs.

The Cottingley girls had copied the fairy images from *Princess Mary's Gift Book*, a book generated by the British monarchy in 1915 to support the Queen's "Work for Women" fund of the war effort.<sup>6</sup> This book could probably be considered British propaganda as it relayed an imperialist outlook and even containing an imperialist story by Arthur Conan Doyle.<sup>7</sup> It included stories and poems that communicated a sense of national pride, such as a poem about fairies by Alfred Noyes.<sup>8</sup> The parents of one of the Cottingley girls would have bought this book in order to be supportive of the war efforts since most of the included stories had been previously published elsewhere.<sup>9</sup> These girls read the book and decided to present further evidence about the existence of fairies to

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5. Hito Steyerl, *eflux journal: The Wretched of the Screen*. Edited by Brian Kuan Wood, Anton Vidokle Julieta Aranda. Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2012.

6. "Princess Mary's Gift Book." *Project Gutenberg*. 1915.  
<http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/39592> (accessed Feb. 8, 2015).

7. Ibid. Doyle's story is titled "Bimbashi Joyce."

8. "Princess Mary's Gift Book," Kindle location 1917 of 2754; Lycett, 414.

9. In "Princess Mary's Gift Book" each story lists the original copyright holder's information at the beginning. No source has been located with information about how the girls got the book. This is conjecture but someone had to either buy the book for the girls or it was loaned from a library.



their parents by manufacturing photos from images in the book.<sup>10</sup> Doyle's sense of national pride and his own family's participation in the proliferation of fairy imagery would have primed him to believe in the validity of those photographs.

Artist Steyerl points out the mutability of images and explains that "to participate in the image as a thing means to participate in its potential agency."<sup>11</sup> By using Steyerl's method of tracing an image back to its original purpose and following the trail of its intended politics, it seems that all along the way these images were meant to inspire British national pride in a fairy heritage. Doyle's fairy writings were simply casting these same positions on a broad scale.

Charles Doyle's experiences with the supernatural were different than Arthur Conan's in that he admitted to seeing fairies himself however, there may be an explanation for that. One of Canadian illustrator Palmer Cox's popular fairy characters, the brownie, was utilized as the iconic image of the Eastman Kodak Brownie camera that first emerged in 1900.<sup>12</sup> Cox's fairies had also been used in marketing of numerous household products in the 1880s (see fig. 26).<sup>13</sup> There are some interesting similarities between the fairy drawings of Cox and those of Charles Doyle (see fig. 27) indicating that perhaps Charles was inspired by some of these advertisements. In that case, Charles would certainly have "seen" these creatures - on boxes - with his own eyes; just as he claimed in his sketchbook. Perhaps Charles was not quite as irrational as he has been

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10. "Princess Mary's Gift Book," Kindle location 1941 of 2754; Silver, 192. The painting in the book by Claude A. Shepperson is one of the images they utilized.

11. Steyerl, 53.

12. Eastman Kodak Co., *The Brownie Camera at 100: A Celebration*. 2000. <http://www.kodak.com/US/en/corp/features/brownieCam/> (accessed Feb. 5, 2015).

13. Kodak.

described by Doyle biographers and he was simply being humorous in his sketchbook statement about seeing fairies.

The reason for Charles Doyle's institutionalization was never publically addressed by Arthur Conan; biographer Michael Baker was one of the first researchers to determine that it was likely due to alcoholism.<sup>14</sup> Obviously, alcoholism and epilepsy are now treated very differently than in the late 1800s. Alcoholics and epileptics are no longer locked up against their will for years. As discussed, Charles' sketchbook presents his opinion that he has been unjustly institutionalized.<sup>15</sup> His watercolor fairy paintings in that same sketchbook reveal both his humor and his imagination. Other works show his intense interest in botany and an awareness of Arthur Conan's literary activities.<sup>16</sup> Charles seems to have been aware of and responsive to what was going on in the world outside of his confinement.

What difference does it make whether or not Arthur Conan and Charles Doyle were Symbolists? While the Symbolist movement serves as a connection for the purposes of this paper, it also presents a new perspective from which to view their works. A Symbolist lens looks at the intellectual sophistication of Charles Doyle's artwork. Having been brought up and trained in a family of artists, Charles was aware of art history and art movements as well as contemporary artists. Although a mental patient, he was far from an outsider artist. Arthur Conan has been widely discussed and there are countless research papers that examine his Sherlock Holmes series. With so many speculative

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14. Baker, vii-xxix. Charles Higham, author of *The Adventures of Conan Doyle* is mentioned by Baker as also coming to that conclusion.

15. Baker, 1-88.

16. Baker, 28. Charles must have had access to newspapers.

arguments presented, it seems interesting that none were found in the course of this research to have attempted a Symbolist perspective. While Arthur Conan is always mentioned among the eminent writers of the late nineteenth century, it is only for his Sherlock Holmes series. *The Coming of the Fairies* and his books on Spiritualism are largely disregarded or considered anomalies but these were the writings that he considered most important and for that reason they should not be ignored. There are many more paintings of Charles and texts of Arthur Conan that could be analyzed with the Symbolist lens. This is a broad topic and only briefly discussed here.

While the evidence presented suggests that both were participating in the Symbolist movement, none of the Symbolist periodicals of the time were found during the course of this research to contain stories by Arthur Conan or paintings by Charles. Neither one is listed in any reference or source materials as Symbolist. Charles's work was obscure and Arthur Conan's clues were too well disguised. Arthur Conan did not want to alienate his readership. It could also be that since the Sherlock Holmes series appealed to the mass population it may not have been considered great literature at the time. In the last decade of his life however, instead of concentrating on Sherlock, he wrote extensively about his occult and supernatural beliefs hoping to arouse interest in what he considered his most vital message.<sup>17</sup> Few people are aware of those writings but everyone knows of Sherlock Holmes. Arthur Conan just wanted to *be* Sherlock Holmes and solve the mystery of what happens to us when we die.

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17. *The Vital Message* is the title of his 1919 Spiritualist book. Doyle wrote just one Sherlock book after 1920, a set of stories titled *The Casebook of Sherlock Holmes*.

What have not been discussed thus far are the other categories of books written by Arthur Conan Doyle such as his historical fiction and science fiction novels. His early historical fiction *Micah Clarke* (1889) relays the journey of a young man's coming of age during the religious turmoil of seventeenth century England and the young man's dreams of universal religious tolerance and intellectual freedom. Arthur Conan had recently discovered Spiritualism and rejected his Catholic faith at the time of that writing.<sup>18</sup> *The War in South Africa: Its Causes and Conduct* (1902) was based on Arthur Conan's personal experience as a medical doctor in a Royal Army field hospital during the British conflict with the native Boers in South Africa.<sup>19</sup> The book contains his observations on the conflict and his defense of the British military against accusations of mistreating the Boers held in refugee camps.<sup>20</sup> It was this highly imperialist writing that garnered Arthur Conan's knighthood, a title that he was at first disinclined to accept.<sup>21</sup> *The Lost World* (1912) is a fantasy or science fiction novel about an expeditionary group that discovers a lost land with dinosaurs and pterodactyls in the Amazon.<sup>22</sup> Professor Challenger, a zoologist, is the main character in that book and features in two additional novels on topics related to psychical research: *The Poison Belt* (1913) and *The Land of Mist* (1926). As these examples point out, not all of Doyle's literature contained Symbolist elements. It also becomes clear from this list that the majority of his non-Sherlock Holmes works are largely unfamiliar to all but Doyle scholars.

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18. Lycett, 140-142.

19. Lycett, 268.

20. Lycett, 275.

21. Lycett, 289-292.

22. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, *The Lost World* (1912), Mineola: Dover Publications, 1998.

Sherlock Holmes and fairies were considered real beings by many Victorians. Fact and fantasy somehow merged. There is a massive amount of literature on Sherlock Holmes as though he were a real person.<sup>23</sup> As discussed earlier in regards to fairy paintings, elements of the material world such as recognizable plants or flowers combined with elements of the imagination such as fairies, and could make the viewer feel more comfortable that the work is a representation of the physical world. This propagated the belief in fairies. Doyle's descriptions of London streets, businesses, and buildings were of actual London landmarks and many of the cases that Sherlock solved had similarities to events that had been written about in the local newspapers.<sup>24</sup> The inclusion of these elements linked fact and fiction and many readers believed that Sherlock Holmes was a real detective. Later, the theater performances of the Sherlock Holmes stories would have added to that blurring of imagination and reality.<sup>25</sup>

Today we can compare Arthur Conan's unwavering belief in fairies, spirit images, and the spirit world with those in our contemporary society who claim to have seen unidentified flying objects or ghosts.<sup>26</sup> Like both of the Doyles, these people are often ridiculed for talking publicly about their encounters. Numerous books have been written and films have been made on the topics of extraterrestrial beings, otherworldly spacecrafts, and paranormal activities. There are multiple television shows presenting

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23. Baring-Gould, 23-104; David Tallon and David Baggett, *The Philosophy of Sherlock Holmes*. Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2012.

24. Lycett, 160. *The Sign of Four* included elements from the news story of Jonathan Small and an exotic stolen treasure. Also, *A Study in Scarlet* discussed Mormon polygamy, a topic in the news. There are many more examples.

25. Lycett, 286. William Gillette adapted the Sherlock Holmes stories for the first play adding a love interest for Holmes.

26. Silver, 210.

haunted houses and ghost stories. If Arthur Conan were still alive today he would probably have a television program with his own team of paranormal researchers, psychics, and all the latest paranormal-sensing equipment at the ready. Psychical research was what he considered his most important work and what he had hoped would be his lasting legacy. Instead it is Sherlock Holmes whom we find on our televisions.

Appendix



Fig. 1. "Oberon, Titania and Puck with Fairies Dancing" by William Blake, 1786, watercolor and graphite on paper, 19" x 27", Tate, London. Image ©Tate, London 2015.



Fig. 2. "Titania and Bottom" by Henri Fuseli, 1786-1790, oil on canvas, 85 1/3" x 109", Tate Gallery, London. Image ©Tate, London 2015.





Fig. 3. "Puck" by Sir Joshua Reynolds, 1789, oil on canvas, size unknown, private collection. Image from Wikimedia Commons.



Fig. 4. "The Triumphal March of the Elf King" by Richard Doyle, 1869, Plate IV, colored wood engraving, 11" x 16," *In Fairyland* by William Allingham, Longman's Green, Reader and Dyer, London. Image © Victoria and Albert Museum, London.





Fig. 5. "The Stuff Dreams are Made Of" by John Anster Fitzgerald, c.1858, oil on board, 10"x 12," Andy and Susan Borowitz. Image from Flickr.com.





Fig. 6. "The Fairy Feller's Master Stroke" by Richard Dadd, 1855-64, oil on canvas, 24 ½" x 15 ½", Tate Gallery, London. Image ©Tate, London 2015.





Fig. 7. "The Serpentine is a Lovely Lake and There is a Drowned Forest at the Bottom of It" by Arthur Rackman, 1906, pen, ink, and watercolor, 21" x 14", Private Collection. Image from J.M. Barrie, *Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens from the Little White Bird*. London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1906.



Fig. 8. "Untitled" by Charles Doyle, n.d., watercolor, possibly with pen and pencil, unknown ownership. Image from Michael Baker, *The Doyle Diary: The Last Great Conan Doyle Mystery - The Strange and Curious Case of Charles Altamont Doyle*. New York and London: Paddington Press Ltd., 1978, 33.



Fig. 9. "Couple with Fairy Followers" by Charles Doyle, n.d., pen and watercolor over pencil, 9 7/8" x 13 1/4", The Huntington Art Collections, San Marino, California. Image © Courtesy of the Huntington Art Collections.

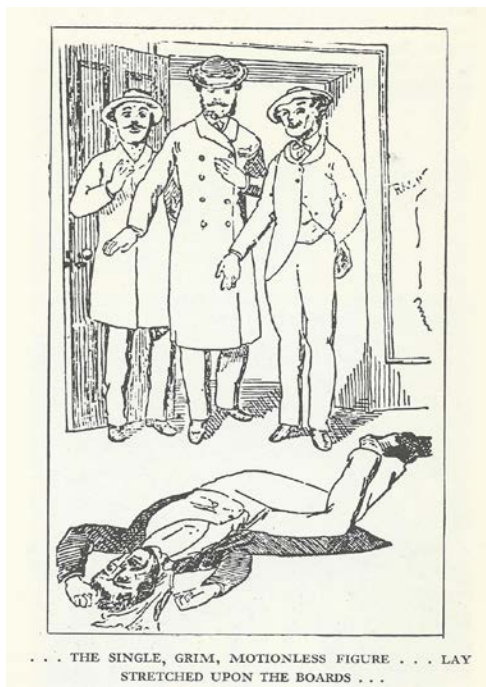


Fig. 10. Illustration by Charles Doyle for *A Study in Scarlet*. Image from Arthur Conan Doyle, *A Study in Scarlet*. London: Ward, Lock & Co., 1888.



Fig. 11. "The Apparition" by Gustave Moreau, 1874, oil on canvas, Musée Gustave Moreau. Image from ARTstor: LESSING\_ART\_10310751253.



Fig. 12. "The Nightmare" by Henri Fuseli, 1781, oil on canvas, 48" x 58 1/2", Detroit Institute of Arts. Image from ARTstor: AMICO\_DETROIT\_1039544243.





Fig. 13. "Meditation, Self Portrait" by Charles Doyle, 1885-93, watercolor, Victoria and Albert Museum. Image © Victoria and Albert Museum, London.



Fig. 14. "Hope" by Pierre Puvis de Chavannes, 1872, Oil, 40 <sup>3</sup>/<sub>8</sub> x 51 inches, The Walters Art Museum, Baltimore, MD. Image from ARTstor: LESSING\_ART\_10310751690.



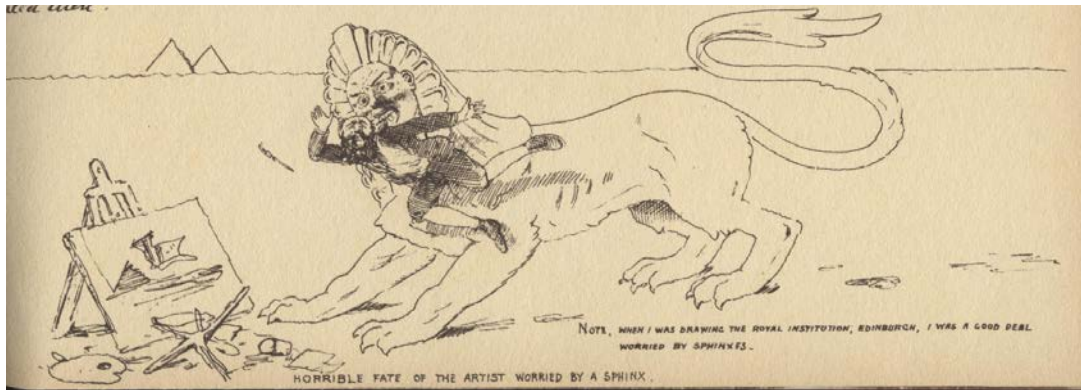


Fig. 15. "Horrible Fate of the Artist Worried by a Sphinx" by Charles Doyle. Image from Michael Baker, *The Doyle Diary: The Last Great Conan Doyle Mystery - The Strange and Curious Case of Charles Altamont Doyle*. New York and London: Paddington Press Ltd., 1978, 15.



Fig. 16. "Oedipus and the Sphinx" by Gustave Moreau, 1864, oil on canvas, 81 1/4" x 41 1/4", Metropolitan Museum of Art. Image from ARTstor: MMA\_IAP\_1039652664.



Fig. 17. "To Gustave Flaubert: The Sphinx: My Gaze which Nothing can Deflect," by Odilon Redon, 1889. Lithograph illustration for Flaubert's *Temptation of St. Anthony*. Image from ARTstor: AMICO\_MINIAPOLIS\_103824648.



Fig. 18. “Kissing a Sphinx” by Charles Doyle, 1889. Image from Michael Baker, *The Doyle Diary: The Last Great Conan Doyle Mystery - The Strange and Curious Case of Charles Altamont Doyle* by, New York and London: Paddington Press Ltd., 1978, 57.

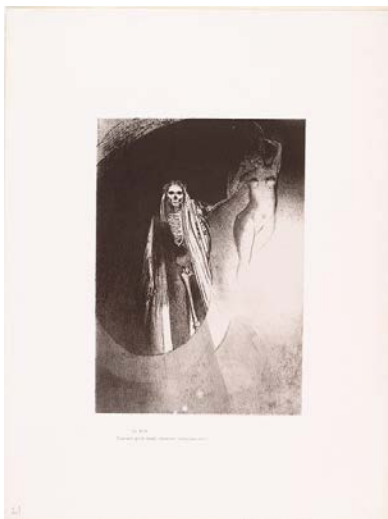


Fig. 19. “La Mort: C’est moi qui tu rends serieuse; enlaçons-nous” (Death: It Is I Who Makes You Serious; Let us Embrace) by Odilon Redon, 1896, from *La Tentation de Sainte-Antoine* (The Temptation of St. Anthony) (plate XX). One from a portfolio of twenty-four lithographs on chine appliqué, composition: 11 15/16 x 8 7/16”; sheet 20 9/16 x 15 3/4”. Publisher Vollard, Paris. Printer: Blanchard, Paris. Edition: 50. Gift of Abby Aldrich Rockefeller. The Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY, U.S.A. Digital Image © The Museum of Modern Art/Licensed by SCALA / Art Resource, NY.

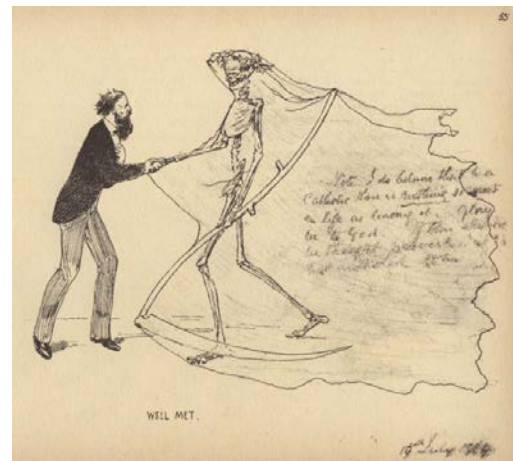


Fig. 20. “Well Met” by Charles Doyle, 1889. Image from Michael Baker, *The Doyle Diary: The Last Great Conan Doyle Mystery - The Strange and Curious Case of Charles Altamont Doyle* by. New York and London: Paddington Press Ltd., 1978, 55.





Fig. 21. "Truth as Death" by Charles Doyle, 1889. Image from Michael Baker, *The Doyle Diary: The Last Great Conan Doyle Mystery - The Strange and Curious Case of Charles Altamont Doyle*. New York and London: Paddington Press Ltd., 1978, 7.



Fig. 22. "Little Girls when the Practice Alone" by Charles Doyle, 1887, drawing with watercolor, 6 1/3" x 9", Fine Arts Museum, San Francisco, California. Image from ARTstor: AMICO\_SAN\_FRANCISCO\_103854604.



Fig. 23. "Untitled" or "Spirits of the Prisoners" by Charles Doyle, 1885-1889, pencil, pen, and brown ink, blue wash, 14" x 10 1/8." Image from Michael Baker, *The Doyle Diary: The Last Great Conan Doyle Mystery. The Strange and Curious Case of Charles Altamont Doyle*. New York and London: Paddington Press Ltd., 1978, 75.



Fig. 24. "Elsie and the Gnome," "Photograph taken by Frances Griffiths. Fairly bright day in September, 1917. The "Midg" camera. Distance, 8 ft . Time, 1/ 50th sec. The original negative has been tested, enlarged, and analysed in the same exhaustive manner as A. This plate was badly under-exposed. Elsie was playing with the gnome and beckoning it to come on to her knee." Image and text from Arthur Conan Doyle, *The Coming of the Fairies*, London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1922, 39.





Fig. 25. "Frances and the Fairies," "Photograph taken by Elsie Wright. Bright sunny day in July, 1917. The "Midg" camera. Distance, 4 ft. Time, 1/ 50th sec. The original negative is asserted by expert photographers to bear not the slightest trace of combination work, retouching, or, anything whatever to mark it as other than a perfectly straight single-exposure photograph, taken in the open air under natural conditions. The negative is sufficiently, indeed, somewhat over-exposed. The waterfall and rocks are about 20 ft. behind Frances, who is standing against the bank of the beck. A fifth fairy may be seen between and behind the two on the right. The colouring of the fairies is described by the girls as being of very pale pink, green, lavender, and mauve, most marked in the wings and fading to almost pure white, in the limbs and drapery. Each fairy has its own special colour." Image and text from Arthur Conan Doyle, *The Coming of the Fairies*. London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1922, 33.





Fig. 27. "Little Girls when They Practice Alone," detail, Charles Doyle, 1887, drawing with watercolor, 6 1/3" x 9", Fine Arts Museum, San Francisco, California. Image from ARTstor: AMICO\_SAN\_FRANCISCO\_103854604.



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