



**Sherlock Holmes through time: The secret behind Arthur  
Conan Doyle's enduring success**

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**Abstract:** For generations, people have been captivated by Sherlock Holmes, a character who is more than a fictional detective. This paper explores why Holmes is still so popular today, how Arthur Conan Doyle crafted a character who remains relevant, and some of his methods. Despite being inspired by real detective techniques and individuals such as Dr. Joseph Bell, Holmes is a fictional character whose remarkable deduction technique was not fiction. The warmth and humor of the relationship between Holmes and Watson are another source of the secret popularity of the stories. Holmes's popularity has endured through the decades because of the films that have brought him back to life. This project uncovers the mystery of Sherlock Holmes' enduring popularity by examining media, character relationships, and history.

**Keywords:** industrialization, detective genre, medical background, deduction, blue carbuncle, Joseph Bell, friendship, film industry, Sherlock series.

**Introduction.** The 19th century was a peak time of industrialization in Western society. While technologies made life easier and created new job opportunities, they also had drawbacks. Many rural workers lost their work as machines replaced manual labor in farming, forcing them to move to crowded cities seeking new jobs places, and life. As the



overpopulation increased, the rate of crime also rose. Investigating the crime and punishing culprits became more difficult, necessitating more advanced forensic methods. This need may have contributed to the creation of the London police force and the rise of the detective genre in literature. The increase in crime stories reflected the public's rising interest in mystery and justice. One name, in particular, plays a significant role in this genre: Sherlock Holmes. Created in the late 19th century, the character remains as well-known today as it was back then. But what made Holmes so unique? Why do his stories still captivate the readers? The answer may be in the medical knowledge of Conan Doyle and the real-life inspiration behind Holmes's extraordinary skills. The friendship between Sherlock Holmes and Dr. John Watson is one of the most enduring and renowned in literature and film. These two characters have fascinated readers over time. Their relationship is more than an occupational association; it is a close friendship based on trust, devotion, and respect. Their relationship has inspired numerous adaptations, proving its timeless appeal'' According to Guinness World Records (2012), Sherlock Holmes is the most frequently portrayed human character in film and television history, with more than 250 adaptations. Holmes's appeal in the movie industry is due to his ageless charm, interesting personality, and adaptability to different periods and styles. From silent movies to contemporary action movies, his on-screen presence in the movie world keeps changing but continues to entice new audiences. In classic black-and-white movies or big-budget Hollywood films, Holmes' legacy in the movie world cannot be compared to anyone else.

Industrialization is the process of building factories and inventing new technologies. Many socioeconomic changes occurred during industrialization in Western societies. These changes have a huge influence on people's lives. It has both positive and negative sides. As far as good features are concerned, it has improved the economy, made products cheaper and the scientific field has transformed how we use it today. In the countryside, due to use of modern machinery in farming, technologies caused the loss of many villagers' job



places. As a result, many people moved to central towns seeking better lives and jobs in newly built factories, leading to overpopulation and poor life conditions. This process made differences bigger between the upper and lower classes. William Burns explained how the revolution influenced British people's lives:

The Industrial Revolution led to powerful social changes, especially in the growth of urbanization and new forms of labor. English urban areas, particularly London and the cities of the industrial north, grew at an astounding rate, and by the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, Britain was the first large nation to have a majority of its population living in cities. (Burns, 2010).

Social, economic, and political problems began to rise, including spread of diseases, illegal businesses, robberies, and increased crime. People were faced with unemployment and poverty, which led them to commit crimes. Investigating crime and punishing the culprits became almost impossible; it was now much easier to hide after committing murder or robbery. Recognizing these changes, the government established the London police force.

The Metropolitan Police, established in 1829 by Sir Robert Peel, was designed to provide a professional, organized police force for London, focusing on crime prevention rather than punishment. (Critchley, 1967).

They have tried to catch criminals, find clues, and explore the crime scene. Community changes and their results were written in newspapers which, play a major role in British people's social lives; different crime reports were also included. Their main meaning was about identifying and catching the criminal; most people liked that, and expectedly, fictional crime stories started to be written.

Although Conan Doyle did not invent detective fiction, he revolutionized genre with Sherlock Holmes. The detective genre had already been initiated by Edgar Allan Poe in *The Murders in the Rue Morgue* (1841), where a detective named Auguste Dupin applied



deductive reasoning to solve crimes. But it was Sherlock Holmes, in his first appearance in *A Study in Scarlet* (1887), who transformed detective fiction, he uses his sharp logic to solve crimes: he looks at small clues, thinks logically, and finds answers that others miss. Initially, Arthur Conan Doyle got refusals from some publishers but when Holmes caught on, the detective character was a worldwide sensation. The new protagonist was well-received by crime lovers for his perceptive and original character. Sherlock's interest in chemistry and science reflects the author's strong medical background, as Conan Doyle studied at the University of Edinburgh in Scotland. Sherlock Holmes was an exceptional observer. By simply looking at someone, he could deduce a great deal about them.

Deduction is a way of thinking that helps people find the truth by using logic. Deduction is useful in daily life, helping people make smart decisions by paying attention to details and thinking logically. For example, if all Basenji dogs do not bark and Max is a Basenji, then Max does not bark, or if a car engine is warm, someone has used it recently. The deduction he used in the story *The Adventure of Blue Carbuncle* could be a good example here. Holmes carefully looks at an old hat and figures out details about its owner. He sees that the hat was once expensive but is now old, meaning the man had money before but is now poor. The wide size of the hat suggests that he is intelligent. The broken strap shows he used to be careful but has become careless over time. Ink stains suggest he still cares about his appearance a little. Watson is surprised by how much Holmes can tell just from a hat, proving his sharp detective skills. “On the contrary, Watson, you can see everything. You fail, however, to reason from what you see. You are too timid in drawing your inferences” (Doyle, 1892).

Among the most interesting cases of Sherlock Holmes, *The Adventure of the Musgrave Ritual*, unites history, tradition, and detection and introduces Holmes' astute intellect in a case that combines past and present. First published in 1893 as part of *The Memoirs of Sherlock Holmes*, the story is an individual mystery ranging from an old family



ritual to a treasure buried (Doyle, 1893). The narrative begins as Reginald Musgrave, Holmes's older university friend, visits him in quest of some help for the peculiarity of an inherited family ritual. The "Musgrave Ritual" is an ages-old mystical verse consisting of seemingly incomprehensible directives: "Whose was it? —His who is gone. Who shall have it? —He who will come" (Doyle, 1893). When Musgrave's butler, Brunton—a shrewd but curious fellow—disappears after attempting to crack the ritual, Holmes takes the case. Through careful deduction, he realizes the poem is an encoded pair of directions to an unknown location on the Musgrave estate. By following its detailed instructions, Holmes discovers a hidden underground chamber where he discovers an old, dusty trunk. Inside lies a lost treasure—"an old, discolored crown, a strange and ancient thing" (Doyle, 1893). Unfortunately, Brunton, who had been trying to steal the treasure for himself, had been buried alive and perished. This story displays several themes that are central to Holmes' detective approach and the broader detective genre. It is primarily the force of reasoning deductive; what initially appears to be an apparently eccentric family tradition is discovered to be an intricate enigma with a substantial historical foundation. The story also illustrates the force of history in the present day—Musgrave's forbears unwittingly stored a priceless royal treasure for hundreds of years unaware of its value. In addition, the case serves as a morality about unchecked ambition; Brunton's greed and heedless quest for riches ultimately cause his downfall. Beyond being a fascinating detective story, The Adventure of the Musgrave Ritual also possesses literary and historical value. It draws on 19th-century fascination with secret codes, buried treasure, and peerages, the best-selling genres of the era in Victorian literature. In addition, it is among the first stories to reveal how Holmes applies his detective skills before he becomes recognized as London's greatest detective.

Sherlock Holmes was not just the product of Conan Doyle's imagination. One of the surgery professors of the writer, Joseph Bell, had a great sense of deduction. He can infer his patients' professions, last actions, and places they visit by observing their appearance,



clothes, and even words. One of Bell's most famous pieces of evidence was his ability to determine a patient's military background through simply his behavior:

You see, gentlemen, the man was a respectful man but did not remove his hat. They do not in the army, but he would have learned civilian ways had he been long discharged. He has an air of authority and he is obviously Scottish. As to Barbados, his complaint is elephantiasis, which is West Indian and not British (Doyle, 1924).

Apparently, this way of determining became the foundation of Sherlock Holmes's approach to crime-solving. Another key success of Sherlock Holmes stories could be an author's medical knowledge, which played a major role in making the detective's methods more realistic. Especially in *The Adventure of the Dying Detective*. Sherlock uses many medical methods to catch the villain; Sherlock pretends to suffer from a rare and dangerous disease called Tapanuli fever, which is spread in tropical areas; he tries to look like a real ill. Because of knowing many illness symptoms, he reflects real patients: refusing to eat, extreme weakness, and sick appearance, he manipulates the antagonist of the story, Culverton Smith, he makes Smith believe that Holmes' death is near; as a result, Smith tells the details of crime that he had committed: "You are not dead yet, Mr. Holmes. I would not be in your position for all the money in the world" (Doyle, 1913).

In that story, we can also notice the role of Dr John Watson; he secretly listens to the conversation between 'sick' Holmes and criminal Smith; and he becomes a witness to that case. Arthur Conan Doyle had reflected his medical background by John Watson, who was an army doctor and the one and only friend of antisocial Holmes. At first glance, Holmes and Watson look like complete opposites. Holmes is highly intelligent and logical and often introverted. He is a brilliant detective who solves the most mysterious cases with his great sense of observation. Watson, on the other hand, is a realistic, inventive, and dependable friend who values emotions and people. As Watson describes in *A Study in Scarlet* (1887),





Holmes is "as sensitive to flattery on the score of his art as any girl could be of her beauty" (Doyle, 1887). This means that although he looks like he has no feelings, Holmes does have an ego and emotions, although he represses them. Watson is always on Sherlock's side, even when it becomes very dangerous or no one believes in the detective, and also Sherlock often relies on Watson and trusts him more than anyone, even his own brother. Their friendship begins with Watson, a veteran war doctor looking for a roommate. A mutual acquaintance introduces him to Holmes, and they eventually decide to share an apartment together at 221B Baker Street. The differences between their personalities make them a great team, and stories are told by Watson as adventures of his close friend. Although Sherlock teases Watson many times, he highly respects him, and it makes stories not only about catching culprits but also about loyal and strong friendship, which both admire and care for each other. As Watson himself rightfully says, "I am lost without my Boswell" (Doyle, 1891), proving that their friendship is just irreplaceable. Their relationship has already shaped several adaptations, which goes on to prove that their friendship remains timeless.

Sherlock Holmes has been portrayed in countless films, television programs, and stage plays, making him the most represented human character in entertainment history. Each production reimagines Holmes in his own way, he has been performed by directors in various ways over the years:

1. Basil Rathbone (1939-1946) was the classic gentleman detective.
2. Robert Downey Jr. (2009, 2011) was a more dynamic, abnormal Holmes.
3. Benedict Cumberbatch (2010-2017, Sherlock) brought Holmes into the modern era, emphasizing his intellectual arrogance and emotional depth.

The BBC TV series Sherlock (2010–2017) stars Benedict Cumberbatch and Martin Freeman in this modern remake of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's classic detective stories. The



series has gained worldwide popularity for its modern-day twist on Sherlock Holmes, in which his adventures are transferred to present-day London but still retain the essence of the original character. With a high IMDb score of 9.1/10, the series earned many awards, including the Emmys and BAFTAs. The most exciting new aspect introduced by Sherlock is the mind palace technique that Holmes uses in order to pull out vast amounts of information from his mind. While the idea might seem like something from the comics, it is based on an ancient mnemonic system once used by memory champions (Smithsonian Magazine, 2014). Another groundbreaking aspect of the show is its on-screen text messages that pop up in front of the viewer instead of on their mobile phone screens. The technique quickly went viral and was then adopted by other TV shows (Fast Company, 2014). While set on Conan Doyle's stories, Sherlock makes big creative departures. One would think that the advent of technology in its time, such as smartphones, computers, and CCTV, would never have happened in a 19th-century novel originally. Most of the traditional stories were also modified to include contemporary aspects. Such as a Study in Scarlet that becomes a Study in Pink or The Greek Interpreter written as The Geek Interpreter (Screen Rant, 2022). Not staying entirely faithful to Doyle's stories, this series re-creates the iconic detective of the 21st century. Its smart storytelling, ground-breaking cinematography, and talented cast have secured this series its place as one of the greatest Sherlock Holmes adaptations on television today.

**Conclusion.** Industrialization is introduced here as a force transforming Western cultures, particularly Britain, with the introduction of new technology and factory machinery reorganizing economies and ways of life. With industrialization making production easier, and cheaper, and speeding up scientific progress, it resulted in overpopulation of the cities, farm unemployment through mechanization, and extreme class inequalities. Urban migration from urban industrial cities to rural towns created tough living conditions, crime, and social disorder, leading to professional police bureaucracies such as





the London Metropolitan Police. The question then shifts to how the new trends in society affected literature, namely detective literature. Crime was a real problem in society, in the actual press accounts as well as in fictionalized reporting of crime. Edgar Allan Poe had begun the detective fiction genre with *The Murders in the Rue Morgue* (1841), but Sherlock Holmes of Arthur Conan Doyle revolutionized detective fiction. Holmes's powers of observation and logic were the reason for his elevation to legendary status, and he set the standard for all subsequent fictional detectives. Though the text is capable of correlating detective fiction and crime with industrialization in a positive context, there are a couple of issues and problems that remain unresolved. First, it is not concerned with how detective fiction developed later than Holmes—how other authors such as Agatha Christie or Raymond Chandler redefined the genre for newer social diseases. It is secondary industrialization management, one that is only interested in Britain and does not know its influence on detective fiction elsewhere, e.g., America or France. One of the most perceptive characteristics of Holmes is his overuse of deduction, a chain of argument which logics out from provided evidence. The novel does this in *The Adventure of the Blue Carbuncle* when Holmes infers a man's poverty, intelligence, and way of living from his hat. *The Musgrave Ritual* is another example of how one gets to see how Holmes succeeds in unraveling all the allusions to the past and synthesize mystery, history, and ethics. The story warns against unlimited ambition, in the form of the doomed romance of butler Brunton for his attempt at taking over a kept prize. The novel has a deep anchor in literary and historical allusions but is not so much a book in which the psychological or philosophical underpinning of the detective novel genre takes center stage. The actual-life influences on the character of Holmes, i.e., Dr. Joseph Bell, Conan Doyle's co-worker and one with amazing powers of observation, are also reviewed by the article. Bell's diagnostic technique, which involved piling small details into grandiose theories, immediately left its mark on Holmes' detective strategy. Doyle's own experience as a scientist also influenced



his writing, for instance, in *The Adventure of the Dying Detective*, when Holmes fakes illness in an effort to apprehend a criminal. Holmes-Watson friendship is another turning point too. Watson, being a man and medic, matches Holmes' analytical intellect with emotional IQ. They share a trust and respect bond that underlies the stories excluding sleuthing. Holmes, ice reserve entire and nothing more, prizes Watson's friendship so highly that the friendship is essential to the long-term popularity of the detective. Finally, the work touches upon how Holmes has been re-imagined on other platforms. From Basil Rathbone's conservative approach to Robert Downey Jr.'s action-oriented approach and Benedict Cumberbatch's modern-day Holmes in *Sherlock* (2010-2017), each remake captures some cultural and cinematic trends. The BBC series updated Holmes' detective work with a tech twist in the modern world like texting and the adaptation of mind palace technique, illustrating how technology could be incorporated into the narrative without straying from the detective's essential nature. Moreover, the influence of new media—video games and interactive stories—on the detective genre is a subject yet to be investigated. Generally, the article is a thorough analysis of the impact of industrialization on literature, crime, and society. It is a correct description of historical change as well as the history of detective fiction and designates Sherlock Holmes as an artifact of his time but receptive to revision in the modern world.

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