



# THE HOUND OF THE BASKERVILLES

SIR ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE was born in Edinburgh in 1859 and died in 1930. Into these years he crowded a variety of activity and creative work that earned him an international reputation and inspired the French to give him the epithet of 'the good giant'. He was educated at Stonyhurst and later studied medicine at Edinburgh University, where he became the surgeon's clerk to Professor Joseph Bell whose diagnostic methods provided the model for the science of deduction perfected by Sherlock Holmes.

He set up as a doctor at Southsea and it was while waiting for patients that he began to write. His growing success as an author enabled him to give up his practice and to turn his attention to other subjects. He was a passionate advocate of many causes, ranging from divorce law reform and a Channel tunnel to the issuing of steel helmets to soldiers and inflatable life jackets to sailors. He also campaigned to prove the innocence of individuals and was instrumental in the introduction of the Court of Criminal Appeal. He was a volunteer physician in the Boer War and later in life became a convert to spiritualism.

As well as his Sherlock Holmes stories, Conan Doyle wrote a number of other works including historical romances, such as *The Exploits of Brigadier Gerard* (1896) and *Rodney Stone* (1896). In the science fiction tale *The Lost World* (1912), he created another famous character, Professor Challenger, who appears in several later stories.

Sherlock Holmes first appeared in *A Study in Scarlet* in 1887. The Holmes stories soon attracted such a following that Conan Doyle felt the character overshadowed his other work. In 'The Final Problem' (1893) Conan Doyle killed him off, but was obliged by public demand to restore the detective to life. Despite his ambivalence towards Holmes, he remains the character for which Conan Doyle is best known.

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*with Death* (2000). He has contributed articles on film, popular culture and the visual arts to many newspapers and magazines, including the *New Statesman*, *Modern Painters*, *Sight and Sound*, *Time Out*, *Granta* and the *Burlington Magazine*. He is chairman of the Design Council and of the Royal Mint Advisory Committee, and the longest-serving Trustee of the Victoria and Albert Museum. He was knighted for services to art and design education in 2001 and was awarded the Royal Society of Arts' Bicentennial Medal the following year.

ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE

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*The Hound of the Baskervilles*

*Another Adventure of Sherlock Holmes*

*Edited with an Introduction and Notes by*

CHRISTOPHER FRAYLING



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I have always associated *The Hound of the Baskervilles* in my mind's eye with Sir Edwin Landseer's painting *Dignity and Impudence* (1839), which was on exhibition in the National Gallery during Conan Doyle's lifetime and which now hangs – periodically – in the Tate Britain at Millbank. The painting shows a large, supercilious-looking, unperturbed bloodhound on the left of the picture, next to a tiny, eager-looking, white Scottish terrier who looks as though he is about to start barking at any moment, both framed by the entrance to a wooden kennel in a parody of seventeenth-century Dutch domestic paintings. Landseer deliberately gave the two dogs almost human qualities. An engraving of Landseer's most popular work was on the library wall of the small prep school in Sussex where I first read *The Hound* (in a bound run of the *Strand* magazine) at the age of ten. Although Landseer's bloodhound was actually called Grafton and the terrier Scratch – the dogs belonged to the man who commissioned the picture – in my imagination they were for ever Sherlock Holmes and Dr Watson, precursors in canine form of the immortal partnership. They were also more than a little grotesque and scary.

In the very first Holmes book, *A Study in Scarlet* (1887), Dr Watson watches the detective examining the scene of the crime and is 'irresistibly reminded of a pure-blooded, well-trained foxhound, as it dashes backward and forward through the covert, whining in its eagerness until it comes across the lost scent'. Holmes himself later adds, 'I am one of the hounds and not the wolf'. Throughout the subsequent Sherlock Holmes stories, Watson likes to compare Holmes on a case with a hunting dog on the scent: the detective combines the excited single-mindedness of a hound, with periods back home of depressed or lethargic dreaminess. Watson's own well-intentioned but usually misguided impetuosity is very like Scratch's. He is forever bounding up to Holmes, expecting a pat on the head – only to be disappointed. History has unfortunately not recorded Conan Doyle's verdict on *Dignity and Impudence*. But he liked well-crafted paintings, gundogs and Queen Victoria, so Landseer might well have appealed to his taste. Although he called the first Holmes book *A Study in Scarlet* – 'a little a

jargon', as he put it, and a reference to the arty side of the detective's personality, as well as to the studies or nocturnes of Whistler which had been the subject of a much-publicized lawsuit – Conan Doyle's attitude to modern art was dismissive as his private journal was later to reveal: 'A wave of [artistic] insanity is breaking out in various forms in various places. If it stops where it is, it will only be a curious phenomenon... One should put one's shoulder to the door and keep out the insanity all one can.'

The 'curious phenomenon' was to become much more than that, and Landseer's brand of anthropomorphism is very out of fashion now, except in the worlds of Walt Disney, George Lucas and some children's book illustrators. But in *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, the dog is without doubt the star of the show. The sleuth-hound on his trail is absent from six out of the fifteen chapters – one reason why the book works so well as a unified novel, rather than as a short story with flashbacks – but the hound is always there, a symbol of the mystery which unleashes the plot, the dark secrets of the moor, and of the ancestral curse which must be explained away. One over-zealous critic of the 1930s referred to the beast as 'the proletarian baying at the gates of the bourgeoisie',<sup>1</sup> which is pushing it. A Freudian would doubtless say it was the Id. At the end of Paul Morrissey's trashy, chaotic film version starring Peter Cook and Dudley Moore (1977) – intended as a homage by the Warhol Factory to both Hammer and *Carry On* films – the friendly Irish wolfhound with whom Sir Henry has fallen in love runs away from Baskerville Hall with a garish family oil painting in a gilt frame round its neck: And so, says the caption, 'The Dog Stole the Picture'. The painting is a portrait of the hound, made in Van Gogh style by the late Sir Charles. In Billy Wilder's film, *The Private Life of Sherlock Holmes* (1970), the creature's reputation has reached even Russia. The Director General of the Imperial Russian Ballet informs Holmes at one point that 'Madame [Petrova, the great ballerina] is a great admirer of yours. She has read every story. Her favourite is *The Dog from Baskerville* '; to which the detective replies, 'I'm afraid it loses something in translation.'

In the mid-1990s, I made a BBC television documentary which – as well as examining the genesis of *The Hound of the Baskervilles* in the imagination of Conan Doyle – explored the various black dog legends which have been claimed as the folkloric origin of the curse. In one of the sequences set in Conan Doyle's Dartmoor hotel room, we had an engraving of *Dignity and Impudence* hanging in the background. Not as an example of Victorian kitsch – the way Alfred Hitchcock used the same engraving at the melodramatic climax of *Marnie* (1964) – but

as a reminder that the folklore shouldn't be taken too seriously. Conan Doyle's friend, the crime writer Max Pemberton, reckoned that the inspiration for the hound came from Black Shuck or Old Shuck of Norfolk – a particularly nasty specimen (*shuck* or *scucca* meaning 'the demon' in Anglo-Saxon) which was reputed to be the size of a calf and was easily recognizable by his saucer-sized eyes weeping green or red fire. Desperate mothers in the neighbourhood would use the phrase 'Black Shuck will get you' to control their unruly children. Herbert Greenhough Smith, the editor of the *Strand* magazine, by contrast, preferred 'the tradition of the fiery hound in a Welsh guidebook' – probably the phantom boar-hound of Hergest Ridge on the Welsh borders, a creature which put in an appearance, complete with clanking chains, whenever there was a death in the local Baskerville-Vaughan family. Other writers, particularly since the 1930s, have opted for a whole pack of spectral whisht hounds (whisht or wush meaning 'sad and uncanny' in local dialect), which hunted the evil seventeenth-century squire Richard Cabell or Capel to his doom at Buckfastleigh on the edge of Dartmoor and which made a comeback every Midsummer's Eve.

The folklore of the British Isles is, in fact, littered with legends of phantom dogs (known as 'black dogs' by professional folklorists, whatever colour they happen to be), and there are still Black Dog lanes and Black Dog inns in villages all over the map. Most of these dogs are fairly benign creatures which warn of impending disaster or haunt a location where something nasty happened to their owner or their owner's family. Many seem to have been supporters of the Stuarts, and especially King Charles I. One of them was a ghostly bloodhound from Moretonhampstead that snuffled about in a ditch opposite a pub, hunting for spilt beer. Theo Brown,<sup>2</sup> a distinguished West Country folklorist affiliated to the University of Exeter who spent much of her adult life making a vast collection of black dog stories, reckoned that: 'The Hound of the Baskervilles does not correspond with any of the black dogs known so far, and it is probably a hotchpotch of several', a reworking of the usual commemorative or haunting function into something considerably more vicious.

The Holmes stories are full of dogs: dogs that bark in the night-time and dogs that don't. The detective – it is revealed in 'The Gloria Scott' – was bitten by one when he was at university, a bull terrier, and it took him a full ten days to recover. In *The Sign of the Four* Holmes says of the half-spaniel, half-lurcher Toby, 'I would rather have [his] help than that of the whole detective force of London.' Which wasn't saying much, it has to be noted, but Toby was a remarkable follower of scents. No other dog in the stories, though, has the charisma

and the sheer nastiness of the hound of the Baskervilles. This has created problems, well known in the business, for the production designers of film versions of the book. *The Hound of the Baskervilles* is the most filmed, because the best loved, the most popular and the most horrific, of all the Sherlock Holmes stories and in the past the dilemma of how to present the hound itself has been solved in many different ways. The dilemma is not only how to find a dog which can do what the director wants, it is also to live up to the thrilling curtainline of Ch. 2: 'Mr Holmes, they were the footprints of a gigantic hound!' Also, how to reduce the powerful metaphor to the level of the literal which film demands. Solutions have included average-sized dogs with big masks on their heads for close-ups; large dogs with enhanced teeth; children dressed up as Holmes and Sir Henry confronting apparently gigantic creatures on pint-sized sets (this one was seriously contemplated by Hammer Films in 1959); animated silhouettes; flames scratched on the negative, frame by frame and, latterly, dogs tinted by computer in post-production with luminous phosphorescent haloes. Even before the first major film version, made in Germany as *Der Hund von Baskerville* in 1914, the hound was causing havoc. Impresario Ferdinand Bonn presented his very successful adaptation at the Berliner Theater in 1907, and recalled:

It so happened that I had a big, black dog that my wife was very attached to... when Argyll [the villain, who in this version wants to get hold of Bonnie Prince Charlie's treasure, locked up at Schloss Baskerville in the Scottish Highlands] disappeared into the cave, the great black Hound springs over the stage in savage leaps, hunting him. The savage leaps were induced by a piece of wurst that my wife, standing in the wings, held up aloft tantalisingly. At first we put on the Hound a false head with electric lamps, but it would have been loudly ridiculed; a little better was a muzzle with electric lamps... The howling presented just as great difficulties. After trying with phonographs, automobile horns, steam whistles and so on, we found the simplest and best way. A man howled through a gramophone horn, at a suitable distance.<sup>3</sup>

For some reason, *Der Hund* – with its supernatural atmosphere which turns out to be all too natural – proved especially popular in Germany. In the silent era, the number of adaptations reached *Der Hund von Baskerville VI* and a copy of the 1937 sound version was discovered at the end of the Second World War in Hitler's private film library at Berchtesgaden. The dictator personally preferred Alsatians to hounds. Many of the sequels dispensed with the dog altogether. In one of the very first Holmes adaptations, released in Denmark in August 1906 as *The Grey Dame/Den Graa Dame*, the hound became a spectral lady.

But no film version, however elaborate the special effects, has managed to match Watson's thrilling description in Ch. 14 of the novel:

A hound it was, an enormous coal-black hound, but not such a hound as mortal eyes have ever seen. Fire burst from its open mouth, its eyes glowed with a smouldering glare, its muzzle and hackles and dewlap were outlined in flickering flame. New

in the delirious dream of a disordered brain could anything more savage, more appalling, more hellish, be conceived than that dark form and savage face which broke upon us out of the wall of fog.

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*The Hound of the Baskervilles* works best on the printed page. When it was first published in the *Strand* magazine of August 1901, the first instalment was by far the most eagerly anticipated of all Conan Doyle's writings. The *Strand*, for the one and only time in its history, went into seven printings and there were queues around the block outside its offices. The magazine's circulation rose to an estimated 300,000 (its average was 180,000). Conan Doyle had predicted that his new story would in all probability 'attract a great deal of attention' but he was being uncharacteristically cautious. He had with a sense of relief killed off his detective in the Reichenbach Falls with 'The Final Problem' nearly eight years before because Holmes 'takes my mind from better things'. Like his friend Arthur Sullivan, he had been convinced that the work he was best at, the work which had made his creation a household name, was in some sense unworthy of an eminent Victorian. And now he was rid of it. When Conan Doyle finally agreed to write a Preface to the collected Holmes stories (he had refused several times), he was to begin it with the words 'so elementary a form of fiction as the detective story hardly deserves the dignity of a Preface'. Arthur Sullivan broke up his Savoy partnership with W. S. Gilbert, and went on to write ponderous and derivative sacred music. Simultaneously, Conan Doyle sent Sherlock Holmes into 'that dreadful cauldron of swishing water and seething foam', to give himself more time to devote to the historical novels which he regarded as literature proper: opinions differ as to the wisdom of these career moves.

There had been a few signs, in the intervening years, that he might be thinking about relenting. In summer 1896, he wrote a short Sherlock Holmes parody for an Edinburgh student magazine. A year later, he started preparing a play but soon abandoned it because, 'I have grave doubts about Holmes on the stage at all – it's drawing attention to my weaker work which has unduly obscured my better.' By July 1898, however, he had agreed to allow the American actor-manager William Gillette to make his own stage adaptation provided there was to be no 'love business' in the piece. The play *Sherlock Holmes*, presented as the work of Conan Doyle and Gillette, was loosely based on the first and last short stories ('The Scandal in Bohemia' for the 'love business', which was eventually allowed in, and 'The Final Problem' for Moriarty and his gang). It ran successfully in New York at the Garrick Theatre from November 1899 until June 1900 and was about to open at the Lyceum Theatre in London at precisely the same time (9 September 1901) as *The Hound* first appeared. The play

also introduced the catch-phrase ‘elementary, my dear fellow’ into the English vernacular. But the play was based on back-numbers.

On 15 December 1900, the magazine *Tit-Bits* printed Conan Doyle’s admission that from the day he completed ‘The Final Problem’ ‘to this I have never for an instant regretted the course I took in killing Sherlock. That does not say, however, that because he is dead I should not write about him again if I wanted to, for there is no limit to the number of papers he left behind...’ The seeds of the idea for a new Sherlock Holmes novel, albeit one which would indeed supposed to predate the Reichenbach Falls, were sown on Sunday, 28 April 1901 – not in March 1901, as has been thought up to now – when Conan Doyle was enjoying a brief but much-needed golfing holiday with his young journalist friend Bertram Fletcher Robinson (1872 – 1907) at the Royal Links Hotel in Cromer, an ace clifftop hotel on the north coast of Norfolk with eighty rooms and a golf course attached. He had stayed there before, with his wife and son, in September 1897. Conan Doyle was feeling, as he’d confided to his mother the previous month, ‘the strain of a hard year’s work last year, and also my soul is naturally and inevitably rather wrenched in two all the time’.

He had been asked to join Queen Victoria’s funeral procession at the beginning of February, and the Queen’s death gave him melancholy thoughts about the end of an era: ‘And how stands England – how stands England?’ On 2 October 1900, he had unsuccessfully stood in the so-called ‘khaki’ General Election as Liberal Unionist candidate for Edinburgh Central: his defeat after an exhausting round of speeches and personal appearances, following a smear campaign which involved putting up posters in Protestant areas accusing him (in his own words) of being ‘a Papist conspirator, a Jesuit emissary, and a subverter of the Protestant faith’, had convinced him that electioneering was like ‘a mud bath’. Conan Doyle had, in fact, been baptized a Catholic and educated by the Jesuits, but had since rejected the family faith. His domestic life was also under considerable strain:

his wife, Louise Hawkins, had for some time been bedridden with tuberculosis of the lungs, and at the same time it was proving more and more challenging for Conan Doyle to maintain a ‘chivalrous’ and Platonic attitude towards Jean Leckie, the woman he loved. That was why his soul was ‘rather wrenched in two’.

He was suffering from insomnia, and from the long-term effects of a fever he had brought back with him from the Boer War. He had, in fact, met Fletcher Robinson – a well-connected war correspondent sent out by the newly founded *Daily Express*, who was later to become the

paper's editor – aboard the *SS Briton* in July 1900 when both were returning from Cape Town. Conan Doyle had tried hard to enlist in the British army to fight the Boers, but had been turned down (he was forty, with no army record) and instead had worked as a voluntary medical officer at John Langman's Field Hospital in Bloemfontein, capital of the Orange Free State, for four months – during which time there had been a devastating epidemic of enteric fever. What he had felt, he'd written to his mother before leaving, 'is that perhaps I have the strongest influence over young men, especially young athletic sporting men, of any one in England (bar Kipling). That being so it is really important that I should give them a lead.' Apart from the fever, other aspects of the war were still preying on his mind in spring 1901. He had written and spoken publicly about military reform. He supported the idea of Civilian Rifle Clubs and formed his own, had strong views on the reasons for Britain's intervention and even stronger ones on the behaviour in the field of ordinary British soldiers – subjects which continued to be controversial among investigative journalists such as W. T. Stead, and about which Conan Doyle was soon to write *The War in South Africa, Its Cause and Conduct*, forcefully putting the British case (including the case for Kitchener's invention: the concentration camp). He was at that time a novelist to whom the government of the day was always prepared to listen.

On the afternoon of Sunday, 28 April (the date is confirmed by Conan Doyle's account in his book) when the breeze from the North Sea was blowing too strongly for them to play a round of clifftop golf, Conan Doyle and Fletcher Robinson passed the time indoors at the Royal Links Hotel. In the course of a long conversation, Robinson – who seems from the printed evidence to have been much better at telling tales than putting them down on paper – whatever his talents as a journalist – mentioned the legend of a ferocious black dog which haunted the countryside. This was perhaps the local Black Shuck, or perhaps a folk tale gleaned from a Welsh guidebook, or perhaps a version from around Robinson's family home on the edge of Dartmoor. According to an article written by J. E. Hodder Williams for *The Bookman* exactly a year later: 'Robinson is a Devonshire man, and he mentioned in conversation some old country legend which set Doyle's imagination on fire. The two men began building up a chain of events, and in a very few hours the plot of a sensational story was conceived

Conan Doyle wrote in the heat of the moment to his mother Mary, from the hotel:

A line to you, dear old Mammie, to say that I have had much good out of my 2 days here, where I have slept soundly at last



All goes well in every way. On Tuesday I give a dinner at the Athenaeum Club [which he did, on Tuesday 30th: one of the guests was Winston Churchill – another confirmation of the April date]... Fletcher Robinson came here with me and we are going to do a small book together *The Hound of the Baskervilles* – a real creeper.

Also from the Royal Links, he gave advance notice to Greenhough Smith, the *Strand's* editor:

I have the idea of a real creeper for the 'Strand'. It would run, I think, to not less than 40,000 words. It is just the sort of thing that would suit you, full of surprises, and breaking naturally into good lengths for serial purposes. It would be called 'The Hound of the Baskervilles'. There is one stipulation. I must do it with my friend Fletcher Robinson and his name must appear with mine. I hope that does not strike you as a serious bar. I can answer for the yarn being all in my own style without dilution, since your readers like that. But he gave me the central idea and the local colour and so I feel his name must appear. I shall want my usual £50 per thousand for all rights if you do business. Let me know at the Reform Club... Let me have [the illustrator Sidney] Paget if you take it.

One reason Conan Doyle was instantly fired up by this 'old country legend' was – according to Max Pemberton, who knew him well – that 'it was ever the bizarre and the daring that drew [him] as a filing is drawn to its magnet',<sup>4</sup> an aspect of his personality which had been rather sidelined by his public association with the arch-rationalist Sherlock Holmes and which maybe also explained the long flirtation with spiritualism which Dr Doyle had begun in earnest in the late 1880s. Holmes was indeed an arch-rationalist on the surface, but he also depended on what he variously called 'intuition', 'speculation' and 'imagination' to reach his conclusions, which involved a significant element of guesswork. He, too, was drawn towards unusual details: in the last chapter of *The Hound*, Holmes observes that 'the more *outré* and grotesque an incident is the more carefully it deserves to be examined...' But it appears that from the very beginning of Conan Doyle's interest in the legend there was no question of the 'real creeper' being an out-and-out horror story with a supernatural ending. This approach had, in fact, already been tried with at least two stories: Theo Gift's 'Dog or Demon?' (1888) and Catherine Crowe's 'Dutch Officer's Story' (1859) – the latter based on a folk legend about a phantom hound guarding Peel Castle on the Isle of Man. The 'chain of events' in the new version would, in the finale, prove the phantom to have been flesh and blood, an approach which had already been tested by Conan Doyle in his short story 'The King of the Foxes', first published in *The Windsor* magazine in July 1898 and collected in book form two years later. This was the tale of a legendary spectral fox which turns out to be a grey Siberian wolf 'of the variety known as *Lupus Giganticus*' on the run from a travelling menagerie, but not before causing havoc with the Anscombe Hunt. The narrator is instantly cured of alcoholism by the experience of meeting this unlikely hunt saboteur:

... a creature the size of a donkey jumped on to its feet, a huge grey head, with monstrous glistening fangs, and tapering fangs, shot out from among the branches, and the hound was thrown several feet in the air, and fell howling among the cove-



Then there was a clashing snap like a rat-trap closing and the howls sharpened into a scream...

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Later in 1898, Conan Doyle had recycled the idea for the *Strand* in another short story, ‘The Brazilian Cat’: in this version, the ‘treacherous and bloodthirsty’ creature called Tommy was part of a murder plot. The idea of a story that seems supernatural, but on closer inspection isn’t, appealed to him as a thinker and a writer.

Conan Doyle and Fletcher Robinson may also have had in mind a story called ‘Followed’ from an even more recent issue of the *Strand* magazine (December 1900). It was by the prolific Irish writer Mrs L. T. Meade, assisted on medical details (as she often was) by Dr Robert Eustace, and its setting was a crumbling manor house called Longmore on Salisbury Plain, complete with sinister servant, ancestral curse and a devilish plot to disinherit a young girl. The story hinged on a monstrous black beast – which again *seems* supernatural – in this case a venomous Tasmanian snake by the name of Darkey (*Pseudechis porphyriacus*), whose bite causes certain death in six minutes. The climax of ‘Followed’ involves the snake chasing the heroine – young English rose Flower Dalrymple – across the Plain to the slaughter stone of Stonehenge, because the creature has been given one of her boots covered in snake-attracting powder: ‘... whatever it was which was now approaching me, it was a reality, not a dream. It was making straight in my direction. The next instant every fibre in my body was tingling with terror, for gliding towards me, in great curves, with head raised, was a enormous black snake!’ Conan Doyle seems to have been particularly partial at this time to stories about monstrous beasts giving nightmares to the aristocracy of deep England – biological run amok – and his work was often stimulated by recent articles and events, as well as by plot suggestions and anecdotes from friends and relations.

Neither Fletcher Robinson nor Conan Doyle thought of *The Hound of the Baskervilles* as a Sherlock Holmes novel, at this early stage. But by 25 May, a month after the Cromer holiday, *Tit-Bits* – a sister publication to the *Strand* – was confidently announcing that ‘presently [Mr Conan Doyle] will give us an important story to appear in “The Strand”, in which the great Sherlock Holmes is the principal character... It will be published as a serial of from 30,000 to 50,000 words, and the plot is one of the most interesting and striking that have [sic] ever been put before us.’ It must have been earlier in the same month that Conan Doyle wrote again to Greenhough Smith:

The price I quoted [in the Royal Links letter] has for years been my serial price not only with you but with other journals. Now it is evident that this is a very special occasion since as far as I can judge the revival of Holmes would attract a great deal of attention. If put up to open competition I could get very particular terms for this story. Suppose I gave the directors t

alternative that it should be without Holmes at my old figure or with Holmes at £100 per thou. which would they choose?  
Holmes is at a premium in America just now.

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The directors of the *Strand*, sensible fellows, did not hesitate. They agreed to the upper figure, for English and American rights, which seemed cheap at the price for the resurrection of Sherlock Holmes – a resurrection in which the ‘£100 per thou.’ had undoubtedly played its part. Some time between the end of April and the end of May 1901, Conan Doyle had decided to make this one of the papers his consulting detective had left behind or rather, as the novel’s subtitle was to put it, *Another Adventure of Sherlock Holmes*. The arrival of the great detective on the scene, after the ‘scheme of events’ had already been planned, was to effect the final shape of the novel.

As Hodder Williams continued, in his *Bookman* piece, ‘when he came to working out the details [Conan Doyle] found... that some masterful central figure was needed, some strong man who would influence the whole course of events, and his natural reflection was “why should I invent such a character when I have him already in the form of Holmes?”’ If the ‘old country legend’ was powerful, the antidote had to be even more powerful. But this did not mean that Conan Doyle was about to start writing a new series of short stories for the *Strand* to follow *The Adventures* and *The Memoirs*.

Whether or not the decision had yet been made to set the legend on Dartmoor, Conan Doyle arranged to go on a brief walking tour of the moor at the end of May. He had set one of his earlier Holmes short stories there: ‘Silver Blaze’, first published in the *Strand* in 1892, the one with the famous line about the silent dog in the night-time: ‘That was the curious incident. This had turned out to be an occasion, Conan Doyle subsequently admitted in his autobiography, when ‘I have got upon dangerous ground where I have taken risks through my own want of knowledge of the correct atmosphere’: the story had a horse-racing theme, and a correspondent for the *Sporting and Dramatic News* who went by the pseudonym of ‘Rapie’ immediately pointed out that the description of the race itself had been wrong in several particulars, and further that if owners and trainers behaved as he described, half of them would be sent to jail while ‘the other half [would be] warned off the turf forever’. Conan Doyle replied publicly to these good-natured and justified criticisms: ‘I have never been nervous about details, and one must be masterful sometimes.’ Never let accuracy of detail get in the way of a dramatic story. Interestingly, the Sherlock Holmes stories set ‘upon dangerous ground’ outside the detective’s home parish of London – the ones where the author ran the

most risks about ‘details’ – were sometimes based on original ideas suggested by someone else: ‘The Copper Beeches’, set in the Hampshire countryside, was suggested by his mother; *The Hound of the Baskervilles* by Fletcher Robinson. Holmes himself professed to feel ‘in exile’ whenever he left the metropolis, and was famously convinced (in ‘The Copper Beeches’) that ‘the lowest and vilest alleys in London do not present a more dreadful record of sin than does the smiling and beautiful countryside [because] the pressure of public opinion can do in the town what the law cannot accomplish’.

Conan Doyle certainly wrote fast. His second wife Jean was later to recall, ‘I have known him write a Sherlock Holmes story in a room full of people talking. He would write in a train or anywhere...’<sup>5</sup> The manuscript of *The Hound of the Baskervilles* was dispersed in 1902, when S. S. McClure (who had purchased the rights to the book and the second serial rights) dispatched it – as individual pages in frames – to bookstores across the United States, to publicize the title in window displays. The pages were accompanied by a slip bearing the name of ‘McClure, Phillips’. Of the pages which somehow survived this process (which itself gives some idea of how casual Conan Doyle was about the business of drafting), one complete chapter, ‘The Man on the Tor’, is now in New York Public Library, while, of the fifteen other single known pages from a variety of chapters, five are in universities and the remainder in private hands. Apart from small drafting details, they reveal two things: that Conan Doyle wrote decisively and with a minimum of revision in his confident, clear handwriting, and that the surviving pages of manuscript were entirely written by him – even part of ‘The Curse of the Baskervilles’ from Ch. 2. It is *possible* that Conan Doyle allowed his manuscript to be dispersed in this unusual way because some of the undistributed pages were in Fletcher Robinson’s hand. But it is much more likely that by the time Conan Doyle started writing, after the Cromer weekend, the yarn was to be all his own ‘in my own style without dilution’. And as he was later to confess to his editor at the *Strand*, ‘a story always comes to me as an organic thing and I never recast it without the Life going out of it’. In the case of *The Hound*, this meant that one or two drafting errors found their way into the *Strand* version.

When Conan Doyle reached Dartmoor in late May, as we shall see, he had already written nearly half the novel – that is, 25,000 words or thereabouts. During the same month, he played cricket at Lord’s for three days on the same side as W.G. Grace and had dinner at the House of Commons on 16 May as a guest of Winston Churchill, where they discussed their South African experiences. It is likely that at least some of these experiences found their way

into the novel he was drafting in the daytime. Churchill was about to take up the case of Albert Cartwright, editor of the *South African News*, who was sentenced on 2 May to a year of imprisonment for ‘criminal and seditious libel’ against Lord Kitchener, an alleged libel which had appeared in the *London Times* four months earlier. Liberal journalists and Tory backbenchers, Churchill included, were outraged by this verdict, and the case may well have been transformed into the subplot about the bombastic, red-faced, litigious Mr Frankland (Lafter Hall in *The Hound* (‘Cartwright’ became a ‘little chap at the Express office’, who is messenger boy in London and on Dartmoor). Second Lieutenant Thomas Frankland of the Royal Dublin Fusiliers had been closely involved in one of Winston Churchill’s more famous adventures of the South African War – a dramatic escape from Boer ambush and a derailed train – which had been described in gung-ho style by Churchill in *London to Ladysmith via Pretoria*, published in 1900, with the train on the cover. Conan Doyle himself had had a ‘curious adventure’ on 7 May 1900, when riding with John Langman across open country the day after a skirmish with some Boer snipers:

... a mounted Kaffir came across us, and told us that a wounded Englishman had been deserted or overlooked, and was only some two or three miles to the west on the veldt. At last, in the middle of a large clear space, we came across him, but he was dead. He was shot in the stomach and through one arm, and had apparently bled to death.

The body on the veldt was a recent memory in Conan Doyle’s mind: the body on the moor was what he was now writing about. He certainly seems to have known more about the veldt than he did about the moor. Despite what he put down on paper at this time, wild orchids do not flower on Dartmoor or anywhere else in mid-October, any more than bitterns, even the almost extinct, mate in the autumn; the bogs on the moor were nothing like the quaking slime of Grimpen Mire; Dr Watson’s and Stapleton’s descriptions of this vast, barren and mysterious place – much vaster than the actual thing – could fit almost any Gothic wasteland. Almost. The novel may also reveal something about Conan Doyle’s deep-seated sense of being ‘rather wrenched in two’ at this time. There is an uncharacteristic, almost gloating, emphasis on brutality to women throughout *The Hound*: Hugo Baskerville’s ‘wild, profane, and godless’ cruelty to the yeoman’s daughter in the manuscript description of the curse; Mrs Laura Lyons’s life of ‘incessant persecution from a husband whom I abhor’ and habit of putting her trust in men who abuse her; Mrs Barrymore’s exploitation by her brother and, above all, Stapleton’s sadistic treatment of Beryl, who ends up with ‘the clear red weal of a whip-lash across her neck’ and ‘her arms... all mottled with bruises’. These go well beyond Holmes’s occasional lapses into misogyny. Did they relate to Conan Doyle’s guilt as a ‘renegade’

Catholic about being tempted to neglect his wife Louise (as some have suggested)? Or to h  
need publicly to repress his feelings towards his beloved Jean Leckie? Whatever the reason  
the result transformed the legend he was told by Fletcher Robinson from an ancestral  
warning into something much more destructive, something which did not recur in his literary  
output. Conan Doyle visited Dartmoor, with Robinson, at the end of May/ beginning of June  
1901. They stayed at Rowe's Duchy Hotel, Princetown, just down the road from Dartmoor  
prison. The hotel building was said to have been constructed by French prisoners-of-war in  
Napoleonic times (which must have struck a chord with Conan Doyle, whose first Brigadier  
Gerard stories had been written in 1894–5); it had been 'patronized by royalty' when the  
Prince of Wales dined at Rowe's Duchy during a visit to Dartmoor prison.

From there, Conan Doyle wrote a letter on hotel notepaper to his mother. In his  
authorized biography of 1949, based on privileged access to family archives John Dickson  
Carr claims that 'the postmark was April 2nd, 1901' but this must have been based on  
misreading. He also claims that Conan Doyle had never been to Dartmoor before, which is  
unlikely since as a young doctor he had lived in Plymouth. The actual date of the postmark  
was much more likely to have been Sunday, 2 June:

Dearest of Mams, Here I am in the highest town in England. Robinson and I are exploring the Moor over our Sherlock Holmes  
book. I think it will work out splendidly – indeed I have already done nearly half of it. Holmes is at his very best, and it is a  
highly dramatic idea – which I owe to Robinson. We did 14 miles over the Moor and we are now pleasantly weary. It is a  
great place, very sad and wild, dotted with dwellings of prehistoric man, strange monoliths and huts and graves. In those old  
days there was evidently a population of very many thousands here and now you may walk all day and never see one human  
being. Everywhere there are gutted tin mines. Tomorrow [Sunday] we drive 6 miles to Ipplepen where R's father lives. Then  
on Monday Tuesday Sherborne for cricket, 2 days at Bath, 2 days at Cheltenham. Home on Sunday the 9th. That is my  
programme. My work will proceed all the better...

Conan Doyle did indeed play cricket for the Incogniti (a team which also included his  
brother-in-law E.W. Hornung, *of Raffles fame*) against Sherborne School on Monday and  
Tuesday, 3–4 June, then another match for the Incogniti against Lansdown at Coombe Park  
Bath, on Wednesday and Thursday, 5–6 June, followed by yet another match against  
Cheltenham College on Friday and Saturday, 7–8 June. All of which confirm the actual date  
as being the beginning of June. On the sixth of that month, there was a payment in his bank  
book, to Fletcher Robinson – one of many, varying in amount, over the next three years –  
£3.0.0.

Fletcher Robinson described their stay at the comfortable old-fashioned inn 'near the  
famous convict prison of Princetown' in more detail, in an article for the *Associated Sunday*

Magazines of America-published in November 1905, fourteen months before his untimely death at the age of thirty-five (according to his death certificate, from typhoid fever). The morning after the writers arrived, apparently, four distinguished men marched into the smoking room and chatted about ‘the weather, the fishing in the moor streams and other general subjects’: their visiting cards revealed them to have been the prison governor, the deputy governor, the chaplain and the doctor, and a pencil note explained they had come ‘to call on Mr Sherlock Holmes’. But they had been too reticent to raise the subject.

Fletcher Robinson continued:

One morning [probably Saturday 1 June] I took Doyle to see the mighty bog... which figured so prominently in *The Hound of the Baskervilles*. He was amused at the story I told him of the moor man who on one occasion saw a hat near the edge of the morass and poked it with a long pole he carried. ‘You leave my hat alone!’ came a voice from beneath it. ‘Whoi! Be there a man under t’at?’ cried the startled rustic. ‘Yes, you fool, and a horse under the man!’ From the bog, we tramped eastward to the stone fort of Grimspound, which the savages of the Stone Age in Britain... raised with enormous labour to act as a haven of refuge from the marauding tribes to the South. The good preservation in which the Grimspound fort still remains is marvellous [it has been partially restored in the early 1890s]... Into one of these [stone huts] Doyle and I walked, and sitting down on the stone floor which probably served the three thousand year old chief as a bed we talked of the races of the past. It was one of the loneliest spots in Great Britain... Suddenly we heard a boot strike against a stone without and rose together. It was only a lone tourist on a walking excursion, but at the sight of our heads suddenly emerging from the hut he let out a yell and bolted... As he did not return I have small doubt Mr Doyle and I added yet another proof of the supernatural to tellers of ghost stories concerning Dartmoor.

This must have been the ‘14 miles over the Moor’ mentioned by Conan Doyle in the letter to his mother: from Princetown to Fox Tor Mire (the ‘mighty bog’ with nearby tin mine which became Grimpen Mire in the novel), eastward to the stone circle of Grimspound (the hiding place of Sherlock Holmes) and back to the hotel again; on foot it is actually nearer twenty-one miles than fourteen. From Conan Doyle’s brief account, it is not clear whether they walked or not: a day-long ride in the Robinsons’ coach and pair, plus hiking for the inaccessible parts of the journey would also – presumably – have made him ‘pleasantly weary’ at the age of forty-two, even if he was a more than competent cricketer in good physical condition. A photograph of Conan Doyle on his visit to the moor has recently surfaced, which shows him standing beside a pony and trap near the Warren House Inn about seven miles east of Princetown. Whether this was taken on Saturday, 1 June, or during the six-mile drive to Ipplepen the following day, or even on the Friday, is not known.

Fletcher Robinson’s yarn about the moor man, the mire and the hat was not, in fact, original to him: it came almost verbatim from *A Book of Dartmoor*, published the previous year, by the Revd Sabine Baring-Gould, Rector of the remote parish of Lewtrenchard, situated

some twelve miles northwest of Princetown. Baring-Gould was a prolific writer: his output included hymns such as ‘Onward Christian Soldiers’, some now unreadable novels, and numerous books of West Country folklore and topography; it was thanks to him that the song ‘Widecombe Fair’ first surfaced into print, the song which the Devon Regiment sang as it marched against the Boers. It was also thanks to him that werewolves had enjoyed something of a literary revival: Baring-Gould’s *The Book of Were-wolves, being an Account of a Terrible Superstition* (1865) covered ancient, medieval and modern manifestations and included in its chapter on folk legends the information that:

In Devonshire they range the moors in the shape of black dogs, and I know a story of two such creatures appearing in an inn and nightly drinking the cider, until the publican shot a silver button over their heads, when they were instantly transformed into two ill-favoured old ladies of his acquaintance. On Heathfield, near Tavistock, the wild huntsman rides by full moon with his ‘wush hounds’...

Conan Doyle may well have read *A Book of Dartmoor*, as had Robinson: its descriptions of the ‘fog, dense as cotton wool’, the quaking bogs and neolithic stone huts, escaped convicts stumbling around the moor and legends dating from the time of the great Rebellion, closely resemble the equivalents in the novel, as does the overall atmosphere of a primeval wilderness, a never-land of mist, legend and antiquity. *A Book of Dartmoor* was a plea for a certain kind of conservation, and a polemic in support of the efforts of the new Dartmoor Preservation Society to control ‘wanton trippers’, over-zealous restorers, enclosing farmers, tin-miners and the military authorities who were turning the place into a shooting range: ‘The Transvaal war has brought home to us the need we have to become expert marksmen. nevertheless, one accepts the situation with a sigh.’ Baring-Gould’s Dartmoor is not a living working landscape. The shallow mines at Whiteworks, right next to Fox Tor Mire, were full and operative at that time – but you wouldn’t know it from his book. He preferred to present Dartmoor which has been scarcely occupied since neolithic times, and which should always remain ‘uncontaminated by the hand of man’, just like Conan Doyle’s perception of the moor as ‘very sad and wild, dotted with... strange monoliths and huts and graves’. Both in the different ways were romancers.

The final piece in the jigsaw of *The Hound*’s plot – the facial resemblance between the villain and the portrait of Hugo Baskerville dated 1647, ‘an interesting instance of a throw-back’, as Holmes puts it – was to be found in another Baring-Gould book, *Old Country Life*, published in 1890, ten years before *A Book of Dartmoor*. This contained a long chapter on ‘Familiar Portraits’, about the physical resemblances which can be traced through genuine and

complete collections of family portraits: his thesis was that facial characteristics, despite having disappeared in the generations between, might reappear in the current generation of family. ‘Consider,’ concluded the Revd Baring-Gould, ‘what misery a strain of tainted blood brings into a family – a strain of blood that causes vicious propensities with it...’ This was a well-tried literary theme in late Victorian times – *Tess of the D’Urbervilles* is a classic example – and in various other stories Sherlock Holmes professed his related belief, again characteristic of his time, in the importance of heredity where persistent criminals were concerned. Moriarty, for one, was supposed to have an inherited criminal strain in his blood. In ‘The Empty House’, which appeared eighteen months after *The Hound’s* serialization finished, Holmes explained:

There are some trees... which grow to a certain height and then suddenly develop some unsightly eccentricity. You will see this often in humans. I have a theory that the individual represents in his development the whole procession of his ancestors, and that such a sudden turn to good or evil stands for some strange influence which came into the life of his pedigree. The person becomes, as it were, the epitome of the history of his own family.

But Conan Doyle may well have found the portrait theme in *Old Country Life* either directly or at Fletcher Robinson’s suggestion.

As Conan Doyle briskly drafted the second half of his novel at the beginning of June 1901, he made Dartmoor – a place of mystery rather than industry – the key symbol of *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, to the extent that P. D. James has justly called the resulting work ‘the atavistic study of violence and evil in the mists of Dartmoor’. The moor becomes in the process less a map reference than a nightmare which has defeated the successive attempts of human beings – prehistoric people or modern tin-miners – to civilize and tame it. Likewise Baskerville Hall, and all that it represents – an ‘old race’, a title and a coat of arms, a family home with servants, a go-ahead modernizing young heir who has spent most of his life up and now ‘in the States and in Canada’ and who can perhaps provide a future for the poor benighted countryside – must at all costs be saved (as Edgar Allan Poe’s House of Usher could not) from sinking into the tarn. And England – how stands England? If contemporary life itself has become, as Dr Watson writes, ‘like that great Grimpen Mire, with little green patches everywhere into which one may sink with no guide to point the track’, all the more reason to hope against hope that the civilized rationality of the great detective, the secular priest, will be able to bring salvation and stop the rot: a masterful central figure to influence the whole course of events, at the start of a new century. W. H. Auden, in his celebrated essay *The Guilty Vicarage*, argued that *the* classic detective story involved explaining away



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