

The Public, the Press, and Celebrities in *The Return of Sherlock Holmes*

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Abstract: Arthur Conan Doyle and his consulting detective had been famous for more than ten years when Doyle came to write *The Return of Sherlock Holmes*. In the following essay, I argue that this experience of fame shaped the composition of the third series of Holmes stories, in which the detective is resurrected a decade after going over the Reichenbach Falls. The essay approaches celebrity as a competitive interaction in which the public, the press, and the celebrity vie for control. It is argued that the stories in *The Return of Sherlock Holmes* work to empower the various celebrities that they portray – including not just Holmes but also well-known aristocrats, statesmen, scholars, and female ‘beauties’ – and to disempower their rival co-participants in the celebrity dynamic: the public and the press.

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1. Resurrecting Sherlock Holmes

In the twelve years that followed the publication, in 1891, of the first Sherlock Holmes short story ‘A Scandal in Bohemia’, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle became increasingly embedded in celebrity culture. While he sent his detective over the Reichenbach Falls in 1893 in an apparent attempt to break from fame, this act of intellectual homicide succeeded only in increasing the public interest in the author and his creation. ‘They say that a man is never fully appreciated until he is dead’, reflects Doyle in his autobiography *Memories and Adventures*, ‘and the general protest against my summary execution of Sherlock Holmes taught me how many and numerous were [Holmes’s] friends’ (99). Doyle’s readers and the press spent years demanding that the author resurrect his detective, and in 1902, he did publish *The Hound of the Baskervilles*. Somewhat teasingly, though, the novel was set before the detective’s ‘death’; and it was only with the announcement, the following year, that Doyle was about to release a new run of short stories, that it became clear that Holmes was back for good. Not surprisingly given this broader context, *The Return of Sherlock Holmes*, as this collection of stories is known, is itself far more centred in the public sphere and celebrity culture than its predecessors. In the first series of Holmes stories (*The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*), the detective dismisses ‘larger crimes’ as boring: ‘the bigger the crime’, he assures Watson, ‘the more obvious, as a rule, the motive’ (31). Yet, in our stories, Holmes appears to have changed his mind. Indeed, Watson tells us that since his resurrection there has been ‘no public case of any difficulty in which [Holmes] was not

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consulted' (385);² and, throughout the collection, we are repeatedly drawn into the lives of the rich and famous.

Cultural theorists often present celebrity as a harmonious interaction underwritten by cooperation. Jennifer Wicke, for instance, describes celebrity as a 'dialogic' phenomenon: a 'choir whose voices resonate only in dialectical unison' (1135). While celebrity is also viewed as a kind of interaction in this essay, the interaction is seen as more competitively antagonistic than Wicke's comments might suggest. In particular, Doyle's experience of celebrity was one in which he, the public, and the press frequently struggled for control over the author and his creations. Out of this struggle, it will be argued, comes *The Return of Sherlock Holmes*, a collection of stories in which Doyle repeatedly disempowers the public and press that he portrays, whilst also empowering Holmes and his fictional celebrities, and thus vicariously himself.

2. Disempowering the Public

Late nineteenth century Europe was shaken by a great deal of popular unrest: newly formed labour unions organised mass industrial action across England and the Continent (Hobsbawm, 128-9), and with the rise of the industrialised super-city came political rallies on an unprecedented scale (Tickner, 57). As such, the end of the nineteenth century was marked by certain anti-populist anxieties. In 1895, for instance, the influential crowd theorist Gustave Le Bon voiced the widely held fear that 'Universal symptoms, visible in all nations, show us the rapid growth of the power of crowds, and do not admit of our supposing that it is destined to cease' (xvii). For Le Bon this was particularly worrying as 'crowds are only powerful for destruction': '[c]ertainly', he concludes, 'it is possible that the advent to power of the masses marks one of the last stages of Western civilisation, a complete return to [a period] of confused anarchy' (xviii).

Public crowds are also quite threatening in the earliest, pre-Hiatus, short stories that Doyle began publishing in 1891. Thus, in the second Sherlock Holmes short story – 'The Red-Headed League' – Holmes and Watson find themselves on a busy City street:

It was one of the main arteries which convey the traffic of the City to the north and west. The roadway was blocked with the immense stream of commerce flowing in a double tide inwards and outwards, while the footpaths were black with the hurrying swarm of pedestrians. (24)

In the three major crowd scenes found in the *Return* series, Doyle tries to undo these anarchic and apocalyptic associations, transforming the crowd into something far more innocuous. Each of these scenes involves Watson arriving at the site of a recent murder to discover a group of transfixed onlookers. In 'The Adventure of the Norwood Builder', for instance, the detective and his amanuensis arrive at the murder-scene to find that 'a

² As the Holmes phenomenon was primarily a feature of the periodical press, I have – here and in what follows – used a facsimile of the stories as they appeared in *The Strand Magazine*, rather than the more usual Oxford edition which (aside from introducing minor textual variations) lacks the original layout and illustrations.

crowd of morbid sightseers were still gathered round' the victim's stately home (363). Ordinarily, the appearance of a collection of villagers surrounding the house of a recently murdered man of 'considerable wealth' (356) might be cause for some concern. Here, however, quite the opposite is true. Indeed, while Watson might disapprove of these 'morbid' onlookers, the fact that they remain static ('still') 'sightseers' seemingly unable to do much more than stand and stare robs the crowd of its potential mob-like agency and turns its members into little more than a passive audience. In 'The Adventure of the Six Napoleons' Doyle goes even further. Now, more than simply being passive, the public crowd inadvertently aids Holmes in his investigation. Here, Watson again describes arriving with Holmes at the site of a murder:

As we drove up, we found the railings in front of the house lined by a curious crowd. Holmes whistled. 'By George! It's attempted murder at the least. Nothing less will hold the London message-boy. There's a deed of violence indicated in that fellow's round shoulders and outstretched neck.['] (444)

In the above-quoted passage, Doyle transforms the concept of the crowd into an order-promoting social entity. Thus, while this passage might still contain a certain ominous quality, Doyle does his best to ensure that this quality is downplayed. More 'curious' than threatening, Doyle's crowd has arranged itself quite neatly – becoming a kind of decoration for the murder victim's fence; the 'deed of violence' detected by Holmes in one man's shoulders does not belong to the man at all, but is simply an uncontrollable instinctive reaction to something that he has seen or heard (compare this to the pre-eminent self-control displayed by celebrities in the *Return*, as discussed later on); moreover, the fact that Holmes can read the crowd at all turns the group into just one more sign, just one more clue through which the great detective can ultimately restore law and order. In the process, Doyle's text seeks to alleviate not only the anxieties about the crowd suggested by the author's earlier stories but also the anxieties of 'civilised society' more generally.

But the public crowd is not only passively exploitable in the *Return* stories; it is also tasteless. Throughout his text, Doyle makes a number of class-based distinctions. The first story in this collection ('The Adventure of the Empty House') opens with the line 'in the spring of 1894 all London was interested, and the fashionable world dismayed, by the murder of the Honourable Ronald Adair' (339). Here, notions of taste, affect, and class, become intriguingly intertwined. Indeed, in being merely 'interested' rather than 'dismayed', it would seem that the masses are not only less influential ('fashionable') than their elite social counterparts but also less fully human – being capable of little more than a kind of heartless voyeurism in response to a violent death. These themes are explored further later on in Doyle's story, in the third of our crowd scenes, in which Watson arrives at yet another murder victim's home:

In the evening I strolled across the Park, and found myself about six o'clock at the Oxford Street end of Park Lane. A group of loafers upon the

pavements, all staring up at a particular window, directed me to the house which I had come to see. A tall, thin man with coloured glasses, whom I strongly suspected of being a plain-clothes detective, was pointing out some theory of his own, while the others crowded round to listen to what he said. I got as near him as I could, but his observations seemed to me to be absurd, so I withdrew again in some disgust. (340-1)

However briefly, Watson here becomes the supreme individual: he is able to go wherever he pleases with apparent ease ('I strolled across the Park'), to think critically ('I strongly suspected [him] of being a plain-clothes detective'), and to 'withdr[a]w' from the public into his own unique judgement and identity. By contrast, the passive 'group of loafers' that he rejects is granted far less freedom: 'staring up at a particular window', they seem almost rooted to the spot; unable to think for themselves, they can only mindlessly 'listen' to the blatantly erroneous theories of an illusion; and, acting as a single entity ('all'), they become amorphous and indistinguishable – indeed, the 'group' does not seem to include a single individual. Yet perhaps most significant of all is Watson's ability to rise above the scene and cast a discerning judgment upon it (in this instance, one of condemnatory 'disgust'). As such, Watson's taste allows him to control how he reacts to his surroundings – to make a moral or aesthetic attachment or repudiation. The crowd, meanwhile, is left to simply wallow in the 'absurd' morass of everyday life.

In many ways, these public crowds – with their obsessively 'morbid' voyeurism for murder – operate as metonyms for Doyle's reading public, which, despite the author's objections, always 'clamoured' for the depictions of criminality found in Sherlock Holmes (Doyle, *Memories*, 99). As such, it is perhaps fitting that, much like Doyle's drip-fed readers, the crowd and the public that Doyle portrays in the *Return* are easily kept in the dark.³ For, in this series, Holmes is constantly helping other characters hide information from the public. Articulating a widely held preconception, Franco Moretti has argued that 'detective fiction treats every element of individual behaviour that desires secrecy as an offence, even if there is no crime', and that '[t]his is the totalitarian aspiration towards a *transparent society*' (239-40, Moretti's emphasis). This may have been true of the *Adventures* (from which Moretti provides examples); however, it is less accurate when it comes to the *Return*. Indeed, Holmes could almost be responding to Moretti when he assures another character (in 'The Adventure of the Missing Three-Quarter') that he and Watson 'are doing the reverse of what you very justly blame, and ... are endeavouring to prevent anything like public exposure of private matters' (490). As Doyle's detective goes on cheerfully to inform us, 'so long as there is nothing criminal I am much more anxious to hush up private scandals than to give them publicity' (494).

³ As discussed below, Watson routinely begins *Return* stories by informing the reader that certain details will be withheld. At the start of 'The Adventure of the Three Students', for instance, Watson declares that 'It will be obvious that any details which would help the reader to exactly identify the college or the criminal would be injudicious and offensive' (456). Watson will, therefore, 'endeavour in my statement to avoid such terms as would serve to limit the events to any particular place, or give a clue as to the people concerned' (ibid). The reader, it would seem, is to remain literally clueless.

Indeed, in certain cases even criminality stops being a consideration for the detective. For instance, when a blackmailer – a violator of the private sphere – is the murder victim, Holmes carefully burns the victim’s secret stash of compromising letters (438) before allowing the murderer to escape (‘certain crimes’, he proclaims, ‘to some extent, justify private revenge’: 440).

Secrecy is also privileged in a later story from the *Return*: Watson’s account of ‘the most important international case which [Holmes] has ever been called upon to handle’ (512), ‘The Adventure of the Second Stain’. Here, the British Prime Minister tells Holmes why he has not gone to the police:

[‘]To inform the police must, in the long run, mean to inform the public. This is what we particularly desire to avoid.’ ‘And why, sir?’ ‘Because the document in question is of such immense importance that its publication might very easily – I might almost say probably – lead to European complications of the utmost moment. It is not too much to say that peace or war may hang upon the issue. Unless its recovery can be attended with the utmost secrecy, then it may as well not be recovered at all, for all that is aimed at by those who have taken it is that its contents should be generally known.’ ‘I understand. ...’ (513-4)

A passage that is intriguingly similar to this can be found in another *Return* story, ‘The Adventure of the Priory School’. Here, readers are told of a man who is ‘extremely desirous to avoid all public scandal. He [is] afraid of his family unhappiness being dragged before the world ... [and] has a deep horror of anything of the kind’ (400). In the above-quoted passage, a similar horror can be found. In this instance, however, this horror is projected onto a far larger trans-European stage – a stage still dominated by an anti-democratic aristocracy – through which the disruptive desire to ‘inform the public’ is made even more dangerous and consequential. Indeed, it is now ‘not too much to say that peace or war may hang in the balance’. Crucially, though, Doyle does not allow these events to actually occur. For Holmes, of course, is ultimately able to quietly secure the document’s return. As a result, ‘The Adventure of the Second Stain’ can be seen as Doyle’s attempt to check anxieties – to reassure himself and his society that the masses can be kept in a paternalistic state of ignorance, and thus that the ‘confused anarchy’ of true democracy warned of by Le Bon can be casually kept at bay. Indeed, with its glorification of what is effectively a concealed political oligarchy, the passage seems to epitomise the various disempowering visions of the public discussed above.

3. Disempowering the Press

Between 1902 and 1913, notes Ronald Rodgers, the periodical which published the *Return* stories in America was one of a number of ‘magazines that regularly criticized the [newspaper] press’ (8); indeed, Rodgers continues, during this period, *Collier’s* published 47 articles which ‘deal[t] with newspapers and their faults’ (11). This suspicion of newspapers complimented what Wong has described as Doyle’s own

'anxieties about the press' (61). Thus while Doyle's autobiography describes the author forming friendships with several journalists during his time in Egypt in 1896, he also announces their arrival (to report on the Mahdist War) by highlighting their parasitic nature. 'The big pressmen had now arrived', he declares, '[w]here the carcass is there shall the eagles, etc.' (138).⁴ To undermine the threat of this intrusive force, the *Return* series transforms the press into an entity that can easily be exploited. Thus, in 'The Adventure of the Six Napoleons' Holmes manages to create the illusion of safety for a man he suspects of being the perpetrator of a crime by manipulating a journalist into (unwittingly) printing an erroneous report. 'The Press', he tells Watson, 'is a most valuable institution, if only you know how to use it' (449). Holmes's belated qualification ('if only you know how to use it') imbues this statement with a biting irony. Indeed, rather than being the bastion of democracy or political transparency, '[t]he Press' here becomes simply one more weapon in Holmes's arsenal.

A comparable effect is produced in a story found earlier on in our collection, 'The Adventure of the Norwood Builder'. Here, the detective indulges in a moment of quasi-humorous nostalgia for Moriarty and the golden age of crime:

[]With that man in the field, one's morning paper presented infinite possibilities. Often it was only the smallest trace, Watson, the faintest indication, and yet it was enough to tell me that the great malignant brain was there, as the gentlest tremors of the edges of the web remind one of the foul spider which lurks in the centre. Petty thefts, wanton assaults, purposeless outrage – to the man who held the clue all could be worked into one connected whole.[] (354)

The very concept of 'The Fourth Estate' was a largely Victorian invention (see Boyce, 1978). However, in the above-quoted passage, this concept is quietly subverted. Thus while a spider's web might normally be seen as a source of power designed to allow the spider to control its environment, in Holmes's imagining it becomes a compromising point of weakness that betrays the spider's presence. In a similar way, the press becomes a point of weakness for the forces of disruption: a 'clue' of 'infinite possibilities' that records 'the smallest trace', 'the faintest indication', of 'foul' misconduct. As a result, Holmes's 'morning paper' inadvertently allows the detective to restore order by both apprehending those wrongdoers and imposing his own metanarrative onto the paper's otherwise-fragmentary 'purposeless' vision of the world, transforming that vision into a singular 'connected whole'.

The press is also rather fragile in the *Return* series. This can, perhaps, be seen best in 'The Adventure of the Six Napoleons' – a story in which a journalist actually appears. Here, 'Horace Harker, of the Central Press Syndicate', is the hapless victim of a seemingly-incomprehensible crime ('if you'll only explain this queer business', he

⁴ Famously agnostic, Doyle here casually misappropriates a biblical expression relating to the second coming of Christ ('For wheresoever the carcass is, there will be eagles gathered around': Matthew 24:28). 'The word "eagles"', George Gutchess tells us, 'refers to large birds of prey such as vultures, or buzzards' (70).

implores ‘with a melancholy face’: 445). Indeed, after the crime has been committed, Harker is so traumatised that he is not even able to take advantage of the experience by turning it into an exclusive report. ‘It’s extraordinary’, he tells Holmes,

[‘]all my life I have been collecting other people’s news, and now that a real piece of news has come my own way I am so confused and bothered that I can’t put two words together. If I had come in here as a journalist I should have interviewed myself and had two columns in every evening paper. As it is, I am giving away valuable copy by telling my story over and over to a string of different people, and I can make no use of it myself.[’]
(444-5)

In this passage, Doyle gleefully delivers a kind of poetic justice. After years spent ‘making use’ of the misery of others, Harker proves incapable of exploiting his own misfortune. Instead he becomes a resource for others to exploit, clumsily violating the first law of the capitalist press by ‘giving away valuable copy’ to anyone who asks, whilst his professional self can only watch on in paralysed disgust. At the same time, he is also condemned to experience the fickle fate of the fussy, sensitive, author: having apparently lost the professional writer’s ability to produce material in an industrial fashion, he is now only able to do his job when in the right frame of mind (‘I am so confused and bothered that I can’t put two words together’).

This authorial punishment seems all the more appropriate when Harker’s usually invasive method of hack-reporting is compared to the discrete method of reporting repeatedly privileged by Watson. For our narrator is constantly beginning stories by telling us that his account of events will leave out compromising or indiscrete details. Thus, at the beginning of ‘The Adventure of Black Peter’, Watson tells us that he would ‘be guilty of an indiscretion if I were even to hint at the identity of some of the illustrious clients who have crossed our humble threshold at Baker Street’ (417); in ‘The Adventure of Charles Augustus Milverton’, we are informed that the coming story will be narrated ‘with due suppression’ (430); at the beginning of ‘The Adventure of the Three Students’, this becomes ‘due discretion’ (456); and, in ‘The Adventure of the Second Stain’, we are assured that we will only be given a ‘carefully-guarded account’ of events, told with the appropriate ‘reticence’ (512). In part, this is, of course, simply a realist device: the diegetic world described by Doyle, such textual moments proclaim, is only a portion of a much larger realm of living people and events. Yet these textual moments also ensure both that the reader knows their place and hint at an ideal form of authoriality, one underwritten by that most important of gentlemanly attributes, discretion.

4. Empowering Celebrities

While the *Adventures* occasionally mentions that Holmes is ‘celebrated’ (14) in his own world, on such points the *Return* is far more insistent. Indeed, throughout the stories, Holmes is described as a ‘famous expert’ (521), a ‘famous amateur’ (418), a ‘well known

consulting expert' (449), and a man of 'increasing fame' (417). At the same time, his power seems to have increased along with his celebrity. In the *Adventures*, Holmes was (at least occasionally) allowed to fail: 'A Scandal in Bohemia', for instance, is the story of how 'the best plans of Mr. Sherlock Holmes [were] beaten by a woman's wit' (15); while, in 'The Five Orange Pips', he tells us that he has 'been beaten four times' (60). In our collection, on the other hand, Holmes's success rate seems to have greatly improved, leading grateful clients to describe the detective as 'a wizard' (526), or to declare that he has 'powers that are not human' (507), while, at the end of 'The Adventure of the Solitary Cyclist', Watson even proclaims that '[t]he strong, masterful personality of Holmes dominated the tragic scene, and all were equally puppets in his hands' (394).⁵

A similar kind of change appears to have taken place in the other fictional celebrities and aristocrats that Doyle portrays.⁶ In the defiantly middle-class *Adventures*, such characters are often revealed to be men of rather dubious character.⁷ Thus, in 'A Scandal in Bohemia', the Bohemian King is, we are told (pointedly, given our earlier discussion of social discrimination), dressed with 'a richness which would, in England, be looked upon as akin to bad taste' (4); the crime at the heart of 'The Adventure of the Beryl Coronet', meanwhile, turns out to have been masterminded by 'Sir George Burnwell', 'one of the most dangerous men in England – a ruined gambler, an absolutely desperate villain, [and] a man without heart or conscience' (152); and, in 'The Adventure of the Speckled Band', we meet the multiple murderer Dr. Grimesby Roylott: last surviving member of a once wealthy family ruined by 'four successive heirs ... of a dissolute and wasteful disposition' (100), whose face is 'marked with every evil passion' (104), who 'beat his native butler to death' while in India (100), and who murdered his own stepdaughter in a 'subtle and horrible' (110) fashion in order to receive an inheritance.

By the time he came to write the *Return* stories, Doyle had himself been both knighted (in 1902, for his defence of the Boer War) and accepted into exclusive American and European social circles.⁸ As such, it is perhaps unsurprising that the more illustrious characters found in our collection seem a little more laudable. For one thing, they tend to have an impressive amount of self-control. For instance, in 'The Adventure of the Priory School', a 'famous statesman' (402) is accused of having kidnapped his

⁵ See also the denouement to 'The Adventure of the Norwood Builder', in which Watson tells us that 'Holmes stood before us with the air of a conjurer who is performing a trick' (365), and Doyle's subsequent brief friendship with Harry Houdini (described, in Massimo Polidoro's account of that friendship, as) 'the greatest self-publicist the world has ever seen' (16).

⁶ The category 'celebrity' and the category 'aristocrat' are inextricably intertwined in the *Return*, and, indeed, elsewhere: as Krieken notes, 'the first use of the word [‘celebrity’] as a noun to refer to individuals appears to be in the mid-nineteenth century, in Ralph Waldo Emerson's commentary on the English aristocracy, where he notes that the English nobility included “the celebrities of wealth and fashion”' (16).

⁷ See Stephen Knight's observation that, in the *Adventures*, 'Holmes is the agent of middle-class feeling against the manipulative, immoral hedonism of aristocrats' (83).

⁸ For examples of Doyle's new-found connections amongst the social elite, see chapter twenty-three of his autobiography – 'Some Notable People' – in which, for instance, the author casually recalls 'Old Lord Burnham, the first of his line' inviting 'me down to his country house at Beaconsfield': 'I can remember the party well ... I see Lady Dorothy Nevill ... retailing gossip about Disraeli's flirtations. Sir Henry James walks under the trees with bended head, talking to the rising barrister who is destined as Lord Reading to be Viceroy of India. ... the door open[s], and enter Arthur Balfour, Prime Minister of England...' (245).

own son. After being momentarily shocked, the statesman quickly collects himself with ‘an aristocratic effort of self-command’ (412). Similarly, in ‘The Adventure of the Second Stain’, Watson is introduced to a politician ‘of European fame’ who has lost an important diplomatic letter (512). When the politician comes close to despair, Watson believes that he may have just been granted ‘a glimpse of the natural man’. Almost instantly, though, he finds that the ‘aristocratic mask’ has returned (512).⁹

In ‘The Adventure of the Missing Three-Quarter’, readers meet another celebrity distinguished by his self-command. According to Watson, Dr. Armstrong is

a thinker of European reputation in more than one branch of science. Yet even without knowing his brilliant record one could not fail to be impressed by a mere glance at the man, the square, massive face, the brooding eyes under the thatched brows, and the granite moulding of the inflexible jaw. A man of deep character, a man with an alert mind, grim, ascetic, self-contained, formidable – so I read Dr. Leslie Armstrong. (489)

Leo Braudy has argued that true fame relies on, what he calls, a ‘posture of reticence’ – on artfully ‘turning away’ from your audience in a bid to maintain its attention (1072). Throughout the *Return*, Holmes is made to do just that, and we are repeatedly told of the detective’s ‘disdain’ for the ‘popular’ (453) or of his ‘hat[ing] ... notoriety’ (512) in language that seems to protest too much. In the above-quoted passage, Doyle tries just as hard to make Dr. Armstrong appear indifferent to the public gaze: he is said to inhabit the objective world of ‘science’; he is proudly ‘ascetic’ and ‘self-contained’; and his unswayable nature is even reflected in his über-masculine physiognomy, which is described (in suitably geological terms) as a ‘massive’ and ‘inflexible’ hunk of ‘granite’ rock. Of these three techniques, the last is probably the most important: as Joseph Roach reminds us, paraphrasing golden-age Hollywood tastemaker Elinor Glyn, if a star’s ‘air of perceived indifference’ does not ‘appear to be exercised effortlessly’ it might as well not be exercised at all (5). By carving unbiddable self-possession into Dr. Armstrong’s face, Doyle makes Leslie’s ‘air of perceived indifference’ appear as natural and effortless as possible, imbuing Leslie’s apparent self-mastery with the indisputability of Lombrosian biological fact and presenting celebrities more generally as innately superior creatures who – far from being merely ordinary individuals who simply happen to be famous for being famous (per Boorstin) – deserve their adulation.

To a degree, Dr. Armstrong’s agency resides in his heightened masculinity; yet Doyle’s female celebrity creations are powerful in the *Return* as well. The best-known powerful female in the Holmes canon is, of course, the *Adventures’* Irene Adler, affectionately known as ‘the woman’. However, while Adler has certainly become something of a celebrity for modern Holmes readers, her celebrity status is more

⁹ In addition to the passage reinforcing ‘aristocratic self-command’, the brief moment of the mask being dropped (and then redeployed) itself performs a technique of celebrity: as Richard Dyer notes, ‘Stars are obviously a case of appearance – all we know of them is what we see and hear before us. Yet the whole media construction of stars encourages us to think in terms of “really” – what is [the star] really like? ... [to think that] we have a privileged reality to hang onto, the reality of the star’s private self’ (pp. 2, 10).

debatable in 'A Scandal in Bohemia', the story in which she originally appeared. Indeed, when the King of Bohemia declares 'I made the acquaintance of the well-known adventuress, Irene Adler. The name is no doubt familiar to you', Holmes and Watson seem to demur: they have to 'look her up' in Holmes's index (her entry is eventually discovered 'sandwiched in between that of a Hebrew Rabbi and that of a staff-commander who had written a monograph upon the deep sea fishes', 5-6). As a result, Adler becomes – typically of the *Adventures* – less a powerful celebrity than simply a powerful individual.

In the *Return*, however, the connection between sexualised feminine power and celebrity becomes far stronger. Perhaps the best example of this is found in 'The Adventure of the Second Stain'. In this story, Lady Hilda Trelawney Hope (a truly 'often heard of ... beauty': 517) has managed to manipulate a police officer into allowing her to enter the scene of a crime. In the following passage, Holmes interviews the officer in question about why he bent the rules. The constable begins by describing Lady Hilda as a

[']very pleasant, genteel young woman, sir.' 'Tall? Handsome?' 'Yes, sir, she was a well-grown young woman. I suppose you might say she was handsome. Perhaps some would say she was very handsome. "Oh, officer, do let me have a peep!" says she. She had pretty, coaxing ways, as you might say, and I thought there was no harm in letting her just put her head through the door.' (522)

With its multiple narrative voices, this passage takes on the layered structure of a fugue. In the outermost layer, we have Doyle, quietly tying everything together; underneath this, we have pragmatic Watson, cutting from one character to the next with the minimum of descriptive fuss; below this, we have the oafish Constable MacPherson, vainly projecting his inappropriately unprofessional desires onto a vaguely hypothetical collective ('Perhaps some would say she was very handsome'); and finally, reverberating through all of these voices, we have Lady Hilda herself – a character whose beguiling coquettish power ('Oh, officer, do let me have a peep!') can still be felt despite the proliferation of other (potentially muffling) layers of narration. Indeed, with her 'coaxing ways', the 'well-grown' Lady Hilda seems to exude what Bourdieuians call 'erotic capital': a sometimes overlooked 'personal asset' that imbues the owner with 'greater ... bargaining power' (Hakim, 2, 72). By giving her this power, Doyle endows Lady Hilda with an attribute capable of both expanding her sphere of influence and (quite literally) opening doors. Lady Hilda chose to open that door in order to retrieve a compromising letter. In so doing she and Holmes managed to 'avoid a scandal' (524). As such, the story represents yet another example of celebrity operating as an antagonistic interaction in which the celebrity figure vies with the public and the press for control over how they are viewed and portrayed.

5. Concluding Comments

Many modern histories of renown claim that the phenomenon has, over time, become increasingly egalitarian.¹⁰ However, in thinking back to the stories in the *Adventures* whilst reading those in the *Return*, one notices that the movement away from the extraordinary towards the ordinary was a little less linear than such histories suggest. A figure himself of increasing fame by the time of the *Return*, Doyle consistently ensures that these stories both empower the fictional celebrities that he portrays and disempower the other players in the celebrity dynamic – the public and the press. As such, the competitive cultural interaction that is celebrity functions very differently in this series than it does in the better-known *Adventures* of a decade earlier: crowds have become little more than passive automatons, privacy has become an obtainable ideal, and those who achieve a level of public renown (male and female alike) have become able to control not only themselves but their audience of easily-led inferiors.

¹⁰ See, for instance, Joseph A. Boone and Nancy J. Vickers (904).

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