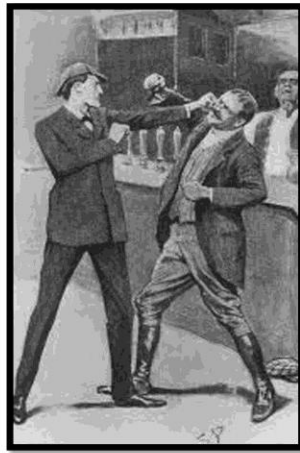


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# A Quantitative Analysis of Sherlock Holmes Stories



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# 10 Things that Will Surprise You

1. Professor Moriarty never appears “on-stage” in any Holmes story. Never. Not once.  
Moreover, at the time Conan Doyle wrote “The Final Problem,” the story in which Moriarty dies, Moriarty had never appeared nor was mentioned in any previous story. At that point in time, “The Final Problem” was the first and last time he was mentioned.
2. By a wide margin, Holmes’ most ubiquitous appurtenance is not his hat or his magnifying glass or his violin, but his pipe.
3. The text never mentions what we would call Holmes’ “deerstalker hat.” Twice Conan Doyle mentions a hat that may presumably be the origin of Holmes’ deerstalker hat, under the descriptions “ear-flapped travelling-cap” and “travelling-cloak and close-fitting cloth cap.”
4. Dr. Watson plays virtually no role in the solution of the mysteries.
5. Holmes uses deduction to solve the problem or mystery much more often than he uses observation (e.g., interpreting footprints, using his magnifying glass, identifying clues). There isn’t a single story in which Holmes uses observation to solve the problem or mystery more than he uses deduction.
6. In 21 of the stories—over one-third—Watson does not live with Holmes in 221B Baker Street, either because he’s married or because Holmes has retired and moved to the country.
7. Oddly, after a story is over, the most frequent fate of the antagonist is that Holmes lets them go ! And the second most frequent fate is that no crime has actually been committed (and so there can be no punishment).
8. Let us define “successfully solving the case” as:  
“There is a mystery to be solved; Holmes solves it; the antagonist does not escape; and justice is meted out to the antagonist (even if it’s Holmes’ personal justice that is meted out).”  
Using this as a definition, then Holmes does not “successfully solve” the case 24% of the time. That is, once out of every 4 cases he does not successfully solve the case.
9. Holmes never says, “Elementary, my dear Watson.” But he does say, “Elementary,” once, and he also uses the word to describe his deductions four other times. He also says “elementary” in a normal context three other times.
10. Contrary to typical depictions, Watson often describes Holmes as having “a remarkable gentleness and courtesy in his dealings with women” (or words to that effect).

# Conan Doyle & Sidney Paget

## Conan Doyle

Wikipedia ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arthur\\_Conan\\_Doyle](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arthur_Conan_Doyle)) says this about Sir Arthur Conan Doyle:

“Sir Arthur Ignatius Conan Doyle (22 May 1859 – 7 July 1930) was a British writer best known for his detective fiction featuring the character Sherlock Holmes. Shortly after he graduated from high school he began using Conan as a sort of surname. But technically his last name is simply 'Doyle'.

“Originally a physician, in 1887 he published *A Study in Scarlet*, the first of four novels about Holmes and Dr. Watson. In addition, Doyle wrote over fifty short stories featuring the famous detective. The Sherlock Holmes stories are generally considered milestones in the field of crime fiction.

“Doyle was a prolific writer; his non-Sherlockian works include fantasy and science fiction stories about Professor Challenger and humorous stories about the Napoleonic soldier Brigadier Gerard, as well as plays, romances, poetry, non-fiction and historical novels.

“Doyle struggled to find a publisher for his work. His first work featuring Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson, *A Study in Scarlet*, was taken by Ward Lock & Company on 20 November 1886, giving Doyle £25 (£2500 today) for all rights to the story.

“A sequel to *A Study in Scarlet* was commissioned, and *The Sign of the Four* appeared in *Lippincott's Magazine* in February 1890, under agreement with Ward Lock & Company. Doyle felt grievously exploited by Ward Lock & Company as an author new to the publishing world, and he left them. Short stories featuring Sherlock Holmes were published in *The Strand* magazine.

“Doyle's attitude towards his most famous creation was ambivalent. In November 1891 he wrote to his mother: ‘I think of slaying Holmes, ... and winding him up for good and all. He takes my mind from better things.’ His mother responded, ‘You won't! You can't! You mustn't!’ In an attempt to deflect publishers' demands for more Holmes stories, he raised his price to a level intended to discourage them, but found they were willing to pay even the large sums he asked. As a result, he became one of the best-paid authors of his time.

“In December 1893, to dedicate more of his time to his historical novels, Doyle had Holmes and Professor Moriarty plunge to their deaths together down the Reichenbach Falls in the story ‘The Final Problem’. Public outcry, however, led him to feature Holmes in 1901 in the novel *The Hound of the Baskervilles*.

“In 1903, Doyle published his first Holmes short story in ten years, ‘The Adventure of the Empty House’, in which it was explained that only Moriarty had fallen, but since Holmes had other dangerous enemies—especially Colonel Sebastian Moran—he had arranged to also be perceived as dead.”

## Sidney Paget

Wikipedia again ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sidney\\_Paget](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sidney_Paget)):

“Sidney Edward Paget (4 October 1860 – 28 January 1908) was a British illustrator of the Victorian era, best known for his illustrations that accompanied Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes stories in *The Strand* magazine.

“He was inadvertently hired to illustrate *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*, a series of twelve short stories that ran from July 1891 through December 1892, when the publishers accidentally sent him the letter of commission rather than his younger brother, Walter Paget. [Author's note: I've checked out Walter's illustrations, and they do seem to be superior to Sidney's.]

“In all, he illustrated one Holmes novel and 37 Holmes short stories. His illustrations have influenced interpretations of the detective in fiction, film and drama.



“*The Strand* became one of Great Britain's most prestigious fiction magazines, with the Holmes series its most popular feature. As Holmes' popularity grew, Paget's illustrations became larger and more elaborate. Beginning with ‘The Final Problem’ in 1893, almost every Holmes story in *The Strand* featured a full-page illustration as well as many smaller pictures within the text.

“Paget is also credited with giving the first deerstalker cap and Inverness cape to Holmes, details that were never mentioned in Arthur Conan Doyle's writing. The cap and coat first appear in an illustration for ‘The Boscombe Valley Mystery’ in 1891.

“Altogether, Sidney Paget did some 356 published drawings for the Sherlock Holmes series. After his death in 1908, other illustrators found that they had to imitate Paget's style when drawing Sherlock Holmes.”



Illustrations in this book are by Sidney Paget unless indicated otherwise.

Paget died in 1908 in the midst of Conan Doyle's career. The following table shows the volumes he did and did not illustrate.

<b>Did</b>	<b>Did Not</b>
<i>The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes</i>	<i>A Study in Scarlet</i>
<i>The Memoirs of Sherlock Holmes</i>	<i>The Sign of the Four</i>
<i>The Return of Sherlock Holmes</i>	<i>The Valley of Fear</i>
<i>The Hound of the Baskervilles</i>	<i>His Last Bow</i>
	<i>The Case-Book of Sherlock Holmes</i>

# The “Holmes Canon” & Plot Types

The term “Holmes Canon” means the Sherlock Holmes stories that experts agree were written by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. In the Canon are:

- Four novellas
- Fifty-six short stories, most published originally in magazines and then gathered into four collections

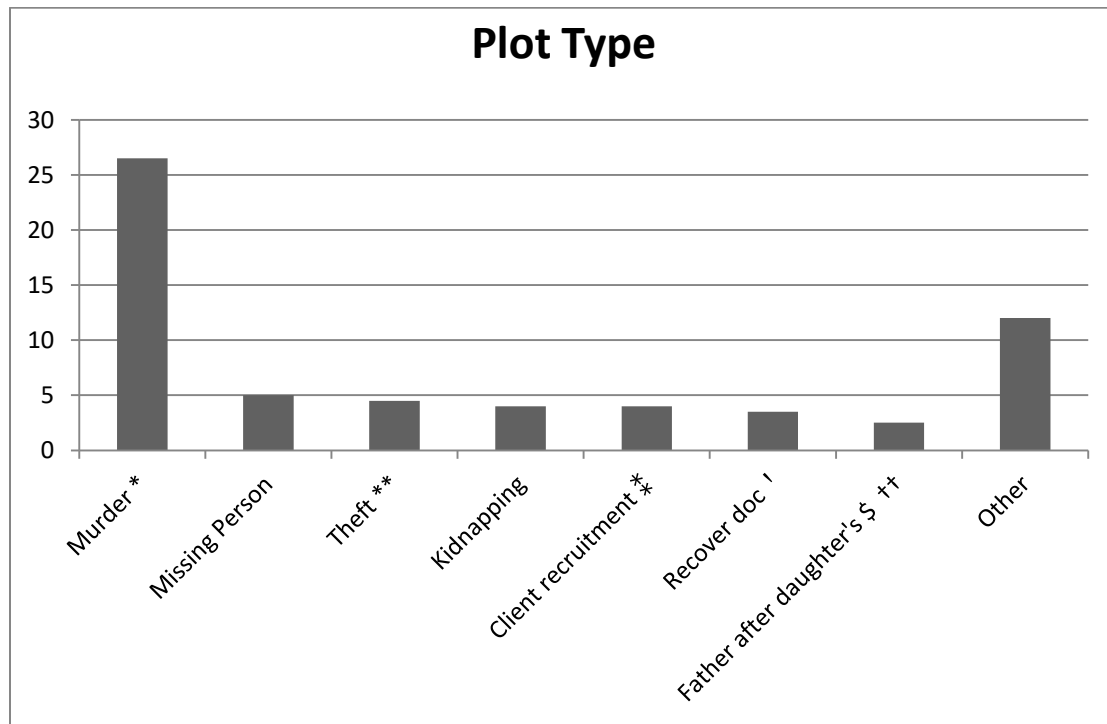
Two of the novellas—*A Study in Scarlet* and *The Valley of Fear*—are divided into two parts. These parts are drastically different in many ways: timeframe, characters, setting, and narration, and indeed Sherlock Holmes plays almost no role in the “part IIs.” Given the sort of data that my book is presenting, it makes most sense to consider these two novellas as two separate stories, giving a total of 62 stories.

Since these are mystery stories, it is not surprising that the stories can be grouped into a small number of plot types. The following table shows the Canon and the type of plot for each story.

Book	Story	Plot Type
A Study in Scarlet	Part I	Determine murderer/attempted murderer, or prevent murder
	Part II	(Other)
The Sign of the 4	The Sign of the 4	Determine murderer/attempted murderer, or prevent murder
The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes	A Scandal in Bohemia	Recover the document
	The Red-Headed League	Protagonist recruited under mystifying circumstances
	A Case of Identity	Father/set-father after daughter's money
	Boscombe Valley Mystery	Determine murderer/attempted murderer, or prevent murder
	The Five Orange Pips	Determine murderer/attempted murderer, or prevent murder
	Man with the Twisted Lip	Missing person
	The Blue Carbuncle	Catch thief or prevent theft
	The Speckled Band	Father/step-father after daughter's \$ AND prevent murder
	The Engineer's Thumb	Determine murderer/attempted murderer, or prevent murder
	The Noble Bachelor	Missing person
	The Beryl Coronet	Catch thief or prevent theft
	The Copper Beeches	Father/step-father after daughter's money
The Memoirs of Sherlock Holmes	Silver Blaze	Determine murderer/attempted murderer, or prevent murder
	The Yellow Face	Domestic problem
	The Stockbroker's Clerk	Protagonist recruited under mystifying circumstances
	The <i>Gloria Scott</i>	Decipher document
	The Musgrave Ritual	Missing person
	The Reigate Squire	Determine murderer/attempted murderer, or prevent murder
	The Crooked Man	Determine murderer/attempted murderer, or prevent murder
	The Resident Patient	Determine murderer/attempted murderer, or prevent murder

Book	Story	Plot Type
	The Greek Interpreter	Kidnapping
	The Naval Treaty	Recover the document
	The Final Problem	Stop arch-criminal
The Return of Sherlock Holmes	The Empty House	Determine murderer/attempted murderer, or prevent murder
	The Norwood Builder	Determine murderer/attempted murderer, or prevent murder
	The Dancing Men	Determine murderer/attempted murderer, or prevent murder
	The Solitary Cyclist	Kidnapping
	The Priory School	Kidnapping
	Black Peter	Determine murderer/attempted murderer, or prevent murder
	Charles Augustus Milverton	Blackmail
	The Six Napoleons	Theft AND determine murderer
	The Three Students	Catch thief or prevent theft
	The Golden Pince-Nez	Determine murderer/attempted murderer, or prevent murder
	The Missing 3-Quarter	Missing person
	The Abbey Grange	Determine murderer/attempted murderer, or prevent murder
	The Second Stain	Recover the document
The Hound of the Baskervilles	Hound of the Baskervilles	Determine murderer/attempted murderer, or prevent murder
The Valley of Fear	The Tragedy of Birlstone	Determine murderer/attempted murderer, or prevent murder
	The Scowrs	Determine murderer/attempted murderer, or prevent murder
His Last Bow	Wisteria Lodge	Determine murderer/attempted murderer, or prevent murder
	The Cardboard Box	Determine murderer/attempted murderer, or prevent murder
	The Red Circle	Miscellaneous mystery
	The Bruce-Partington Plans	Determine murderer/attempted murderer, or prevent murder AND recover document
	The Dying Detective	Determine murderer/attempted murderer, or prevent murder
	The Disappearance of Lady Frances Carfax	Kidnapping
	The Devil's Foot	Determine murderer/attempted murderer, or prevent murder
	His Last Bow	Counter-espionage
The Case-Book of Holmes	The Illustrious Client	Unmask villain
	The Blanched Soldier	Missing person
	The Mazarin Stone	Catch thief or prevent theft
	The Three Gables	Protagonist recruited under mystifying circumstances
	The Sussex Vampire	Domestic problem
	The Three Garridebs	Protagonist recruited under mystifying circumstances
	Thor Bridge	Determine murderer/attempted murderer, or prevent murder
	The Creeping Man	Domestic problem
	The Lion's Mane	Determine murderer/attempted murderer, or prevent murder
	The Veiled Lodger	Miscellaneous mystery
	Shoscombe Old Place	Misc mystery
	The Retired Colorman	Determine murderer/attempted murderer, or prevent murder

The following graph shows the frequency of the various plot types. (The vertical axis is “number of stories that are of this plot type.”)



\* Determine the murderer or attempted murderer, or prevent a murder

\*\* Catch thief or prevent theft

\* Protagonist recruited for some task under mystifying circumstances

† Recover missing/stolen document

†† Father or step-father tries to get his daughter's money and perhaps harm her

The “Other” category includes such plots types as counter-espionage, stopping an arch-criminal (Moriarty), unmasking a villain for what he is, deciphering a document, blackmail, and others.

# Back Stories

According to Wikipedia (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Backstory>):

“A backstory, background story, back-story, or background is a set of events invented for a plot, presented as preceding and leading up to that plot. It is a literary device of a narrative history all chronologically earlier than the narrative of primary interest.

“It is the history of characters and other elements that underlie the situation existing at the main narrative's start. Even a purely historical work selectively reveals backstory to the audience.”

That is, back story is set-up information that the author has to give you, in order for you to effectively understand where the story is starting from and the nature of the world in which the story takes place. For example, if your main character is blind, you'll have to make this clear fairly early on, as well as (typically) sooner or later explaining how the character was blinded. On the other hand, if they have a spider phobia, that is something that need not come out till much, much later. Too much back story slows the story down and gets you rejected by the agent or editor nice and quick.

There are a small number of Sherlock Holmes stories where the back story is more important than the main mystery and Holmes' role in it. That is, the solution to the mystery is a relatively unimportant part of the text, or happened in the distant past. For example, someone merely tells a story to Holmes, or Holmes merely tells what happened a long time ago to Watson. These stories are as follows:

- *A Study in Scarlet - Part II* (the antagonist's history in Utah, before Holmes and Watson even meet)
- *The Gloria Scott* (Holmes' first case, described by Holmes to Watson)
- *The Empty House* (the story of Holmes' travels when he was supposedly dead)
- *The Valley of Fear* - “The Scowlers” (back story to the mystery in “The Tragedy of Birlstone,” also set in America)
- *The Veiled Lodger* (a confession to Holmes and Watson by woman involved in a crime long ago)

I don't consider any of these stories very successful: three I rated as only “1 star” (out of 4) , the other two only “2 stars.”

# Settings: Place & Time

## Settings: Place

There are no major surprises about the places in which the stories unfold. See the graph below.

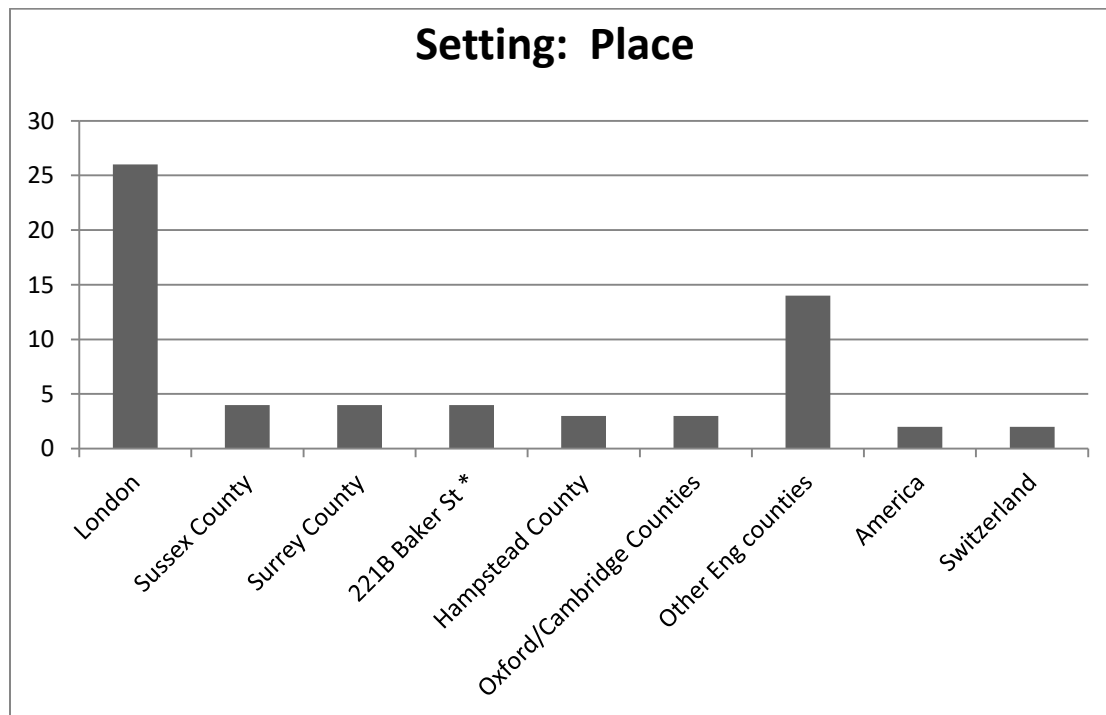
Interestingly (or not), if you

- ... add all the stories that take place in the non-London English counties, and
- ... add the 221B Baker Street settings to the London settings, then

you get 28 for the counties and 30 for London—almost exactly equal.

Perhaps two items are of note:

- There are over 80 English counties, some of them quite small. So Conan Doyle hit only about 15% of them.
- It's not surprising that 94% of the stories take place in England. But it's a little surprising that none take place in other parts of the United Kingdom besides England.



\* Or across the road from 221B Baker Street.

## Settings: Time

Giving precise information on the timeframes in which the stories take place is iffy. Much of the time Conan Doyle gives a specific year and sometimes even a specific date. But often he doesn't, and there's a cottage industry of people with nothing better to do with their time than scrutinize the stories and speculate on their relative chronological order. Me, I've got places to go and people to meet. Or not.

The table below is my reading of the chronology, given a rational investment of time. Note:

- If a story doesn't give a time setting, and the date of publication of the story in *The Strand* magazine is known and is a plausible date for the story to have taken place, then I use the date of publication of the story. (Many dates of publication are *not* plausible dates for the story to have taken place.)
- It is generally accepted that Watson married Mary Morstan in 1888 (some say 1889) and left 221B Baker Street. (After Mary's death he moves back in with Holmes.) Therefore, if Watson is living apart from Holmes in the story, it can be deduced in Holmesian fashion that the story takes place between 1888 and her death (which by my reading is 1894). In such cases I make a reasonable guess at the date and am likely correct within 1 or 2 years.
- If I can't make a reasonable guess I skip it.

To the extent that dates in which the stories take place can be determined, the chronology of the stories is as follows—according to my reading.

Story	Year It Takes Place
<i>Study in Scarlet</i> - Part II	1847
The Scowrers	1875
Gloria Scott (Holmes' 1 <sup>st</sup> case)	1875
<b>1878: Watson graduates from med school</b>	
Musgrave Ritual (Holmes' 3 <sup>rd</sup> case)	Before 1880
<b>1878 - 1880: 2<sup>nd</sup> Afghan war, Watson wounded</b>	
<b>1881: Holmes and Watson meet</b>	
<i>Study in Scarlet</i> - Part I	1881
Resident Patient	1881 - 1882
Speckled Band	1883
5 Orange Pips	1887
Reigate Squire	1887
<i>Hound of the Baskervilles</i>	~1887
Tragedy of Birlstone	~1887
Noble Bachelor	1888
Second Stain	1888
<i>Sign of the 4</i>	1888

<b>1888: Watson married</b>	
Scandal in Bohemia	1888
Stockbroker's Clerk	1888
Crooked Man	1888 - 1889
Naval Treaty	1888 - 1889
Dying Detective	1889
The Engineer's Thumb	1889
Man with the Twisted Lip	1889
Case of Identity	1888 - 1890 pub date
Boscombe Valley Mystery	1888 - 1890 pub date
Blue Carbuncle	1888 - 1890 pub date
Red-Headed League	1890
Copper Beeches	1889 - 1892 pub date
Final Problem	1891
<b>1891: Holmes "dead"</b>	
<b>1891 - 1894: "Dead" Holmes wanders, then returns</b>	
Empty House	1894
Mazarin Stone	1894
<b>~1894: Watson moves back in with Holmes, so Mary is dead</b>	
Norwood Builder	1894
Golden Pince-Nez	1894
Black Peter	1895
3 Students	1895
Solitary Cyclist	1895
Wisteria Lodge	1895
Bruce-Partington Plans	1895
Veiled Lodger	1896
Missing 3-Quarter	~1896
Abbey Grange	1897
Devil's foot	1897
The Retired Colour-man	After 1897
Charles Aug. Milverton	1899
Priory School	After 1900
<b>1902: Watson moves to Queen Anne Street</b>	
Illustrious Client	1902
3 Garridebs	1902
Dancing Men	Before 1903 pub date
Blanchard Soldier	1903
Creeping Man	1903

<b>By 1907: Holmes retires</b>	
Lion's Mane	1907
His Last Bow	1914

The following are impossible to date, because: (a) It's unclear if Watson is married, and (b) The publication date is not a sufficient indicator of the timeframe:

- The Disappearance of Lady Frances Carfax (somewhere in the 15 years after 1889)
- Silver Blaze
- The Cardboard Box
- The Beryl Coronet
- The Greek Interpreter
- The Yellow Face
- Shoscombe Old Place
- Thor Bridge
- The Sussex Vampire
- The Red Circle
- The Three Gables
- The Six Napoleons

# Narration

## Point of View

In literary theory, “point of view,” also called simply “narration,” means: Who is telling the story?

A story can only be considered “true” or “dependable” if the person telling the story is a dependable narrator. There are many examples of stories told by undependable characters. I suspect there are even stories told from an “undependable omniscient author” point of view, though I can’t think of any at the moment.

There are various typologies for defining “who is telling the story.” I am using the following:

- 1<sup>st</sup> person: A major or minor character is telling the story. Also called an “I narrative.” The text follows the format “I saw this, I thought that.”

If the author is playing fair, the story can only be told from this character’s point of view. Events that occur in times and places other than those experienced by the narrator cannot be depicted. (Of course, another character could tell the 1<sup>st</sup> person narrator about those times and place.)

- 3<sup>rd</sup> person omniscient: Also called a “godlike omniscient narrator.” The narrator is essentially the author, who can go anywhere, see anything, know what everyone is thinking, and jump from one time period to another and back again. The text follows the format “He saw this, she thought that.”
- 3<sup>rd</sup> person limited omniscient: This represents a spectrum of omniscience, which at some arbitrary point just becomes “3<sup>rd</sup> person omniscient.” A limited omniscient narrative can be described as “telling the story by looking over a particular character’s shoulder.” That is, the author limits the point of view to a single character. The author only depicts what that character can see and hear, and what he or she thinks. Again, the text follows the format “He saw this, he thought that”—but it’s always the same person.

In some cases, the story might be “over the shoulder of two or three characters.” Any more than that, and a reasonable person would consider it a 3<sup>rd</sup> person omniscient narrative. In Part II of *A Study in Scarlet*, the story is told by Hope, Ferrier, and one or more Mormon scouts. Therefore, I’m calling it a 3<sup>rd</sup> person omniscient.

The data in this case is so heavily skewed that it doesn’t graph well, so I’ll give it in table format:

- 1<sup>st</sup> person - Watson: 56 stories
- 1<sup>st</sup> person - Holmes: 2 stories
- 3<sup>rd</sup> person omniscient: 2 stories
- 3<sup>rd</sup> person limited omniscient: 2 stories (1 over Watson’s shoulder, 1 over Birdy Edward’s)

## Story within a Story

The issue of narration becomes more complicated, because the standard Holmes plot follows this structure:

1. Boy contacts Holmes.
2. Boy describes his problem or mystery to Holmes.
3. Holmes investigates boy's problem or mystery.
4. Holmes solves boy's problem or mystery.
5. Boy ends up happy, unhappy, jailed, exiled, or dead.

Because of this structure, a very great percentage of the plot consists of step 2, where the client describes the events that led up to the client's contacting Holmes. Often this takes up more pages than any other part of the story. Therefore, much of what we think of as the plot—that is, the events that take place in the story—are not actually *occurring before our eyes*, but rather *are being described to Holmes (and Watson the narrator) and thus to us*. This technique falls under the moniker of “story within a story.”

Moreover, this technique is not at all limited to step 2 but very often occurs in step 5, when:

- Holmes tells Watson what Watson doesn't know yet.
- The antagonist confesses and tells of the events from his or her point of view.
- The client explains additional facts that he or she did not previously reveal.

Often, therefore, the formal narrator (Watson, usually) is actually listening to a narration by another character; and the distinction between “who is narrating the story” is thus a complicated one. Some commenters have classified such stories as being narrated by the client or antagonist or Holmes. I have taken a purist point of view and do not: Whomever starts out telling the story is the narrator.

Note that within *The Valley of Fear* and *A Study in Scarlet*, the plot is broken into separate “Parts” in which the formal point of view changes from 1<sup>st</sup> person (Watson) to 3<sup>rd</sup> person omniscient or limited omniscient. This is one of the reasons I treat these as separate “stories.”

# Sherlock Holmes



Yeah, yeah, yeah, everybody knows about Sherlock Holmes. I won't bore you with the basics. But here are some things you may not be aware of:

- Contrary to typical depictions, Watson often describes Holmes as having “a remarkable gentleness and courtesy in his dealings with women” (or words to that effect). In addition to making him a more sympathetic protagonist, this provides the detective the advantage of eliciting information that otherwise might be lost to him if he was discourteous.

It's probably fair to say that the Holmes of the books is a little less cantankerous and hard-edged than Jeremy Brett's PBS portrayal.



- In the first story, *A Study in Scarlet*, Holmes is unaware that the earth revolves around the sun!
- Elaborating on the preceding bullet, the Holmes of *A Study in Scarlet* is very different from the Holmes of later stories. In *Scarlet* he's more outgoing, more given to humor, and less of a logical automaton. He's more like Benedict Cumberbatch's Holmes.

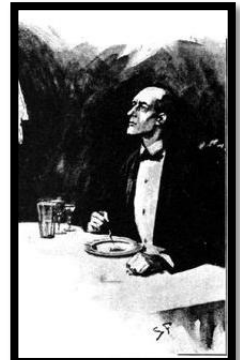


- Holmes not only plays the violin pretty well, he also composes music.
- He owns a Stradivarius.
- He's an excellent boxer; and is proficient at “Japanese wrestling,” which we would typically call judo.
- 2 of his clients die.
- No later than 1906 he retires to the country to raise and study bees.



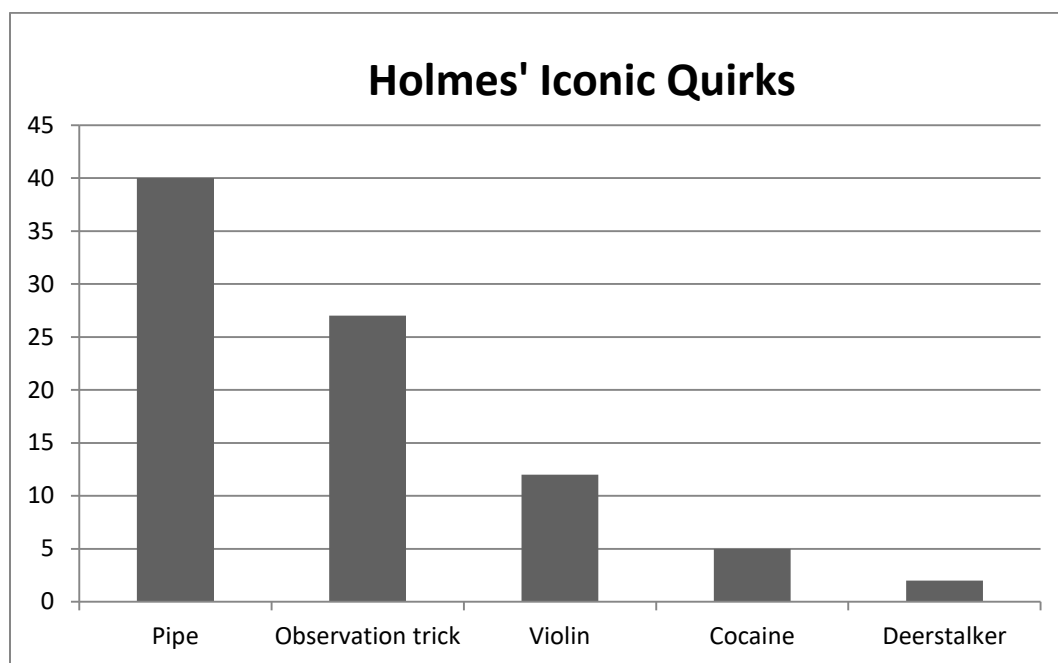
- He pretty much treats Watson like shit, explicitly showing that he considers Watson a dummy:
  - One time Watson says, “I am inclined to think...” and Holmes chimes in to the effect of, *Yes, you should.*
  - Another time after he sent Watson on a mission, he tells him, “A very pretty hash you have made of it.”

If I was Watson, I would have moved out after a week.



# Holmes' Iconic Quirks

Again, the vertical axis is “number of stories in which this iconic quirk appears.” Since a given story may include more than one, the total number is larger than the number of stories, unlike other data points.



Pipe	<p>Holmes' pipe smoking dominates every other personal habit or possession: 40 stories include him smoking a pipe (or talking about doing so).</p> <p>The man smokes like a chimney: In addition to smoking a pipe, probably 5 - 10 stories show him smoking a cigarette, and another 3 - 6 smoking a cigar.</p>
Observation trick	<p>In 27 stories, Holmes looks at a person's clothes, jewelry, physiognomy, body type, calluses, shoes, dirt and dust, and who knows what else, and from them deduces everything about the person: age, birth order, occupation, place of residence, nationality, moral and personal habits, where they have been that day—just about anything you can name. Note that I cannot think of a single case where such shenanigans are part of solving a case; it's just a personal quirk.</p> <p>The picture is from “The Blue Carbuncle.” He's examining a lost hat to determine its owner.</p>



Violin	<p>10 stories include him playing the violin or refer to him playing it.</p> <p>I didn't keep data on it, but listening to concerts is certainly his most frequent form of recreation</p>
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Cocaine	<p>This is certainly the most sensationalistic quirk. The stories in which this is shown or mentioned, and the years they take place, is as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Five Orange Pips (1887)</li> <li>• <i>The Sign of the Four</i> (1888)</li> <li>• A Scandal in Bohemia (1888)</li> <li>• Man with the Twisted Lip (1889)</li> <li>• The Yellow Face (~1892, based on the publication date)</li> </ul> <p>In "The Yellow Face," Watson calls Holmes' use of cocaine "occasional."</p> <p>Since this occurs in the narrow band 1887 - 1892, one presumes Conan Doyle became uncomfortable with showing his increasingly popular hero as a dope fiend and gave it up.</p>
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Deerstalker	<p>As described above, the goofy hat appears at most twice in the text and is never called a "deerstalker." My research proved it was indeed popularized by Paget.</p>
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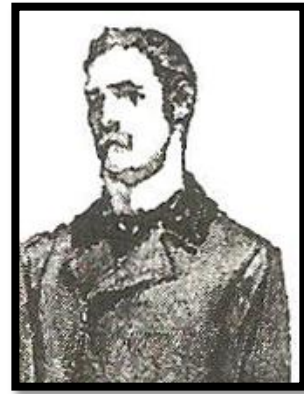


# Dr. John Watson

Dr. John Watson really is kind of a sad case. He serves virtually no role in solving the mysteries, and Holmes treats him pretty shabbily (see the previous section). You'd think that since they had a doctor handy, both Holmes and Conan Doyle would employ him in a forensic capacity, but this is not the case. All this is even more peculiar, given that Conan Doyle was himself a physician.

Watson is little more than an observer and narrator. The only stories in which he has a meaningful role in the plot are as follows:

- *The Sign of the Four*: Watson helps shoot the murderous pygmy.
- *The Copper Beeches*: Watson shoots the killer mastiff.
- *A Scandal in Bohemia*: He helps Holmes fool Irene Adler.
- *The Greek Interpreter*: Watson uses his medical knowledge to save the interpreter.
- *The Empty House*: Watson helps subdue the sniper.
- *Charles Augustus Milverton*: Watson impersonates a porcelain connoisseur as a diversion, so that Holmes can burgle the antagonist's home.
- *The Dying Detective*: He fetches the disease specialist.
- *The Devil's Foot*: He and Holmes perform a dangerous experiment with a hallucinogenic drug.
- *The Bruce-Partington Plans*: He helps Holmes burgle the suspect's home.
- *The Disappearance of Lady Frances Carfax*: He helps revive Lady Carfax.
- *The Illustrious Client*: He helps Holmes burgle the suspect's home.
- *The Reigate Squire*: The suspects try to kill Holmes in middle of the investigation, and Watson helps save him.
- *The Three Garridebs*: He takes a bullet when he and Holmes capture the antagonist.
- *The Hound of the Baskervilles*: This is Watson's most efficacious role. He investigates the mystery on his own and discovers a couple key facts (though Holmes later says he had discovered them on his own too). It's the only story in which Holmes praises him. Watson also takes a pot shot at the hound, though it's not clear if he hit it or not.



# Mary Morstan & Mycroft

## Mary Morstan

Mary Morstan appears on the scene as early as *The Sign of Four* (set in 1888), the second Holmes story that Conan Doyle wrote. Watson introduces her as follows:

“Miss Morstan entered the room with a firm step and an outward composure of manner. She was a blonde young lady, small, dainty, well gloved [*Author’s Note: Say what?* ], and dressed in the most perfect taste. There was, however, a plainness and simplicity about her costume which bore with it a suggestion of limited means. The dress was a sombre grayish beige, untrimmed and unbraided, and she wore a small turban of the same dull hue, relieved only by a suspicion of white feather in the side. Her face had neither regularity of feature nor beauty of complexion, but her expression was sweet and amiable, and her large blue eyes were singularly spiritual and sympathetic. In an experience of women which extends over many nations and three separate continents, I have never looked upon a face which gave a clearer promise of a refined and sensitive nature.”

It’s love at first sight, on both their parts. On that very first night they hold hands. (And remember, that was back when holding hands really meant something.) They’re engaged by the end of the story, and by the third story, “A Scandal in Bohemia” (also set in 1888 by my reading), they’re married, and Watson is no longer living with Holmes. (According to my reading, one entry in *Wikipedia* is incorrect when it states that Watson was married in 1889.)

She is mentioned in “The Crooked Man” but gets to speak only in “The Boscombe Valley Mystery” and “The Man with the Twisted Lip.” *Wikipedia*

([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Minor\\_Sherlock\\_Holmes\\_characters#Mary\\_Morstan\\_\(later\\_Watson\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Minor_Sherlock_Holmes_characters#Mary_Morstan_(later_Watson)))

says: “By the time of ‘The Norwood Builder’ (after Holmes’s return), Mary Morstan has died and Watson has returned to his former lodgings in Baker Street. Her cause of death is never mentioned.” “The Norwood Builder” takes place in 1894, so poor Mary did not have a long life.

Sidney Paget did not illustrate *The Sign of the Four*. Frederic Dorr Steele depicts her like this:



## Mycroft Holmes

Sherlock describes his older brother as follows:

“He has the tidiest and most orderly brain, with the greatest capacity for storing facts, of any man living. The same great powers which I have turned to the detection of crime he has used for this particular business. The conclusions of every [government] department are passed to him, and he is the central exchange, the clearinghouse, which makes out the balance. All other men are specialists, but his specialism is omniscience. [The government] began by using him as a short-cut, a convenience; now he has made himself an essential. In that great brain of his everything is pigeon-holed and can be handed out in an instant.... Again and again I have taken a problem to him, and have received an explanation which has afterwards proved to be the correct one.”

Mycroft appears in or is mentioned in four stories:

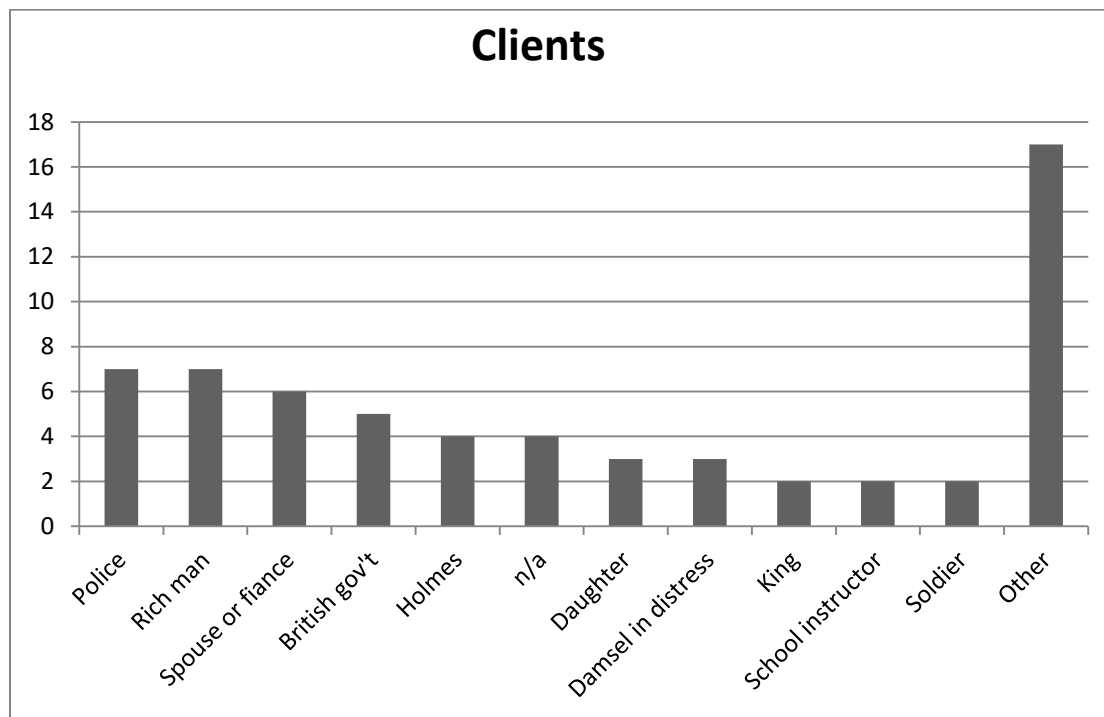
- The Greek Interpreter
- The Final Problem
- The Empty House
- The Bruce-Partington Plans



# Clients, Antagonists, & Moriarty

## Clients

As you might expect, Holmes' clients—that is, the people who first contact him to solve the problem or mystery—are a diverse lot. Still, they can be grouped into a fairly limited number of categories:



Of note:

- “Holmes”, column 5: Holmes sometimes pursues a case on his own volition, without being hired by someone else.
- “Daughter”, column 7: This column includes both daughters and step-daughters.

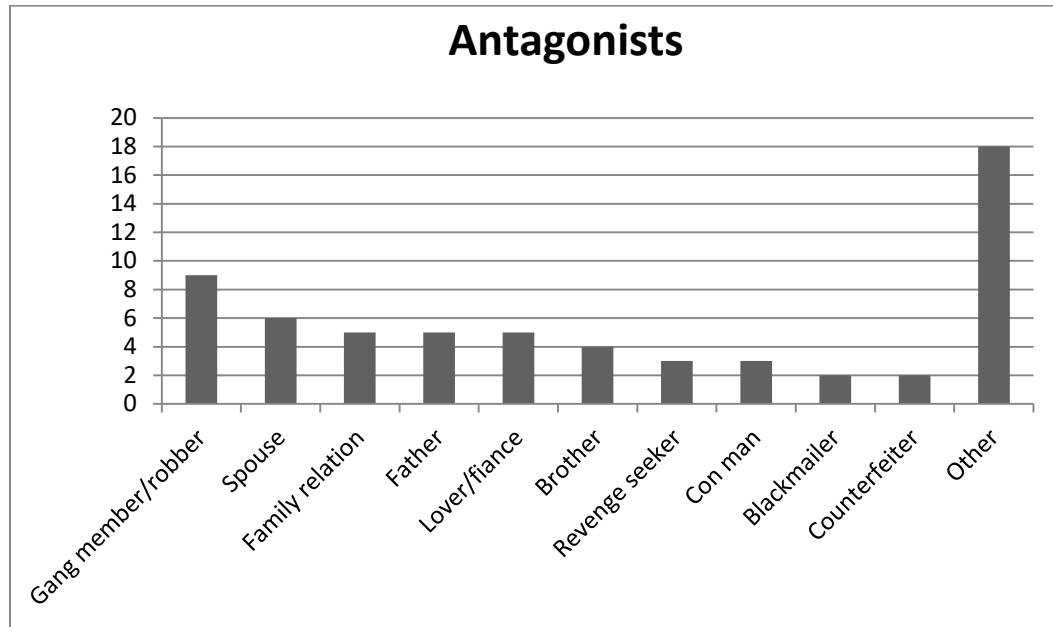
## Antagonists

Antagonists are as diverse as clients. Some of the more interesting antagonists:

- Ku Klux Klan
- Harpooner
- Butler (“the butler did it”)
- Central American dictator
- Indian Ocean pygmy cannibal
- Australian highwayman

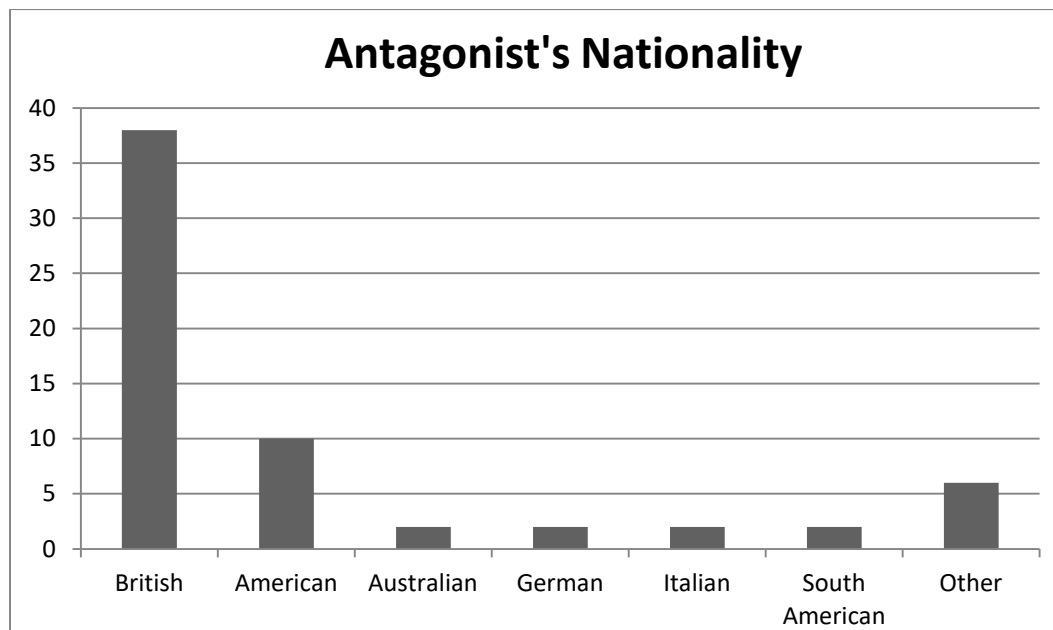
- Brigham Young
- Kaiser Wilhelm's spy
- Mafia killer

The following graph shows what sort of person the antagonist is. Again, the vertical axis specifies the number of stories with this kind of antagonist.



## Antagonist's Nationality

Like John LeCarre, Conan Doyle doesn't seem to think too highly of Americans.



## Moriarty

Moriarty, Holmes' most famous adversary, is described in *The Valley of Fear* as “the celebrated author of *The Dynamics of an Asteroid*, a book which ascends to such rarefied heights of pure mathematics that it is said that there was no man in the scientific press capable of criticizing it.”

Professor Moriarty never appears “on-stage” in any Holmes story. Never. Not once.

Moreover, at the time Conan Doyle wrote “The Final Problem,” the story in which Moriarty dies, Moriarty had never appeared nor was mentioned in any previous story. That story was the first and last time Moriarty was mentioned.

One concludes that Moriarty was just a device to get rid of Holmes in the noblest fashion possible, because Conan Doyle was sick of writing about him.

When Conan Doyle decided that the cash was too good to turn his back on, he resurrected Holmes. He was then free in later stories to refer to Moriarty as a dead arch-villain, and this he did in 5 stories.



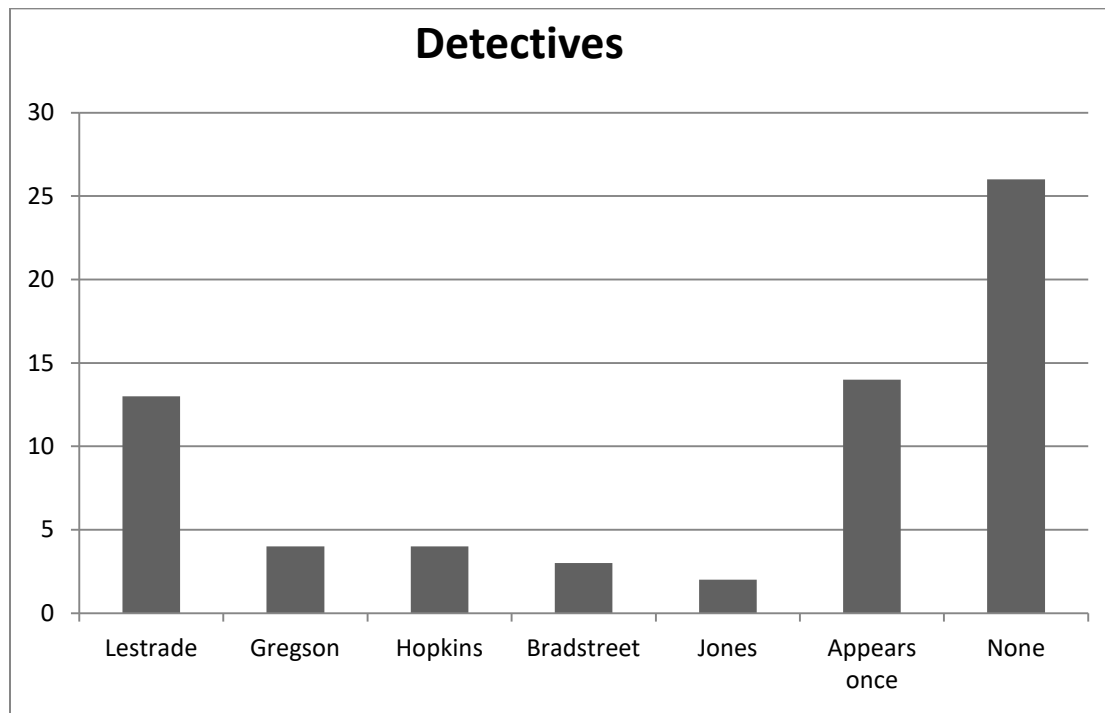
After killing off Moriarty (and apparently Holmes) in “The Final Problem,” Conan Doyle also wrote stories set in the time before that story takes place; and in one of them, Moriarty is alive and well and has one of Holmes' clients murdered, though Moriarty does not appear “on-stage.”

# Detectives

Holmes is openly disparaging of Scotland Yard. Detective Lestrade is the most well-known foil to Holmes, and the detective with whom Holmes has the testiest relationship. However, after Holmes solves “The Adventure of the Six Napoleons,” Lestrade tell Holmes that down at Scotland Yard they are proud of him, though he may not think it. Holmes is touched. This occurs relatively halfway through the chronology of all the stories, so one could say Lestrade and the rest of Scotland Yard warmed up to him over time. But the testy relationship continues afterwards. It was too useful to Conan Doyle as a plot device.

The chart below shows the number of stories that include each detective. Some observations:

- As I read the stories, I felt like you couldn’t spit without hitting Detective Lestrade, but that was not borne out by the data. He appears in only 21%.
- In 26 stories, no detective appears.
- 14 detectives appear in only 1 story.
- In a handful of stories, more than one detective appears. In the first story, *A Study in Scarlet*, Holmes says that Lestrade and Gregson are as jealous of each other as “a pair of professional beauties.”



# Mrs. Hudson & the Babes

## Mrs. Hudson

Mrs. Hudson is of course Sherlock's landlady, and she tends to appear in many depictions on TV or in the movies. But the truth is, her role in the stories is less than typically thought. She appears on-stage in only 10 stories:

- *The Sign of the Four*
- The Naval Treaty
- The Empty House
- The Dancing Men
- Black Peter
- The Second Stain
- Wisteria Lodge
- The Dying Detective
- The Mazarin Stone
- The Three Garridebs

She is mentioned in 4 others but doesn't appear:

- The Blue Carbuncle
- The Speckled Band
- *The Valley of Fear*
- The Disappearance of Lady Frances Carfax

In the first story, *A Study in Scarlet*, Conan Doyle only mentions a "landlady."

The only meaningful role she plays is in:

- "The Empty House", where she periodically turns the Holmes dummy in the window to fool the sniper into thinking that Holmes is sitting there.
- "The Dying Detective," where she contacts Watson and tells him how ill Holmes is.

Interestingly (or not), Conan Doyle uses the name "Hudson" for other people or places about half a dozen times.

## The Babes

One fact that surprised me: In fully 25 of the stories, a pretty or stunningly beautiful woman appears. Of these, five women stand out above all others. Descriptions of these ladies are as follows.

**Maud Bellamy (The Lion's Mane)**

Holmes: "There was no gainsaying that she would have graced any assembly in the world. Who could have imagined that so rare a flower would grow from such a root and in such an atmosphere? .... I could not look upon her perfect clear-cut face, with all the soft freshness of the downlands in her delicate coloring, without realizing that no young man could cross her path unscathed.... Maud Bellamy will always remain in my memory as a most complete and remarkable woman."

*Original illustration in The Strand magazine.*

**Irene Adler (A Scandal in Bohemia)**

- The King: "She has the face of the most beautiful of women."
- Horse groom: "She is the daintiest thing under a bonnet on this planet."
- Holmes: "She was a lovely woman, with a face that a man might die for."
- Watson: "I know that I never felt more heartily ashamed of myself than when I saw the beautiful creature against whom I was conspiring, or the grace and kindness with which she waited upon the injured man."

(no illustration available)

**Lady Mary Brackenstall (The Abbey Grange)**

Watson: "Seldom have I seen so graceful a figure, so womanly a presence, and so beautiful a face. She was a blonde, golden-haired, blue-eyed (*sic*), and would no doubt have had the perfect complexion which goes with such coloring, had not her recent experience left her drawn and haggard."

(no illustration available)

**Alice Turner (The Boscombe Valley Mystery)**

Watson: "... one of the most lovely young women that I have ever seen in my life. Her violet eyes shining, her lips parted, a pink flush upon her cheeks.... I cannot admire [the young man's] taste, if it is indeed a fact that he was averse to a marriage with so charming a young lady as this Miss Turner."

(no illustration available)

### **Lady Hilda Trelawney Hope (The Second Stain)**

Watson: “A moment after, our modest apartment was further honored by the entrance of the most lovely woman in London. I had often heard of the beauty of the youngest daughter of the Duke of Belminster, but no description of it, and no contemplation of colorless photographs, had prepared me for the subtle, delicate charm and the beautiful coloring of the exquisite head.... It was a queenly presence—tall, graceful and intensely womanly.”



Given that Holmes is notoriously immune to the charms of the opposite sex, his descriptions of Irene Adler and Maud Bellamy are surprising.

# Solving the Mystery !

This section was really the impetus for writing this book. I was curious about the relative proportion of mysteries that Holmes solves by his powers of observation, versus the proportion he solves by deduction.

I didn't realize it, but in *The Sign of the Four*, Holmes himself explicitly identifies these two abilities as crucial to the detective's profession and his own success:

"He [a French detective] has considerable gifts himself. He possesses two out of the three qualities necessary for the ideal detective. He has the power of observation and that of deduction. He is only wanting in knowledge."

The meaning of "deduction" is self-evident. "Observation" primarily means "identifying physical clues such as footprints, fingerprints, physical traces such as cigar ashes or dirt, artifacts at the scene of the crime, the murder weapon, and so forth; and making obvious conclusions based on those clues."

When he says "knowledge" in this case, he means "a knowledge of the history of crime." Holmes considers this essential to the art of the detective and says so on several occasions, including "The Noble Bachelor," *The Valley of Fear*, *The Sign of the Four*, *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, and *A Study in Scarlet*. Indeed, factual knowledge of the history of crime is the way he solves the problem in "The Noble Bachelor." I'm sure there are more examples of him making the point, but I didn't specifically keep data on this.

The following chart shows the primary way in which Holmes solves each problem or mystery. (Vertical axis is "number of stories in which this method is the primary way Holmes solves the problem or mystery.") Of necessity, the data are judgment calls on my part, but I didn't feel like there were many close calls.

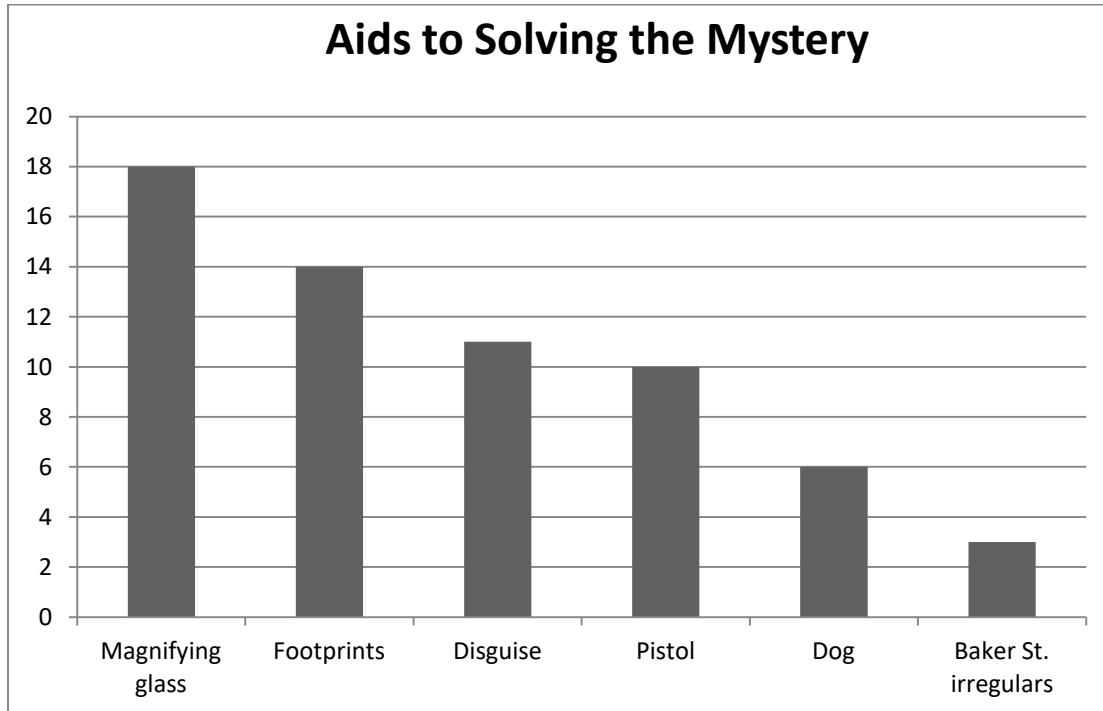


(Note that if a tip or factual knowledge was only partially the cause of the solution, I have counted it as half a story and the other cause of the solution as half.)

- Deduction (18.5 stories): This category means “Holmes successfully solves all aspects of the mystery virtually by deduction alone.” Indeed, sometimes Holmes solves the problem or mystery so easily by just thinking it through, that it makes the story unconvincing. (See “Mistakes by Conan Doyle” below.)
- Deduction & observation (18 stories): This category means “Holmes successfully solves all aspects of the mystery by a combination of deduction and observation in roughly equal degrees.”
- Unsolved (7 stories): This category means “Holmes didn’t solve the mystery at all.”
- Holmes is hunter (4 stories): This category means “There is no mystery to be solved, because Holmes is in the role of a hunter hunting his quarry.” That is, he is not trying to solve a mystery, but rather to entrap an already-known antagonist. This is the case in “The Empty House”, “The Dying Detective”, “His Last Bow”, and “The Mazarin Stone.”
- No mystery (4 stories): This category means “The story does not take the form of a mystery to be solved.
- Solved, antagonist escapes (3 stories): This category means “Holmes successfully solves the mystery, but the antagonist escapes.”
- Solved, but not in time (3 stories): This category means “Holmes successfully solves the mystery, but not in time.” In 2 cases the client dies, and in 1 the client is driven at least temporarily insane.
- Tip (2.5 stories): This category means “Holmes successfully solves all aspects of the mystery primarily because somebody gives him a tip.”
- Factual knowledge (2 stories): This category means “Holmes successfully solves all aspects of the mystery primarily because of a fact that he knows.” For example, Holmes solves the mystery in “The Lion’s Mane” by knowing about a certain form of sea life.
- Observation (no stories !): This category means “Holmes successfully solves all aspects of the mystery virtually by observation alone.” In my opinion, this never happens.

# Aids to Solving the Mystery

The physical objects Holmes uses most frequently to solve the mysteries are shown in the following table. (The vertical axis is “number of stories that include this object.”)



Magnifying glass	So in only 29% of the stories does Holmes use a magnifying glass, the object with which he is probably most often associated.
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(no illustration available)

Footprints/tracks	My gut feeling was that following footprints and tracks would be a more frequent strategy than it turned out to be.
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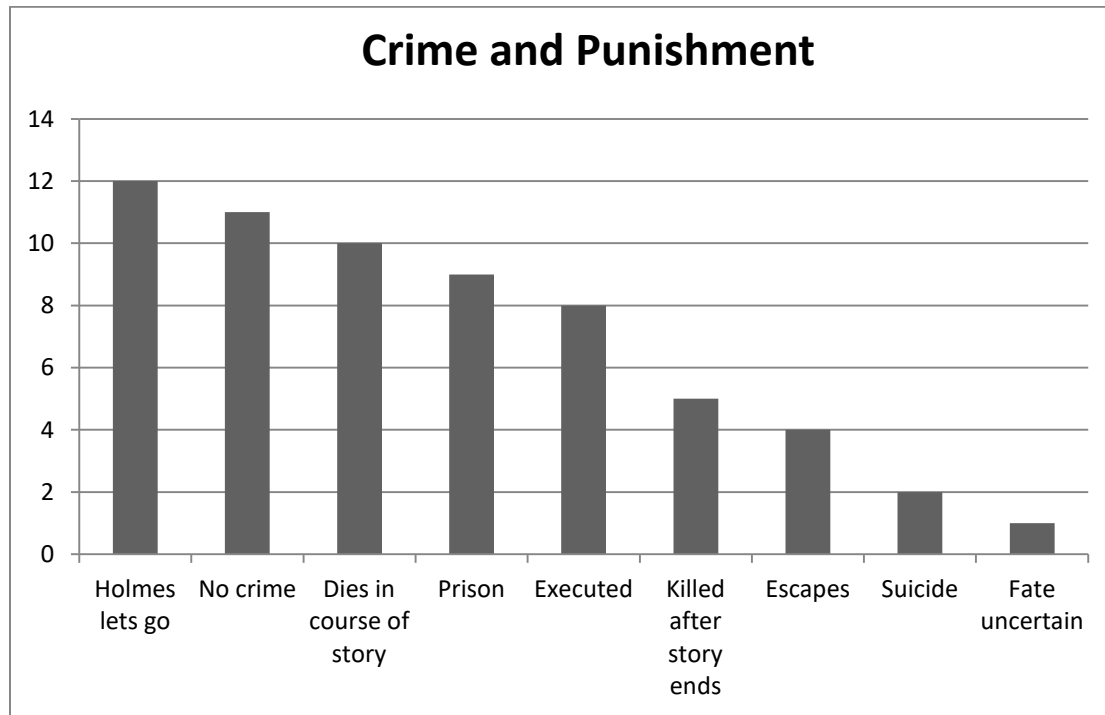
Disguise	I didn't realize disguises were such a frequent strategy (18%).
Pistol	<p>Holmes carries a pistol in only 10 stories, almost always using it to prevent violence as opposed to adding to the violence of the situation. He discharges it in only 2 stories, killing a pygmy in self-defense and killing the hound of the Baskervilles. He also pistol-whips one antagonist. In 2 stories Watson cites Holmes' habit of taking target practice <i>inside</i> 221B Baker Street.</p> <p>Watson is a pistol-packin'-papa in 13 stories, also typically using it to prevent violence. He discharges it in 3 stories, helping Holmes kill the pygmy, shooting the hound of the Baskervilles, and killing a mastiff attacking the antagonist. Watson pistol-whips another.</p>
Dog	<p>In 5 stories, Holmes solves the mystery (at least in part) by tracking with a dog or observing the dog's behavior.</p> <p>In two additional stories a dog takes on the role of adversary.</p>
Baker Street Irregulars	These are the gang of street urchins that Holmes uses to scour the city. Conan Doyle phases out the Baker Street irregulars pretty quickly: The third and last time they appear is in the 21 <sup>st</sup> story he wrote.



(no illustration available)

# Crime and Punishment

The following table shows what happens to the antagonist as a result of the events of the story. (Two antagonists are specified for *The Sign of the Four*.) Again, the vertical axis is “number of stories where the antagonist meets this fate.” Note that the antagonist is best defined as “the person Holmes is pursuing in order to solve the problem or mystery.”



- Holmes lets go: Oddly, the most frequent fate of the antagonist is that Holmes lets them go free !
- No crime: No crime has actually been committed.
- Dies in course of story: The antagonist dies in the course of the story. This resolution enables Conan Doyle to mete out divine justice.
- Prison: The antagonist is apprehended and either imprisoned or is presumed to be imprisoned based on the nature of the crime.
- Executed: The antagonist is apprehended and either executed or is presumed to be executed based on the nature of the crime.
- Killed after story ends: The antagonist escapes, but in a sort of postscript Conan Doyle, in the voice of Watson, reveals that they later die in an accident or by a revenge killing. This too enables Conan Doyle to mete out divine justice.
- Escapes: The antagonist escapes.

- Suicide: The antagonist commits suicide in the course of the story.
- Fate uncertain: The law may or may not punish the antagonist.

# Trivia & Oddities

- Holmes says, “The game is afoot” just once. Watson says it once too.
- Four plots involve the antagonist hiding in a hidden room.
  - The Golden Pince-Nez
  - The Norwood Builder
  - The Musgrave Ritual
  - The Tragedy of Birlstone
- In three stories, Holmes cites (various forms of) his dictum: “When you have eliminated the impossible, whatever remains, however improbable, must be the truth.”
  - The Sign of the Four
  - The Blanched Soldier
  - The Bruce-Partington Plans
- Holmes and Watson burgle the antagonist’s house on three occasions.
  - Charles Augustus Milverton
  - The Illustrious Client
  - The Bruce-Partington Plans
- Two of his clients die: John Openshaw in “The Five Orange Pips” and Hilton Cubitt in “The Dancing Men.”
- In three or four cases, both Holmes and clients record upcoming engagements by writing them on their shirt-cuffs. Weird-o-rama!

# Mistakes by Conan Doyle

Identifying mistakes by Conan Doyle is another cottage industry that there is no point in researching or trying to add to. But I noticed the following ones.

- The oddest of mistakes: In the first story, when describing his debilitating bullet wound in Afghanistan in *A Study in Scarlet*, Watson says, “I was struck on the shoulder by a Jezail bullet.” But in the second story, *The Sign of the Four*, he says, “I sat nursing my wounded *leg*. I had a Jezail bullet through it some time before.” Given that the books were back to back, this is a pretty silly mistake.
- “The Blanched Soldier,” with Holmes as the narrator, specifically says it’s January, 1903. However, Holmes-the-narrator says, “The good Watson had at that time deserted me for a wife...” However, in the “The Norwood Builder,” Watson says he’s moved back in with Holmes, so Mary Morstan must be dead—and “The Norwood Builder” is set in 1894 - 1895.

So either Conan Doyle screwed up, or Watson got married again (which is inconceivable, given the “Sherlock Holmes canon”), or it’s a case of the love that dare not speak its name.

- “The Solitary Cyclist”: Conan Doyle (speaking in the voice of Watson, of course) refers to “... the curious sequel of our investigation, which culminated in unexpected tragedy.” But the story does not end in a tragedy of any sort. It has a happy ending: the client gets rich and marries her sweetheart, and no one dies, not even the antagonist.
- “The Naval Treaty” says “The Second Stain” occurred “The July after my marriage.” Note that “The Naval Treaty” was published in 1893 and “The Second Stain” in 1904. That is, at the time Conan Doyle wrote “The Naval Treaty,” he had NOT written “The Second Stain” (unless he had written it and put it on the shelf for 11 years).

Now, it isn’t unusual for Conan Doyle to mention cases that he never wrote up as actual stories. “The Second Stain” is to my knowledge the only instance where it appears he referred to a case that he did **not** intend to write up (since it was 11 years before he did so), but he changed his mind and **did** write it.

This is all well and good.

However:

- If “The Second Stain” occurred “The July after my marriage,” that would make it 1889 or perhaps 1888, and Watson would not be living with Holmes. (What’s the point of getting married if you just keep rooming with your bro?) But in “The Second Stain,” Watson calls 221B Baker Street “our humble room.”
- In “The Second Stain,” Conan Doyle says that the story is set “in a year, and even in a decade, that shall be nameless.” Ooops! Too late Arthur, you already spilled the beans in “The Naval Treaty” !

- Both Holmes and Watson are always saying how Holmes lets the police take all the credit and explicitly avoids publicity for his efforts. For example, in “The Naval Treaty,” Holmes says, “out of my last fifty-three cases, my name has only appeared in four, and the police have had all the credit in forty-nine.” And yet whenever he introduces himself, the reaction of the person to whom he is introducing himself is always, “Yeah, I’ve heard of you,” or “OMG, can I have your autograph!?” ... never “Who the hell is Sherlock Holmes?” He’s pretty famous for someone who has chosen to remain anonymous.
- In failures of craftsmanship, the following mysteries are solved way too easily by a flash of intuitive inspiration, prior to any clues being gathered or any deductions being made:
  - The Noble Bachelor
  - A Case of Identity
  - The Red Circle
  - The Blanched Soldier
  - Shoscombe Old Place
  - The Sussex Vampire
  - The Retired Colourman

This is not only unrealistic, it completely undercuts the drama: Very early on you know Holmes has already solved the case.

Of these seven, the last five are among the final 15 stories Conan Doyle wrote. I think it’s safe to assume that his creative juices had dried up, and he was just coasting.

- But the biggest mistake Conan Doyle made was bringing Holmes back to life after “The Final Problem.”

I don’t mean he shouldn’t have written more Holmes stories. I mean he should have kept Holmes dead and (un)buried. Why? For the following reasons:

- Most importantly: Because “The Final Problem” is the only story that touches you emotionally. The fact that Holmes gives his life to save the world from Moriarty, and Watson’s moving encomium to his dead friend, just about brings tears to your eyes. Holmes could never have had such a fitting ending.
- It’s such a blatant, patched-up, bogus, go-for-the-dough thing to do, that you lose respect for the character and the author. It undercuts the value of everything that went before it.
- It was completely unnecessary. He could have had his cake and eaten it too. That is, he could have kept on writing Holmes stories and raking in the cash, by setting them before “The Final Problem.” He did this anyway in several stories, most notably *The Hound of the Baskervilles*; and in many more stories he left the date of the action unclear. There was no need to bring Holmes back to life to keep writing Holmes stories.

# The Mystery Writer's Dilemma

Conan Doyle had a problem: On the one hand, his hero was almost all-knowing, and as described above sometimes solved the crime in a flash of intuition or deduction that was, frankly, not credible artistically. Moreover, that hero several times faulted Watson for making his stories pot-boiled thrillers rather than essays in cold scientific logic:

“Honestly, Watson, I cannot congratulate you upon [your story]. Detection is, or ought to be, an exact science, and should be treated in the same cold and unemotional manner. You have attempted to tinge it with romanticism, which produces much the same effect as if you worked a love-story or an elopement into the fifth proposition of Euclid.” (*The Sign of the Four*)

Contrarily, Conan Doyle was trying to sell books. Mysteries, to be precise. A mystery that's solved very early on is no mystery at all. As Conan Doyle's stand-in and Holmes' chronicler, Watson has the exact same problem. He absolutely cannot do as Holmes suggests above; he has to keep the solution to the mystery hidden until the ending.

Conan Doyle solved the contradiction rather clumsily, in my opinion. There are only a handful of stories where Holmes does not solve the case, or is surprised at some aspect of it. Quite the opposite: It is apparent to the reader that Holmes has solved the case early on and is only clearing up the loose ends prior to the climax and unmasking of the villain. Holmes himself often says so.



One way Conan Doyle partially solved his narrative contradiction was to have a narrator who was, against all reason, willing to be led into situations of extreme danger without knowing what in blazes was going on—all the while knowing that his bosom friend the detective had already solved the case in his head. This isn't particularly credible, psychologically.

After 25 stories (i.e., up to and including “The Final Problem”), Conan Doyle figured he'd better try to patch over this blemish on his craftsmanship. In *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, Watson tells the reader:

“One of Sherlock Holmes's defects—if, indeed, one may call it a defect—was that he was exceedingly loath to communicate his full plans to any other person until the instant of their fulfillment. Partly it came no doubt from his own masterful nature, which loved to dominate and surprise those who were around him. Partly also from his professional caution, which urged him never to take any chances. The result, however, was very trying for those who were acting as his agents and assistants. I had often suffered under it....”

Not a very satisfying solution, but at least the author tried.

# The Best and the Worst

## Best Stories (4 stars)

Story	Reason
A Scandal in Bohemia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The most compelling woman</li> <li>• Holmes is thwarted</li> <li>• Holmes is smitten</li> </ul>



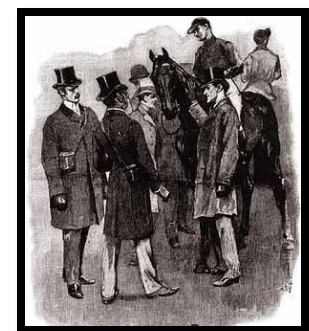
Thor Bridge	Conan Doyle's most ingenious mystery and solution
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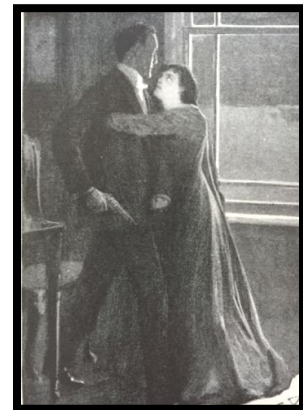
The Second Stain	2 <sup>nd</sup> -most ingenious mystery and solution
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Silver Blaze	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ingenious solution</li> <li>• Memorable quote: "The curious incident of the dog in the night"</li> <li>• Most surprising killer</li> </ul>
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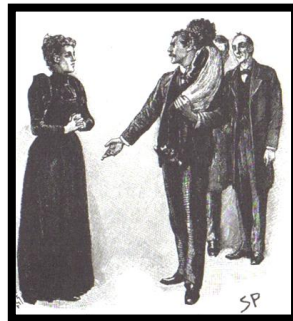
Story	Reason
The Speckled Band	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Most blood curdling plot</li> <li>• A very evil but believable antagonist</li> <li>• Most realistic Holmes: he's terrified at one point</li> </ul>
The Dancing Men	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interesting breaking of a cipher code</li> <li>• Holmes fails, with tragic results</li> </ul>
The Cardboard Box	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Grisly plot, very modern</li> <li>• Psychologically broken killer, very Raskolnikov-like</li> </ul>



## Worst Stories (1 star)

Story	Reason
A Study in Scarlet - Part II	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Nothing to do with Holmes</li> <li>• No mystery—just a classic revenge story</li> <li>• Portrayal of the American Old West is not compelling</li> </ul>
The Noble Bachelor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Trivial plot: runaway bride</li> <li>• Cliché cause for her running away</li> </ul>
The Yellow Face	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Trivial plot: turns out to just be a domestic melodrama</li> <li>• Holmes has no part in the resolution</li> </ul>
The Three Students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Trivial plot: some student has stolen an exam</li> <li>• Of the 3 suspects, you immediately know who-did-it</li> </ul>

(no image available)



Story	Reason
The Missing Three-Quarter	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Trivial plot: a rugby player has left his college</li> <li>• A dog does the heavy lifting</li> </ul>
The Empty House	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conan Doyle never should have had Holmes come back from the dead</li> <li>• Plot hole: if Moran knew Holmes wasn't really dead, there was no point in Holmes pretending to be !</li> <li>• Boring back story of Holmes' travels, stitched together unconvincingly with the murder mystery</li> </ul>
His Last Bow	<p>Holmes vs. Kaiser Wilhelm's spy; what more need be said?</p> <p><i>Original illustration in The Strand magazine.</i></p>

