

The Popular Gothic Novel
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Lecture 46
Introduction to Doyle and contexts

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Week 10: Arthur Conan Doyle's
The Hound of the Baskervilles

Lecture 10A: Introduction to Doyle and contexts

Image source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arthur_Conan_Doyle

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Hello, and welcome to Week 10's lectures on Arthur Conan Doyle's The Hound of Baskervilles. In today's session, I will be talking about the author and providing you with some of the contexts related to Gothic fiction.

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Sir Arthur Conan Doyle (1859 - 1930)



• "Arthur Conan Doyle was born on 22 May 1859 in Edinburgh into a prosperous Irish family. He trained as a doctor, gaining his degree from Edinburgh University in 1881. He worked as a surgeon on a whaling boat and also as a medical officer on a steamer travelling between Liverpool and West Africa. He then settled in Portsmouth on the English south coast and divided his time between medicine and writing".

• Text source:
http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/historic_figures/conan_sir_arthur_doyle.shtml#:~:text=Arthur%20Conan%20Doyle%20was%20born,between%20Liverpool%20and%20West%20Africa.



Image source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arthur_Conan_Doyle

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Now, “Arthur Conan Doyle was born on 22nd May 1859 in Edinburgh into a prosperous Irish family. He trained as a doctor, gaining his degree from Edinburgh University in 1881. He worked as a surgeon on a whaling boat and also as a medical officer on a steamer traveling between Liverpool and West Africa. He then settled in Portsmouth on the English south coast and divided his time between medicine and writing.”

A few pointers are important here. He is Irish, that is Sir Arthur Conan Doyle is Irish, he is also a physician, he is a surgeon. And there is also a colonial contact in terms of his life, there is a reference to West Africa and we know this is England in the second half of the 19th century when Empire was at its height.

Conan Doyle split his time between practicing medicine and writing. “Sherlock Holmes made his first appearance in a study of Scarlet published in Beeton’s Christmas Annual in 1887. Its success encouraged Conan Doyle to write more stories involving Holmes, but in 1893 Conan Doyle killed off Holmes hoping to concentrate on more serious fiction. A public outcry later made him resurrect Holmes.” Holmes, the very well-known detective that we know and love made his first appearance in this work called a Study of Scarlet. It is again a late Victorian novel and it was immensely popular with the reading public.

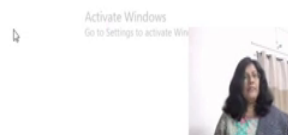
Doyle uses the same character in many of his works, but eventually he got tired of Holmes and he wanted to eliminate that figure from his narratives, so that they can be of a different kind. He wanted to do some serious fiction series writing. And the implication is that, that detective fiction was not very serious or highbrow, it was very popular. Nevertheless, his attempt at killing off Holmes was not very successful and the public wanted him back, wanted Holmes back and Doyle buckled to the popular demand and resurrected him in his fiction.

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Sir Arthur Conan Doyle (1859 - 1930)



- "In addition, Conan Doyle wrote a number of other novels, including 'The Lost World' and various non-fictional works. These included a pamphlet justifying Britain's involvement in the Boer War, for which he was knighted and histories of the Boer War and World War One, in which his son, brother and two of his nephews were killed. Conan Doyle also twice ran unsuccessfully for parliament. In later life he became very interested in spiritualism."
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http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/historic_figures/conan_sir_arthur_doyle.shtml#:~:text=Arthur%20Conan%20Doyle%20was%20born,between%20Liverpool%20and%20West%20Africa.



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Doyle wrote works, which did not have Holmes in them, he wrote a lot of non-fiction as well the Lost World is a well-known work by Doyle. Doyle was also an apologist for the Empire. He wrote a work on the Boer War, a pamphlet on the Boer War, in which he rationalized justified Britain's involvement in that war. There was a family connection with World War One too for Doyle, his son, his brother, his nephews were killed in the war.

Doyle also was interested in politics. Personally, he ran for parliament unsuccessfully, he did not succeed, he did not win a seat, but he made two attempts at getting into the parliament and later in life he became very much interested in spiritualism.

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Gothic Era

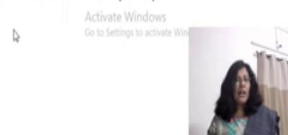


- “The Gothic era is characterized by the horrific and unknown; death, psychological degeneration, and mystery are the typical elements intertwined in Gothic literature. The concept of Gothic is ever-evolving, with prevailing social anxieties dictating what constitutes the macabre. Characterized by what “shocks the conscience”, the Gothic genre is moulded by human nature and fear of the unknown, which exists on a continuum throughout history.”

- <https://www.nature.com/articles/palcomms201745>

- **Title of Work:** Reasoning through madness: the detective in Gothic crime fiction

- **Author:** Michelle Miranda *Palgrave Communications* volume 3, Article number: 17045 (2017)



Now, I would like us to revisit the Gothic context. Before we look at *The Hound of Baskervilles* by Conan Doyle, we need to revisit some of the tropes associated with this sub-genre so that we are very aware of the kind of motives and characterizations that we come across in *The Hound of Baskervilles*.

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This is a fantastic characterization by Michelle Miranda, about the nature of the Gothic. The Gothic is symbolized by the horrific. It can be anything, but there is an element of horror in the Gothic. There is also something profoundly mysterious about this notion of the Gothic. There is death, we come across deaths, there is a psychological degeneration, a regression, a going backwards in time in terms of civilizational attributes.

So these are some of the key attributes of Gothic literature. We also understand that the Gothic symbolizes the society’s anxieties, its desires, its taboos. And we understand that the Gothic mood is dictated by all these pressures. The Gothic is about what shocks the individual’s soul, spirit and we understand that the Gothic is shaped by human nature. The

human nature's fear of the unknown, fear of horrifying things tangible and intangible are embedded in the fabric of the Gothic and this is not particular to one particular episode in history or one particular period in history, the Gothic is relevant across historical periods. Because in every age, there is horror, there is mystery, there is social anxiety, people are shocked by different things in different period. So the Gothic is able to respond to all these pressures, all these anxieties and that is what makes this mood very, very successful across time.

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Gothic Terrors



- “Psychological terror, whether in the form of a monster or a madman, reflects on the atmosphere of a given time period, focusing on the public’s deepest fears and anxieties and forcing the reader to face those fears through a winding maze of darkness and uncertainty”.

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So let us take a particular kind of fear. We can call it psychological fear. The psychological fear can be expressed in the shape of a monster or insane person. And this monster or crazy figure can illustrate a particular time periods, fears and anxieties experienced by that society, by those individuals present in that society.

And what is significant about the Gothic genre is that, it makes the people face those anxieties, those fears, through the kind of representations, Gothic representations in that

narrative. And there is darkness. Of course, there is uncertainty, but these elements are important to think through these various kinds of fears that abound in society.

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Early Gothic Fiction



- “Early Gothic fiction, centered in the first half of the nineteenth century, was influenced by the Enlightenment; while the scientific and industrial revolutions of the eighteenth century brought forth advanced scientific theories and modes of reasoning, social stratification began to see a blurred division between the civilized and the barbaric. With this division, fears of social regression and degeneration were heightened. What separated the man from the beast was not a chasm, but a line not so well-defined and not so easily avoidable.”

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Gothic fiction, in the first half of the 19th century was very much affected by the enlightenment narrative, the trajectory of the enlightenment. Remember that in Ann Radcliffe’s works the supernatural is explained away, there is a rational reason for some of that apparently supernatural phenomena in Gothic narratives, particularly authored by Radcliffe.

So this is an impact of the enlightenment narrative. The scientific and all these industrial changes, revolutions brought into society, sophisticated theories about science, about logic. So while these narratives were being introduced into society something very interesting was happening in terms of social formation, there were social stratification, of course, people were put into different classes and categories.

And the division between human beings as civilized and human beings as barbaric was becoming fuzzy. So there was a blurring of the distinctions between the civilized and the

uncivilized. So this kind of attitude also brought in ideas about going backwards in time, social regression instead of social progression and degeneration also came into the picture.

The idea that human beings were somehow morally, socially, culturally degenerating, losing their civilizational attribute and were somehow becoming primitive as time progressed. So this fear was something that was prevalent in the second half of the 19th century. So people began to sense that there was not a massive gulf, chasm between the beast and the man. The distinction was not very distinct. There was no easy avoiding of the possibility that the man could become a beast.

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Victorian Gothic



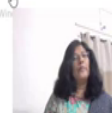
- “Existing on a continuum, Victorian Gothic continued to explore the fears and anxieties of society, with attention given to the morbid and dark. While the Victorian Gothic era was characterized by epistemological advancement and a romanticism of daily life, the public’s fascination with horror and the morbid was still prominent. What evolved during this transition from Gothic to Victorian Gothic was knowledge obtained through developments in science, criminology and the criminal justice system. Superimposed on the rising attention to crime was the amplification of scientific thought”.

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So the Victorian Gothic is on a continuum with the early Gothic narratives and ideas about what is a Gothic. Victorian Gothic also performed what the early Gothic did. It discussed, it explored, illustrated the fears and horrors of individuals in the Victorian period. However, we

also realized that there is a massive advancement in terms of the expansion of knowledge, boundaries were broken, boundaries were expanded and knowledge became an endless booster.

There was also an idealization about the ordinary life, about the every man, about the humble figures in society yet in addition to these advancements in science and particularly in the fields of medicine and the romantic moment there was also this inevitable obsession with the dark, the morbid, the macabre.

So while on the one hand, there was new feels being set up in terms of criminology, new institutions being organized and run very efficiently in that time and age, such as the criminal justice system the subtext was this idea that there were some kind of profound changes happening in relation to the civilizational attributes of man, there was a fear of regression, degeneration and a kind of reverting back to primitivism. So that domain was also very active.

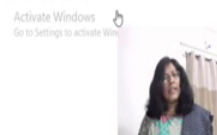
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Gothic: Doyle and Poe



- “The greatest impacts on Gothic fiction and detective fiction were those works by Edgar Allan Poe and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. While Gothic fiction and detective fiction are distinctly different in style and form, Poe and Doyle were instrumental in linking the two, often through the combination of horror and reasoning.”

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Michelle Miranda puts forth the idea that Poe and Doyle were gargantuan figures in terms of the Gothic and the detective sub-genres. And she argues that even though Gothic fiction, detective fiction are two very distinct modes, in fiction these writers Poe and Doyle were successful in integrating the two distinct sub-genres and she lands on the notion of horror being combined with reasoning to kind of justify this linkage between the two sub-genres.

If you remember the previous lecture, we did talk about how *The Moonstone* could also be Gothic in addition to being a very, very landmark, very interesting landmark detective fiction. So there is a kind of overlap in terms of Gothic and detective fiction because of the narrative of crime and crime and its mystery and its motives are inevitably most of the time associated with the darkest secrets and darkest anxieties and fears and taboos of human society.

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Gothic: Poe and Doyle

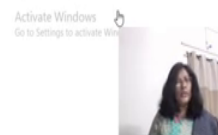


- “Both Poe and Doyle took cues from their own periods in history to isolate existing social anxieties to cause both fear and relief within the same tale of mystery—fear of the unknown clarified by the use of reasoning and logic, sometimes at the hands of the narrator-turned-investigator and other times at the hands of the detective.”

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“Both Poe and Doyle took cues from their own periods in history to isolate existing social anxieties to cause both fear and relief within the same tale of mystery- fear of the unknown, clarified by the use of reasoning and logic sometimes the hands of the narrator turned investigator and other times at the hands of the detector.”

What Poe and Doyle do is that they pick up on some of the key anxieties that are prevalent in their own time and they weave this narrative of mystery. At the heart of it is this unknown, the domain of the unknown, which is clarified which is made clearer by the narrator who sometimes is the investigator or by the detective. So the detective or the investigator is throwing light on the dark spot.

And the dark spot is the mystery is a crime and we do not know the perpetrator. So we can see how the idea of crime itself comes to symbolize various aspects of the human soul and spirit, which is associated with the various anxieties in society.

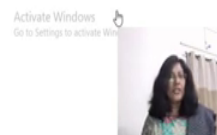
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Doyle



- “A selection of Doyle’s tales focused on horror and the supernatural, with little to no reference to reasoning. Likely influenced by Poe’s tales, Doyle also crafted stories of the “locked room” mystery style. Doyle’s tale *The New Catacomb* (1898), parallels Poe’s *The Cask of Amontillado* (1846), where one man is effectively “buried alive” on purpose by his trusted acquaintance after following the friend on a seemingly innocent venture. In these stories, both Doyle and Poe rely on trust and vengeance to stir the anxiety of the reader.”

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In some of the tales by Doyle, there is no narrative of reasoning, things are not logically reasonably explained away because the emphasis is on the horror and on the supernatural attributes of the story. And we understand that this is because Doyle was influenced by Poe and Poe is known for his locked room mystery style, where people are locked up and there is horror in that, there is a lot of Gothic element in the idea of imprisoning, incarcerating people.

And the fantastic example that many of us can think about is, think of is *The Cask of Amontillado*, where a friend is buried alive. He is buried in such a manner that it is extremely horrifying and we see how trusting he had been when he entered the catacomb with that friend. So it is a fantastic story a very claustrophobic and the settings are very Gothic as well, because of the labyrinthine passageways and the dark mysterious ambience that we can sense as the two men walked down into the cellars. So this is extremely atmospheric and Doyle was influenced by this kind of writing done by Poe.

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Doyle's Sherlock Holmes



- “While the Sherlock Holmes series was more aligned with detective fiction and advances in forensic science, some of the tales had remnants of those elements of classic Gothic fiction. Specifically, *The Hound of Baskervilles* (1902), *The Adventure of the Devil's Foot* (1910), *The Adventure of the Creeping Man* (1923), and *The Adventure of the Sussex Vampire* (1924). In the latter story, upon hearing of the possibility of the “suspect” being a vampire, Holmes asserts, “What have we to do with walking corpses who can only be held in their grave by stakes driven through their hearts? It's pure lunacy” (Baring-Gould, 1967: 463).

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“While the Sherlock Holmes series was more aligned with detective fiction and advances in forensic science some of the tales had remnants of those elements of classic Gothic fiction. Specifically *The Hound of Baskervilles* published in 1902, *The Adventure of the Devil's Foot*, published in 1910, *The Adventure of the Creeping Man* 1923 and *The Adventure of the Sussex Vampire* published in 1924. In the latter story, upon hearing the possibility of the suspect, being a vampire, Holmes asserts, “What have we to do with walking corpses who can only be held in their grave by stakes driven through their hearts? It is pure lunacy.””

So what is interesting to ask is that though Sherlock Holmes is known to be the embodiment of detective fiction there are elements of Holmes narratives, narratives in which Holmes appears, which are Gothic in nature, because those narratives contain some of the key Gothic attributes and others are less given to you there on the slide and we are of course interested in *The Hound of Baskervilles* published in 1902.

The last comment there on the slide seems to be offhand and Holmes seems to be dispersing the idea of the vampire. He says it is pure lunacy.

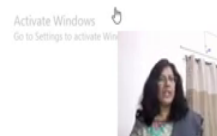
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Sherlock Holmes



- “As expected, Sherlock is able to dispose of the supernatural hypothesis and arrive at a conclusion based on science, reason and causality. It is not the sucking of blood occurring for thirst of a vampire, but the sucking of a wound from an arrow impregnated with poison to save the life of the injured, who is helpless at the hands of the perpetrator”.

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And when we come to this part of that story, we realize that “as expected, Sherlock is able to dispose of the supernatural hypothesis and arrive at a conclusion based on science, reason and causality. It is not the sucking of blood occurring for thirst of a vampire, but the sucking of a boon from an arrow impregnated with poison to save the life of the injured, who is helpless at the hands of the perpetrator.”

So what we need to know here is that since we have not read that story for this course, is to understand that it is not that vampire, which is the cause of trouble it is something else. It is related to science and Sherlock Holmes is able to get rid of a supernatural hypothesis because he understands the workings of science. He is able to fathom that science and its instruments are at the heart of this crime.

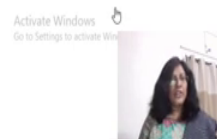
So what is further important for us to note is that science itself can be Gothic, science has a Gothic side, especially when we do not understand how it is exploited in the narrative. Science can be extremely mysterious until we understand the way it functions and the way it produces results. So vampires are Gothic, yes, they are, but science can also be Gothic and we need to kind of understand to what purpose science is used and to what effect.

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Sherlock Holmes



- “Using observation and confirmation to support his hypothesis, Holmes declares, “It has been a case for intellectual deduction, but when this original intellectual deduction is confirmed point by point by quite a number of independent incidents, then the subjective becomes the objective and we can say confidently that we have reached our goal ...” ([Baring-Gould, 1967](#): 472)...Here, Holmes’ observation and ratiocination are supplemented by verification, which brings about a certainty in results. Holmes’ linking of a series of independent incidents provides the element of causality.”
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Here, Holmes observation and ratiocination are supplemented by verification, which brings about a certainty into results. Holmes’ linking of a series of independent incidents proves the element of causality.”

The point here is that Holmes arrives at his conclusion through his methods of deduction, he takes each and every point, each and every clue and explores it and tries to find out more about it. He tests every hypothesis and through this kind of rational processing his subjective theory about crime becomes objective knowledge, becomes a certainty.

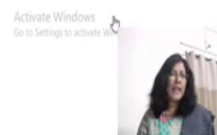
So the independent incidents are connected by a chain of reasoning on the part of Sherlock Holmes. And this kind of chain of reasoning produces the results, which throws light on the mystery. So causality is established and narrative is woven around a dark matter. So this method is very, very important for us to understand because it is the method of science. It is about experimentation, it is about testing theories and confirming, affirming the results.

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The Hound of Baskervilles



- “The *Hound of the Baskervilles* includes several elements characteristic of Gothic fiction. The ominous Baskerville estate and the eerie moor, a hound representing death and evil, and the supernatural elements of the hound haunting the Baskerville estate, “A creature upon the moor which corresponds with the Baskerville demon, and which could not possibly be any animal known to science...A huge creature, luminous, ghastly and spectral” (Baring-Gould, 1967: 15).
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Now, *The Hound of Baskervilles*. “The *Hound of Baskervilles* includes several elements characteristic of Gothic fiction. The ominous Baskerville estate and the eerie moor, a hound representing death and evil and the supernatural elements of the hound haunting the Baskerville estate, a creature upon the moor, which corresponds with the Baskerville demon, and which could not possibly be any animal known to science, a huge creature luminous, ghastly and spectral.

There we go, we have the classic Gothic monster for you here. *The Hound of Baskervilles* is detective fiction, but it is also classic Gothic fiction. We have an estate called the Baskerville estate and the moors in which this estate is set is eerie, it is strange, it is bizarre, it is threatening and there is a hound haunting this moor. And this hound is supposed to kind of embody features such as death and evil itself. And it could potentially be supernatural too according to the legends that are floating about.

So this creature upon the moor is massive, and it is kind of ghostly in nature as well. It seems to be a spirit too. So these are some of the classic cues associated with the Gothic and this is at the heart of this narrative by Arthur Conan Doyle.

Thank you for watching, I will continue in the next session.