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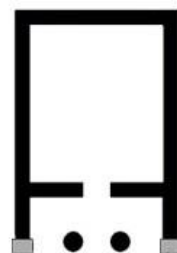
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The “Gypsies” as Displaced Others in Doyle’s Sherlock Holmes Stories

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The Roma feature prominently in nineteenth-century British literature as proto-typical displaced “others” symbolic of moral, social, and racial standards antithetical to the national ideal. This article will argue that Arthur Conan Doyle’s treatment of the Roma in his Sherlock Holmes stories opens a subversive space resisting a stereo-typical representation which may be expected from an author whose cultural conservatism is well documented, and whose Holmes stories are often seen as reinforcing sentiment sympathetic to the Imperial and British national ideal. Many of Doyle’s Holmes stories feature foreigners, or English characters returning from abroad having adopted habits and customs of an alien culture, who threaten to disrupt the harmonious space of British society. The country becomes a safer place when these “types” are categorised according to Holmes’s methodology in relation to the ideal hierarchy, which has the white Anglo-Saxon male at its summit. The Roma maintain anonymity as a quasi-autonomous, mobile, and discrete culture within British national boundaries, yet in these stories they are never responsible for crime; suspicion, on the other hand, is often the cause of their displacement as they are forced to avoid local disturbance. Critics have either cursorily acknowledged the presence of the Roma in Doyle’s stories or have explained their meaning through an orientalist lens. This essay engages with such orientalist critique and argues that a close reading of Doyle’s stories reveals a portrayal of a people which contrasts sharply with his imperialist ideals.

In order to provide the reader with a sense of historical context, the article opens with some background historical information with regard to how the Roma were received from their arrival in Britain following and concurrent with attitudes in mainland Europe. Examples follow of how that image is expressed in nineteenth-century English literature. This treatment, although not always negative, contributes to the status of the Roma as the stereotypical other, in opposition to received social and political values. Doyle’s public persona will then be described by quoting from his letters to the press and general engagement with the media, and how the interpretation of this material by the contemporary establishment and subsequent critical evaluation have informed recent opinion with regard to his world view. This process in turn leads to interpretations of his fiction that do not allow for tensions within his work, and which irritate conclusions that his Sherlock Holmes series can be regarded as unqualified imperialist and conservative propaganda. Finally, by discussing Doyle’s involvement of the Roma in his fiction, it will be argued that unlike so many of his nineteenth-century counterparts, his re-configuration of the literary trope and his refusal to vilify or romanticise an abject section of society shows a willingness to counter conventional prejudice.

Ronald Lee charts the migration and displacement of the Roma who originated in India and gradually populated Europe having been forced out of Anatolia by the Ottoman regime. Their way of life became less nomadic as they settled across the continent in the sixteenth century

although their non-observance of Christian ritual and perceived threat to established trade practices contributed to constant vilification. Lee describes how, '[i]n some countries, "Gypsy hunts" were still conducted where nomadic Roma were hunted down and killed like wild animals [well] into the nineteenth century'.¹ In Britain their arrival precipitated constant legal opposition, initiated by Henry VIII, and sustained well into the nineteenth century. A combination of legal barriers, such as the 1824 Vagrancy Act, alongside ignorance with regard to their ethnic provenance and cultural distance, placed the Roma in a status of abjection. Kristeva defines abjection as that 'which disturbs identity system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules'.² Of which definition Abbi Bardi writes: 'This is an apt description of the struggle of the Romani people in the British isles, who have over the centuries managed to maintain their own culture, often at cross purposes with British identity, system and order/law'.³

Studying other non-conformist societies in Doyle's work can give us some contextual support. For example, Lydia Fillingham argues that the portrayal of the Mormons in *A Study in Scarlet* reveals an abhorrence of a society which opposes the contemporary, if controversial, liberal ideology relating to the freedom of the individual and absence of state interference. She further comments that the 'Mormon state within a state is in this novel specifically associated with German and Italian secret societies, socialist societies seeking revolutionary change'.⁴ Socialist movements were feared in England because they advocated various levels of intrusion into the private space and were perceived to seek recruitment from the marginalised 'residuum [...] outside the control and information of the bureaucracy'.⁵ Fillingham does not identify specifically what type of individuals constitute the residuum but the Roma can be said to fit these criteria. The Roma were not a state within a state and a consequent threat as is the case with Doyle's Mormons, who are praised for their pioneering spirit but condemned for their intrusion into the private space, but their unknowability and cultural distance rendered them a source of anxiety albeit tinged with romance. As Bardi states: 'Nowhere are these anxieties more evident than in the numerous nineteenth-century works by non-Romani British writers which construct Gypsies as the objects of both fear and envy'.⁶ Thomas Maclean notes an increasing xenophobic tension in Britain as the century drew to a close, which saw the threat of Germany as a potential aggressor and foreign nationalists becoming less welcome: 'An anxious situation in Britain was made worse when great numbers of immigrants from Eastern Europe and Russia arrived in the 1890s'.⁷ Given that the gypsies occupied such a disturbing

¹ Ronald Lee, 'Roma in Europe: Gypsy Myth and Romani Reality—New Evidence for Romani History', in *"Gypsies" in European Literature and Culture*, ed. by Valentina Glajar and Domnica Radulescu (New York, NY, and Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), pp. 1-28, p. 6.

² Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1982), p. 4.

³ Abbi Bardi, 'The Gypsy as Trope in Victorian and Modern British Literature', *Romani Studies*, 16(1), (2006), 31-42, p. 32.

⁴ Lydia A. Fillingham, 'The Colourless Skein of Life: Threats to the Private Sphere in Conan Doyle's *A Study in Scarlet*', in *Critical Essays on Sir Arthur Conan Doyle*, ed. by Harold Orel (New York, NY: G.K. Hall and Co., 1992), pp. 160-178, p. 172.

⁵ *ibid.*, p. 173.

⁶ Bardi, p.34.

⁷ Thomas Maclean, 'Dracula's Blood of Many Brave Races', in *Fear Loathing and Victorian Xenophobia*, ed. by Marlene Tromp, Maria K. Bachman, and Heidi Kaufman (Columbus, OJ: The Ohio State University Press, 2013), pp. 331-346, p.337.

space in the national psyche, it would be reasonable to expect a reflection of this sentiment in narratives promoting the identity and values of the imperial ideology.

The Roma were wrongly identified upon their arrival in Britain in the sixteenth-century as having come from Egypt because of their physical appearance and unusual ways of making a living.⁸ In order to avoid collusion in this initial error, any reference to the epithet “Gypsies” is here in quotation. Elsewhere, the author of this article refers to these people as Roma, which acknowledges their diaspora from India and thence across Asia into Europe. Scholars of Orientalism, however, will no doubt notice the irony inherent in this tactic because the Roma, until comparatively recently had, according to David Mayall, an ‘orally based culture’.⁹ On this, Ian Hancock observes: ‘While there are mediaeval and Renaissance references to an actual Indian origin, this fact did not become generally known, and eventually became forgotten, even by the Romanies themselves’.¹⁰ The Roma are, therefore, ‘orientalised’ according to Said’s model: ‘the written statement is a presence to the reader by virtue of its having excluded, displaced, made supererogatory any such *real thing* as “the Orient”’.¹¹ Whatever we read of the Orient and by inference the Roma in nineteenth-century literature is, on the strength of Said’s analysis, a form which supervenes a realistic representation; being unable and unwilling to speak for themselves, as Mayall comments, ‘[g]ypsies are who the writer or speaker thinks they are [...] Romantic one minute, criminal vagrant the next. Alluring and seductive in one pose, filthy and diseased in another’.¹² As will be argued in due course, neither perspective using Mayall’s phraseology is appropriate for Doyle’s fictional representations.

Nineteenth-century authors plundered the Roma myth for whatever features served their purpose. For the late-Victorian establishment, vagrancy and criminality were closely associated and the Roma were stereotypically represented as the displaced other resisting the control of the state, and this because of their itinerant lifestyle, Romany language and cultural diversity. Bardi writes that ‘[g]ypsies served as a clearly established literary trope that functions in texts to present multiple challenges to the status quo’.¹³ We can see evidence of this phenomenon across generic divides, reaching a wide and socially diverse readership. G.K. Behlmer notes a particularly prominent campaigner, George Smith, who sought to influence both the public and the establishment of the necessity to control the Roma with invasive and heavy handed legislation additional to existing statutory powers. Behlmer writes: ‘his second book on the subject, *I’ve Been a Gipsying, or Rambles Among Gipsies and Their Children in Their Tents and Vans* (1883), intrigued a growing audience with its tales about the godless folk who fed their children half-hatched blackbirds, abused their donkeys, and committed incest’.¹⁴ Although his narratives were ridiculed in some quarters, a number of attempts to pass the

⁸ See David Mayall, *English Gypsies and State Policies* (Hatfield: University of Hertfordshire Press, 1995), p. 40.

⁹ David Mayall, *Gypsy Identities 1500-2000 From Egipcians and Moon-men to the Ethnic Romany* (London: Routledge, 2004), p. 38.

¹⁰ Ian Hancock, ‘The “Gypsy” Stereotype and the Sexualisation of Romani Women’, in *“Gypsies” in European Literature and Culture*, ed. by Valentina Glajar and Domnica Radulescu (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), pp. 181-192, p. 182.

¹¹ Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin Group Ltd., 2003), p. 21.

¹² Mayall, *Gypsy Identities*, pp. 3, 15.

¹³ Bardi, p. 32.

¹⁴ G.K. Behlmer, ‘The Gypsy Problem in Victorian England’, *Victorian Studies*, 28(2), (1985), 231-253, p. 247.

Moveable Dwellings Bill onto the statute books nearly succeeded by fuelling cross-party anxieties with regard to vagrancy, sanitation, and mental wellbeing in the sense that vagrancy could be infectious.¹⁵ With regard to Emily Brontë's Heathcliff, described in *Wuthering Heights* as speaking 'some gibberish that nobody could understand' and 'that gipsy brat',¹⁶ Katie Trumpener writes: 'The Gypsy in Emily Brontë's [sic.] *Wuthering Heights* appears [...] as a demonic figure for the counter-colonization of memory and the erosion of Western identity under "native" influence'.¹⁷ Heathcliff is violent, dark in many senses of the word, and a usurper of family harmony and its material possessions. He is attributed with stereotypical qualities such as horse trading, occultism, and elusiveness through mobility, and we read that the housekeeper 'is exceedingly vexed at having the task of dictating an inscription for his monument [...] as, he had no surname, and we could not tell his age', so that even in death he resists the ideological imperative of classification.¹⁸ Matthew Arnold views the supposedly unfettered life of the Roma as a possible antidote to Victorian materialism in his poem 'The Scholar Gypsy', published in 1853. The narrative revives a story of a seventeenth-century Oxford student:

Who, tired of knocking at preferment's door,
 One summer morn forsook
 His friends, and went to learn the gypsy lore,
 And roamed the world with that wild brotherhood,
 And came, as most men deemed, to little good¹⁹

Philip Landon writes that Arnold 'contrasts a purely fanciful and nostalgic dream with the urgent predicament of Victorian alienation'.²⁰ Arnold places the Roma life in what Behlmer describes as a 'romantic haze', but acknowledges that such an existence necessarily involves segregation from mainstream society and is consequently unworkable.²¹

At the end of the nineteenth-century, a contemporary of Doyle, Bram Stoker manipulates contemporary xenophobia to a much wider audience with his novel, *Dracula*, in which the Roma play a prominent and threatening role. The hero Jonathan Harker relates his first encounter with the Roma:

These Szgany are gipsies; I have notes of them in my book [...] who are almost outside all law. They attach themselves as a rule to some great noble or *boyar*, and call themselves by his name. They are fearless and without religion, save superstition, and

¹⁵ *ibid.*, p. 248.

¹⁶ Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 31.

¹⁷ Katie Trumpener, 'The Time of the Gypsies: A "People without History" in the Narratives of the West', *Critical Inquiry*, 35, (1983), 834-884, p. 871.

¹⁸ Brontë, p. 293.

¹⁹ Matthew Arnold, 'The Scholar Gypsy', in *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, ed. by Stephen Greenblatt (London: W.W. Norton and Co. Ltd., 2012), p. 1382, II. 35-40.

²⁰ Philip Landon, 'Bohemian Philosophers: Nature Nationalism, and "Gypsies" in Nineteenth Century European Literature', in *"Gypsies" in European Literature and Culture*, pp. 45-68, p. 48.

²¹ Behlmer, p.253.

they talk only their own varieties of the Romany tongue.²²

The suggestion is that Harker has had access to a formalised study of the Roma perhaps by a writer associated with the Gypsy Lore Society which, Mayall tells us, was a group of Gypsologists who came together in 1888 to promote the scientific study of the Roma.²³ This movement further developed the work of George Borrow and echoes the studies of nineteenth-century Egyptologists in their respective fields, which Said identifies as part of the Orientalist process.²⁴ Stoker's Roma assist the vampire Dracula both with his departure and his ill-fated return to Transylvania; however, their involvement is more contractual than sympathetic, and bears similarities to an episode in Doyle's work which will be returned to in due course. Nevertheless, although Dracula is not Roma, at least not according to his oral history recorded by Harker, he is Roma by association, and is the avatar of an alien cultural movement whose characteristics threaten Western ideology and English domestic space. Parasitism, fecundity, miscegenation, contagion, sexual predation, and particularly elusive mobility have all been discussed by critics with regard to Dracula, and are all similarly contained in the constructed imagery of the Roma disseminated in a variety of forms to the nineteenth-century reader.

Wilkie Collins, who is seen as a significant influence in the development of the Gothic melodrama into a 'formula that has dominated crime fiction ever since', and to whom Doyle and Stoker owe their formal progress, employs the Roma trope to satirical advantage in *The Woman in White*.²⁵ The heroine of the novel, Marian, is distinguished by her 'gypsy face' and her dark and masculine features. Her character tends towards the Romantic projection of the Roma stereotype yet at the same time troubles what Landon describes as the "'generic" representations of humans"²⁶ according to Western nationalistic ideology in the way she is not physically attractive to Hartright, the principal male protagonist in the story.²⁷ At the beginning of the nineteenth century, Jane Austen describes a confrontation in her novel *Emma* between a Roma family and two genteel young ladies who are asked for money. Described as 'loud and insolent', the Roma are scared off by the passing Churchill and we read that 'they did not wait for the operations of justice; they took themselves off in a hurry'.²⁸ Notwithstanding the ironic tones of Austen's narrative, the episode plays on conventional prejudice, a view which leads to what Behlmer describes as a mid-century 'campaign against mendicancy in all its forms'.²⁹ As it happens, we see this anxiety reflected in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* during Jane's flight from Thornfield: 'I blamed none of those who repulsed me [...] an ordinary beggar is frequently an object of suspicion: a well-dressed beggar inevitably so'.³⁰ Throughout the century, therefore, and expressed in a variety of forms, we see the Roma as a literary construct, a convenient trope for the benefit of authors wishing to accommodate "otherness" within

²² Bram Stoker, *Dracula* (Ware: Wordsworth Editions Ltd., 2000), p. 36.

²³ Mayall, *Gypsy Identities*, p. 33.

²⁴ Said, p. 170.

²⁵ Andrew Mangham, 'Wilkie Collins (1824-1889)', in *A Companion to Crime Fiction*, ed. by Charles J. Rzepka and Lee Horsley (Chichester: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2010), pp. 381-389, p. 382.

²⁶ Landon, p. 46.

²⁷ See Wilkie Collins, *The Woman in White* (London: Penguin Books Ltd., 1999), p. 34.

²⁸ Jane Austen, *Emma* (Ware: Wordsworth Editions Ltd., 2007), pp. 268, 271.

²⁹ Behlmer, p. 235.

³⁰ Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre* (Ware: Penguin Books Ltd., 1994), p. 325.

British social space.

In the introduction to their compilation of Doyle's letters to the press, John Gibson and Richard Green conclude that 'the writer comes across as a warm hearted and tolerant person'.³¹ Yet Doyle is widely recognised as having been faithful to imperialist ideology and therefore necessarily intolerant in so far as the individual does not conform to the ideal model, racially or otherwise. In both his letters and fiction, however, there is evidence of ambivalence with regard to the reality of the imperial machine, such as criticism of the police and the consequences of Empire in 'London, that great cesspool into which all loungers and idlers of the Empire are irresistibly drained'.³² There is a tension, in other words, between what seems to be a tolerant predisposition, an ideological belief, and an awareness of the lack of faith in the structural integrity of the establishment.

Before discussing Doyle's Sherlock Holmes writing in detail, evidence will be examined which suggests that although the author expressed attitudes which have tended to confirm opinions that he was a prime exemplar of stereotypical conservative values, it is a mistake to hold that view without qualification. The Holmes stories represent a modest fraction of Doyle's literary output, which included plays, poems, historical novels and papers, and a constant stream of eclectic correspondence with the press: all of which made him, as Harold Orel states, 'one of the most visible literary figures of England'.³³ There is a wealth of material available, therefore, which can provide useful lines of research. As one reads from an interview recorded in *The Bookman*:

The centre of gravity of the whole race has shifted to the West and I believe in time that every Saxon will swing the sword of justice over the whole world [...]. America and England, joined in their common Anglo-Saxonhood, with their common blood, will rule the world. We will be united. And the sooner that day comes the better.³⁴

Such jingoistic sabre-rattling is hard to misinterpret. An extract from the American *Munsey's Magazine* reads as follows: 'His friends speak of him as an ardent lover of healthful outdoor sports, a golf enthusiast, and a devotee of the ubiquitous bicycle. The wholesome atmosphere of his books is due in great measure, no doubt, to his own robust health'.³⁵ For this reviewer, the Doyle physiognomy rubber-stamps his literature as the product of the healthy white Anglo-Saxon male according to imperial ideological hierarchy. Adding further to Doyle's imperialist credentials, Barbara Rusch refers to his written defence against German and domestic accusations of British brutality during the Boer War, for which he was knighted, and subsequently his report of the actions of the Titanic's officers against the critical views of George Bernard Shaw.³⁶ Armed with this kind of evidence, it is easy to understand how critics

³¹ John Gibson and Richard Green, 'Introduction', in *The Unknown Conan Doyle: Letters to the Press*, ed. by John Gibson and Richard Green (London: Martin Secker and Warburg Ltd., 1986), pp. 1-7, p. 7.

³² Arthur Conan Doyle, *A Study in Scarlet* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 6.

³³ Harold Orel, 'Introduction', *Critical Essays on Sir Arthur Conan Doyle*, ed. by Harold Orel (New York, NY: G.K. Hall and Co., 1992), pp. 1-24, pp. 3, 23.

³⁴ R. Blathwayt, 'A Talk with Dr Conan Doyle', in *The Bookman*, 2(8), (1892), 50-1, p. 51.

³⁵ Unsigned Review, 'Conan Doyle and His Books', in *Munsey's Magazine*, 18, (1897), p. 152.

³⁶ Barbara Rusch, 'The Sinking of the Sherlockian Age', in *The Baker Street Journal*, 62(2), (2012), 38-50, p. 40.

have focused on textual analyses which privilege a reading of Doyle's fiction as the product of a cultural stereotype.

And yet, while Doyle submits to the abstract concept of, as Leslie Favor puts it, 'the eminence of the English over the Other-than-English and the Male over the Other-than-male' and the moral eligibility of the Imperial vision, he is critical of the concrete realisation of that vision.³⁷ We can see in his letters to the press a wide and subversive critical engagement with normative values both in the establishment and the broader social sphere. For example, in a letter to *The Daily Express* in 1906, we read:

This insistence on the literal meaning of texts is, in the words of Winwood Reade, "to pull down idols of wood only to replace them with idols of paper and printer's ink." They are the weapons by which theologians from the earliest days of Christianity have spread disunion and strife. Every creed can found its position upon a text, and every other creed can find some other to controvert it.³⁸

These words, still resonating with today's reader, are clearly designed to oppose belief reliant on religious dogma. In a similar vein and this time specific to Divorce Law Reform, we read from a letter to *The Morning Post* in 1913: 'if any so-called moral law compels the continued union of a confirmed lunatic with a sane person, or of a helpless woman with a cruel and brutal man, then it becomes an accursed thing though you bolster it with a thousand texts'.³⁹ The sentiment expressed in this extract expresses some sympathy towards the rights of women and the moral inconsistency of the judicial process; a theme which surfaces in the Sherlock Holmes canon. Doyle implicitly challenges his own imperialist ideals in a letter to *The Times* in 1909, this with regard to British complicity in the horrors of what was ironically known as The Congo Free State. He writes in reference to the Berlin Congress of 1885: 'Did these solemn words mean anything? Are they compatible with our standing by year after year seeing these native races done to death, and never raising an effective hand to help them?'⁴⁰

While this evidence of his critical stance mitigates a polarised image of his conservative values, we are left with the question of how apparently opposing perspectives are reconciled within his world view. An answer may lie in the 'racial superiority of Europeans as a key justification for, and instrument of, imperial rule'.⁴¹ We see this belief exposed in the partnership between an Andaman Islander and a disgraced British soldier cooperating in the theft of Indian treasure in *The Sign of the Four*. Immediately prior to the Andaman Tonga's death, we read Watson's account: 'I can see the two of them now as they stood: the white man with his legs far apart, shrieking out curses, and the unhallowed dwarf with his hideous face, and his strong, yellow teeth gnashing at us in the light of our lantern'.⁴² This partnership cannot be accepted because

³⁷ Leslie J. Favor, 'The Foreign and the Female in Arthur Conan Doyle', *English Literature in Transition 1880-1920*, 43(4), (2000), 398-409, p. 398.

³⁸ Arthur Conan Doyle, in *The Unknown Conan*, p. 120.

³⁹ *ibid.*, p. 192.

⁴⁰ *ibid.*, p. 138.

⁴¹ Yumna Siddiqi, *Anxieties of Empire and the Fiction of Intrigue* (Columbia, OH: Columbia University Press, 2012), p. 68.

⁴² Arthur Conan Doyle, *The Sign of the Four* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 87.

it is anathema to the idealised conception of British identity the violation of which leads to violent disorder. Andrew Lang was moved to condemn Doyle's portrayal of the islander: 'The Andamanese are cruelly libelled, and have neither the malignant qualities, nor the heads like mops, nor the weapons, nor the customs, with which they are credited by Sherlock'. This observation seems refreshingly enlightened at first glance, but Lang spoils the illusion in his next breath: 'He has detected the wrong savage, and injured the character of an amiable people'.⁴³ In other words, had Doyle selected a character from a different part of the world, he might be excused, but the islander is still a 'savage' with all its prejudicial connotations. Jon Thompson writes:

Many of these strategies of exclusion are understandable in terms of imperialism and its related ideologies. Racism is one such ideology, and it has long served as an excuse for Western imperialism [...] many took comfort in the rationalization that people of color were not fully human. This belief, so widely accepted that it often did not seem to be an opinion, had the advantage that it also functioned as a rationale for imperial domination.⁴⁴

With this observation, the story shifts from appearing to be a criticism of imperialism to one of criticising individuals within the system who have failed to uphold imperialist values. In a letter concerning a controversy with regard to expansive bullets Doyle betrays this a priori belief: 'It is notorious [...] that the British, whose wars are usually against savages, had prepared large quantities of soft-nosed bullets [...]. It is only just to say, however, that they were never intended to be used against white races, and that a War Office order forbade their use in the South African war'.⁴⁵ Doyle unwittingly discloses a distinction between whites and 'savages' so that a weapon which causes horrific injuries can be used against people who are perceived as belonging to a lower order of existence. For Doyle, however uncomfortable this conclusion may seem to today's reader, there appears to be no conflict, because racial superiority to him was a universal truth which by definition requires no further consideration. Nevertheless, as we move on to the texts themselves we see that Doyle creates a character which undermines and conflicts with the author's stated views.

It is appropriate to introduce the outré detective in relation to the Roma themselves because Doyle's creation displays many of the bohemian characteristics so alienated by contemporary and preceding authors. We read Watson's observations in *The Musgrave Ritual*:

I find a man who keeps his cigars in the coal scuttle, his tobacco in the toe end of a Persian slipper, and his unanswered correspondence transixed by a jack-knife into the very centre of his wooden mantelpiece [...]. Holmes in one of his queer humours would sit in an armchair, with his hair trigger, and a hundred Boxer cartridges, and proceed to

⁴³ Andrew Lang, 'The Novels of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle', in *Critical Essays on Sir Arthur Conan Doyle*, pp. 219-235, p. 234.

⁴⁴ Jon Thompson, *Fiction, Crime, and Empire* (Urbana and Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1993), p. 74.

⁴⁵ Doyle, *Letters to the Press*, p. 84.

adorn the opposite wall with a patriotic V.R. done in bullet-pocks.⁴⁶

Doyle's patriotic character is lazy by his own admission when not engaged in a case, has Eastern connections in his sartorial choice, and has no respect in general for normative values. Quintessentially bohemian with his violin and pipe, he is friendless save Watson, and spends his leisure time in an opiated miasma.⁴⁷ In spite or because of this bizarre image, his methodology of 'scientific imagination' enables him to categorise individuals unencumbered by social bias. Social bias was a significant factor in the harassment of the Roma, as Mayall states: 'The local inhabitants preferred to find offenders in the camps of strangers rather than their own communities'.⁴⁸ Holmes, as an outsider, has no interest in social relations and operates without prejudice in this regard. At the same time, however, his methodology is a caricature of the impulse towards designation of type as Said writes: 'such designations gather power when, later in the nineteenth century, they are allied with character as derivation, as genetic type'.⁴⁹

The reader is introduced to this methodology in *A Study in Scarlet*, the first book in the Holmes canon. Holmes explains his identification of a 'retired sergeant of Marines' to a bewildered and sceptical Watson:

Even across the street I could see a great blue anchor tattooed on the back of the fellows hand. That smacked of the sea. He had a military carriage, however, and regulation side whiskers. There we have the marine. He was a man with some amount of self-importance and a certain air of command [...], A steady, respectable, middle aged man, too, on the face of him-all facts which led me to believe he had been a sergeant.⁵⁰

This can be compared with a brief reference to the Roma in *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, when Watson questions Dr Mortimer in order to find out the owner of a set of initials found on a scrap of burnt paper: 'There are a few gypsies and labouring folk for whom I can't answer, but among the farmers or gentry there is no one whose initials are those'.⁵¹ The unknowability of the Roma and other itinerant people is emphasised by a complete lack of social contact and the simplest category of appellation. The perceived threat to society from resistance to identification by a self-contained people sharing the same space as the dominant society is tranquilised in these stories as will be unpacked in the final part of this paper.

First published in *The Strand Magazine*, *The Speckled Band* was apparently Doyle's favourite story.⁵² The villain is Dr Grimesby Roylett who, returning from India having narrowly escaped execution for murder, takes up residence in the family seat with two step-daughters, a cheetah and a baboon. A violent disposition separates him from society and his only companions are a group of Roma which he lets stay in the estate grounds; we read how he 'accepts in return the

⁴⁶ Arthur Conan Doyle, *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 113.

⁴⁷ See Daniel Cottom, 'Sherlock Holmes meets Dracula', *ELH* 79(3) (2012), 537-567, p. 554.

⁴⁸ Mayall, *English Gypsies and State Policies*, p. 50.

⁴⁹ Said, p. 119.

⁵⁰ Doyle, *A Study in Scarlet*, pp. 22-3.

⁵¹ Arthur Conan Doyle, *The Hound of the Baskervilles* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 106.

⁵² Favor, p. 399.

hospitality of their tents, wandering away with them sometimes for weeks on end'.⁵³ One of his step-daughters dies in mysterious circumstances and the surviving sister, Helen, appeals to Holmes for help. Helen recalls her sister's allusion to a speckled band in her last words which briefly diverts suspicion towards the Roma. In this story, and indeed all the stories in which they are mentioned, the suspicion is groundless, as Clausen briefly remarks: 'Such conventional scapegoats as gypsies are sometimes suspected of serious crimes [...] but they always turn out to be innocent'.⁵⁴ Holmes realises that Roylett's finances are precarious and he needs to keep his step-daughters unmarried in order to continue to benefit sufficiently from their legacy. The alternative is to murder the daughters, hence the motive for Julia's death. Various inexplicable structural alterations to the Manor narrow the search to adjoining rooms between Roylett and his step-daughter, and Holmes proposes lying in wait for whatever may occur. Their watch is rewarded by the discovery and repulsion of a snake which escapes to fatally strike its trainer, the murderer Roylett. Roylett's death, for which Holmes is partially responsible, is greeted with his indifference: 'I cannot say that it is likely to weigh heavily upon my conscience'.⁵⁵ Like many conclusions to these stories, "justice" is accomplished prior to any intervention by the state.

Favor connects Roylett's portrayal with Doyle's imperialist views, arguing that the combination of his inherent violent temper, his adoption of Eastern habits and possessions, and his association with the Roma are suggestive of his being 'tainted by the East'.⁵⁶ The thought to be concluded from Favor's analysis is that failing to uphold British cultural values in a foreign environment is potentially destabilising because order can only be maintained throughout the world on that ideological basis. Developing this theme and focusing on the Roma, Stella Pratt-Smith describes how Roylett's estate, Stoke Moran, undergoes a cultural metamorphosis. She writes that:

although an English space, it is Orientalised as a place of Purdah, where the domestic ideology is effectively taken to extremes and turned in upon itself [...]. [T]he gypsies' tents in the garden enact a reversed and specifically Eastern colonisation, a contamination by the multiple, uncontrollable, and transient racial and cultural elements of the British Empire.⁵⁷

As pointed out earlier, the Roma originate from India, and are the only society with which Roylett can identify as having adopted and being isolated by the accoutrements of that environment by which the culture of his birth has been displaced. The Roma, however, in spite of being associated with the culture that has exacerbated Roylett's psychotic behaviour and being located in England, are not represented as a particular threat. They are utilitarian in their contract with Roylett, attaching themselves to him as an opportunity given their itinerant

⁵³ Doyle, *Adventures*, p. 176.

⁵⁴ Christopher Clausen, 'Sherlock Holmes, Order, and the Late-Victorian Mind', in *Critical Essays on Sir Arthur Conan Doyle*, pp. 66-91, p. 80.

⁵⁵ Doyle, *Adventures*, p. 157.

⁵⁶ Favor, p. 399.

⁵⁷ Stella Pratt-Smith, 'The Other Serpents: Defiance and Contagion in *The Speckled Band*', in *Victorian Newsletter* 113, (2008), 54-66, p.55-6.

lifestyle and comparable with accounts of their social behaviour across the Continent, as has been noted in the relationship between Dracula and the Transylvanian Roma. Their presence in Britain as “others” and their consequential image conventionally represented, as opposed to the dominant ideological model, do not predict illegal activity. For Holmes, the connection between the Roma and crime is illogical: ““ I had [...] come to an entirely erroneous conclusion which shows, my dear Watson, how dangerous it always is to reason from insufficient data””.⁵⁸ Holmes is initially distracted from correctly diagnosing the mystery by conventional prejudice and conveys this sentiment to the reader.

As in the previous story, the Roma in *Silver Blaze* come under immediate suspicion upon the violent death of a horse trainer, John Straker, and the disappearance of the eponymous race horse. As Holmes investigates the incidents on the Devon moors, he considers the plausibility of the “Gypsies” involvement in the horse’s kidnap: ‘And why should gypsies kidnap him? These people always clear out when they hear of trouble, for they do not wish to be pestered by the police’.⁵⁹ Holmes is not minded to direct suspicion towards the Roma in the face of conventional attitudes by the establishment. As it happens, the trainer, in financial straits as a result of an expensive mistress, meets his death while attempting to hamstring the horse on the moor but is instead fatally struck by a hoof in the process. The loose horse is caught and disguised by a neighbouring trainer for his own gain but is discovered by Holmes; the Roma having no involvement whatsoever. *The Priory School*, a short story this time involving the kidnap of a young nobleman Lord Saltire and the murder of a German schoolmaster, takes place on the Derbyshire moors where Roma once again are to be found. The kidnap victim is the half-brother of the perpetrator James, who attempts to force their father, an aristocratic politician known as the Duke of Holderness, to change his will in his illegitimate son’s favour. The Roma are as usual initially suspected, having been discovered in possession of the boy’s cap. Dr. Huxtable, headmaster of the school attended by Saltire, declares on this turn of events: ‘They shuffled and lied-said they found it on the moor on Tuesday morning. They know where he is, the rascals!’; the Roma are incarcerated on this evidence but Holmes is unimpressed: ‘The police have really done nothing locally, save the arrest of these gypsies’.⁶⁰ This episode is significant in that it corresponds to one of the conditions of the 1824 Vagrancy Act previously referred to, which required in rather nebulous terms that the detainees give a good account of themselves in order to avoid arrest.⁶¹ For Holmes, the actions and beliefs of the establishment have no bearing on the case and the Roma disappear from the narrative effectively exonerated. Incidental to the Roma’s cause but a useful accompaniment is the fate of the German master who is murdered by James’s accomplice during the chaotic proceedings. Rusch notes Doyle’s extreme dislike of Germans,⁶² yet this character is not only exonerated from initial suspicions, but even, following his fateful attempt to rescue the victim and the subsequent discovery of his corpse, accorded respect by Holmes: ‘That he could have gone on after receiving such an injury said much for the courage and vitality of the man’.⁶³ If one accepts the thought that, as Favor

⁵⁸ Doyle, *Adventures*, p. 196.

⁵⁹ Arthur Conan Doyle, *The Memoirs of Sherlock Holmes* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 18

⁶⁰ Arthur Conan Doyle, *The Return of Sherlock Holmes* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 113.

⁶¹ Mayall, *English Gypsies and State Policies*, p. 53.

⁶² Rusch, p. 40.

⁶³ Doyle, *The Return*, p. 117.

argues, '[t]he narratives communicate, via the villains a "type" that tells the reader how to view foreigners', the corollary must be that the narratives also communicate a disturbance of conventional belief with regard to the Roma as the non-Anglo Saxon other, and indeed, furthermore, a reason to resist the dovetailing of received beliefs with regard to Doyle's own ideological perspective into a polarised textual analysis of his fiction.⁶⁴

To conclude, therefore, it has been shown that the contemporary literary response to state-sponsored repression of the Roma in the nineteenth century was a constructed imagery which, although not always inflammatory, was a trope representing "otherness" incompatible with normative aspirations. We have also seen that Doyle's imperialist agenda is complicated by contradictory liberal statements in his letters, and these complications have been overlooked by some critics who read his fiction as a reflection of stereo-typical conservative values. There is no reason to suppose that Doyle was any better qualified to provide a realistic portrait of the Roma than his fellow authors, and so his manipulation of the device may merely be read as a benign reconfiguration of a literary trope as Behlmer suggests: 'Whether Victorian gypsies actually deserved their lawless reputation is difficult to judge'.⁶⁵ Nevertheless, it can be said with confidence that an author whose reputation is paired with divisive ideology treats a people conventionally "othered" in literature in such a way as to hold up to critical scrutiny a received mistrust in difference.

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⁶⁴ Favor, p. 408.

⁶⁵ Behlmer, p. 234.

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