



REFLECTION OF 19TH CENTURY VICTORIAN AGE THROUGH SIR CONAN DOYLE'S LITERARY PROLIFICACY - A LEGEND WAS BORN

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Abstract:

Detective stories and novels draw the attention of a wide array of readers. These were mouth-watering prospects whenever being catered to its readers and audiences over the decades. However, if we could go back through the time machine, we would see that late 18th and later half of 19th century developed the foundation of such kind of fictions and not to mention, afterward, detective fictions progressed leaps and bounds, as it rampaged its authority on the English literature. Although such stories are considered as potential crowd pullers but above all, if we intricate such stories and novels in depth, we would be able to see a sizeable reflection of 19th century Victorian Age and its social perspectives. Therefore, in this essay, we would like to emphasize primarily to illustrate the socio-economy of Victorian Era, in relevance to the contribution of detective fiction stories and novels by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle.

Keywords: detective fiction, Victorian age, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, Sherlock Holmes, British Empire

Introduction

Literature is the potential mirror of an era. However, the advent of detective fictions, novels was a touch different to intricate the overall legacy of colonial British Empire, until Sir Arthur Conan Doyle appeared into the center stage. In fact, he gave a new dimension to the

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English literature not only by creating the colossal image of Sherlock Holmes but also developed a concept to narrate an era by his prolific style.

To fulfil our objective of this essay, we subdivided our writings into as many as four individual sections to be exact. In the first part, we illustrated a bit on Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, how he stamped his authority in modern English literature. In the second portion, we continued with a short briefing on the background which triggered Sir Arthur to construct his everlasting character, Mr. Sherlock Holmes. In this portion, we also depicted Mr. Sherlock Holmes and how was he all about. The third and fourth sections are the true reflections of Victorian Age and British Empire of that time through the mesmerizing artistry of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. We concluded this essay by showcasing how detective fictions of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle should be read from a different angle to assimilate the social perspective of 19th century Victorian Age.

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle; The Inventor

Sir Arthur Ignatius Conan Doyle (1859 – 1930), by profession, was a clinician, belonged to an aristocratic Irish family. Sir Arthur was greatly influenced by his mother since childhood as she exposed him to a variety of books of literature. He expressed his gratitude in his future works and autobiography "*In my early childhood, as far as I can remember anything at all, the vivid stories she would tell me to stand out so clearly that they obscure the real facts of my life.*" (Sherlock Holmes online, 2015). With the aid of ever progressing scientific ideas Sir Conan Doyle concentrated more on the social scenario of the Victorian Era when he was in his college days. Edgar Allan Poe, one of his contemporary American Story writers, influenced him immensely that eventually protruded him to write stories. It was primarily Poe's influence by which Sir Arthur published his first story "*Mystery of the Sasassa Valley*". Meanwhile, in conjunction with his story writing he went on with his medical practice as well. However, Sir Arthur whenever, was not surrounded by patients, was feeling bored. To get rid of this boredom and in search for recognition as an eminent writer he took up writing as his weapon.

He went door to door of several publishers but all his efforts were in despair at the beginning of his writing career. In the end, God gave him mercy when he published his first novel "*A study in scarlet*". In fact, it is the novel where people of the 19th century forgot the inventor totally regarding his creation. It is that novel, where Sherlock Holmes appeared for the first time and without a doubt he is considered as one of the bests, if not the best literary creation of English literature.

Socio-economic Perspective

Literature is the virtual mirror of the socio-economic structure of a country; Sir Conan Doyle's works were also no exceptions by any means. As we percolate through the novels and stories of him, we would see social implications of both before and during the Victorian Age (1837-1901). This period is also considered to be the era of industrial revolution in the United Kingdom. The cities all over England and surrounding places were not only under continuous propagation but also it brought the concept of "portable property" rather than land revenues. Many people were nearby, and it attracted thieves as potential scavengers to snatch those properties. Soon this became a headache of the Metropolitan police. The young Queen Victoria in her dynasty was criticized in and out by the public. However, in 1860s and later 19th century, several of the public servants were made into heroic proportions as if they were the only guardians to give justice, *"the role of the official detective as the employee of whoever wanted the mystery solved rather than the independent restorer of order"* (Pittard, 2013).

All those above parameters potentially developed into a situation where it needed a package which not to mention leading up to the invention of a legend named Sherlock Holmes who pinpointed the crime by circumstantial evidence and incomparable presence of mind.

Sherlock Holmes and Concept of Detection

Let us now concentrate a bit on the derivation of such a monumental creation. The first name came from a famous violinist, Alfred Sherlock and the surname came from one of Doyle's fellow physicians, Dr. Oliver Wendell Holmes. In spite of magnificent detection abilities, Holmes by no means was intimidating to his admirers and followers; *"Well, I have a trade on my own. I suppose I am the only one in the world. I'm a consulting detective if you can understand what that is. Here in London, we have lots of government detectives and lots of private ones when these fellows are at fault, they come to me"* (Kindle eBook, 2012).

Silver Lining among the Dark Clouds

The Victorian Age was ruling the roost during the 19th century and its later half. The British Empire was in its full throttle as it invaded millions of lands across the world. The tremendous propagation in conjunction with industrial revolution greatly influenced the economic prosperity of United Kingdom. It also initiated the formation of a new middle class among the social realm. However, a significant gap has thus been developed between

the poor and rich. Besides that, discrepancy among sets of people, the absence of habilitation leads to the formation of a series of crimes.

Sir Conan Doyle was smart enough to perfectly showcase these social transitions and eventually introduced his creation at a perfect point. It would be incomplete if we talk only about Sherlock Holmes but ignore Dr. Watson. In reality, he is the flag bearer of Sir Conan Doyle as he encompasses through almost every story of Holmes. To say the least, Britain, especially, London, during the Victorian Era, became a character of its own rather than a mere overcast, foggy and densely populated city as was being illustrated by Dr. Watson; *"I have seen death in many forms, but never has it appeared to me in a more fearsome aspect than in that dark, grimy apartment, which looked out upon one of the main arteries of suburban London"* (Kindle eBook, 2012).

The introduction and settlement of Charles Darwin's evolutionary theory greatly influenced People of the Victorian Era. It's worth mentioning that people of Great Britain were slowly assimilating the innermost fact of Darwinism as it invariably began to weaken the traditional religious beliefs. It was quite inevitable that Dr. Watson was a true representative of such a transition as he was keen in search for its new order. Zechlin, quoted very admirably in this context; *"The great question became whether God or Nature was in charge; and if faith in God was no longer able to make sense of Nature's disorder, then what could replace it?"* (Zechlin, 2013).

Conclusion

Sherlock Holmes and his works are undoubtedly amongst the best among modern English fiction stories. However, the novels and stories of Sherlock Holmes were not only pinpointed to the detection of crime. The ever-changing socio-economic condition, as well as the beliefs of fellow countrymen, influenced Sir Conan Doyle a lot. Sir Conan Doyle, through his creation, Sherlock Holmes, broke the dead rubber of creationism using the scientific ideas. As a detective, Sherlock Holmes not only solved the mysteries but also illustrated the origin of those crimes from the social point of views.

Last but not the least, Sir Conan Doyle enlightened the transitory spirit of the Victorian Age in a pronounced fashion through the novels and stories of his. Dr. Watson more often than not clarified the morality of Victorian realm. Sir Conan Doyle evaluated the social threats that were hovering around the overcast sky of London and shores of Great Britain, as he was in the constant process of reviving the roots of crime, not criminals. Sir Conan Doyle persevered to construct a new London, a New Britain and above all, the beginning of a new world.

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