

The Intertextual Adventures of Sherlock Holmes

“Perhaps the greatest of the Sherlock Holmes mysteries is this: that when we talk of him we invariably fall into the fantasy of his existence.” So wrote T. S. Eliot in a 1929 review of *The Complete Sherlock Holmes Short Stories*. In the 125 years since Holmes first appeared in print, this fantasy has extended far beyond Sir Arthur Conan Doyle’s text, with thousands of stories, plays, films, and other media featuring diverse visions and revisions of the master detective. While some of these works directly adapt Doyle’s narratives, many more borrow Holmes and his fictional compatriots for new tales and new contexts. This exhibition highlights a small selection of these intertextual adventures, which evoke, riff on, and re-imagine the classic Sherlock Holmes.

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***The Pursuit of the House-Boat: Being Some Further Account of the Divers Doings of the Associated Shades, under the Leadership of Sherlock Holmes, Esq.* by John Kendrick Bangs (1862–1922, US). Illustrated by Peter Newell. New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1897.**

The name of John Kendrick Bangs lives on in the phrase “Bangsian fantasy,” referring to tales in which famous literary and historical personages meet in the afterlife for humorous adventures. *The Pursuit of the House-Boat*, sequel to Bangs’s *A House-Boat on the Styx*, falls into this category. The Associated Shades, who had lost their boat to Captain Kidd at the end of the previous novel, are here assisted by Sherlock Holmes, the first fictional character among their company, in tracking the missing craft. Bangs’s afterlife conceit remains consistent, however, as the story appeared during the Great Hiatus, when Holmes was presumed dead: he dedicates the book “To A. Conan Doyle, Esq., with the author’s sincerest regards and thanks for the untimely demise of his great detective, which made these things possible.”

***A Thief in the Night: Further Adventures of A. J. Raffles, Cricketer and Cracksman* by E. W. Hornung (1866–1921, UK). Illustrated by Cyrus Cuneo. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1905.**

While Holmes is never mentioned by name in any of the four volumes of Raffles stories, the influence of the detective on the gentleman thief is evident. Like Holmes, Raffles is a master of disguise, and is almost always the cleverest person in the room, though he applies his talents to committing crimes rather than solving them. Raffles also has his own Watson, in the form of the adoring narrator Bunny Manders. Hornung's dedication of the first volume, "To A. C. D., this form of flattery," underscores the association. While Hornung never paired Raffles with Holmes, other works soon took up the challenge, including two featured in this display: John Kendrick Bangs's *R. Holmes & Co.* and Carolyn Wells's "The Adventure of the Clothes-Line." Like Holmes, his lawful foil, Raffles soon transcended his author's pages.

E. W. Hornung's connection to Doyle was personal as well as literary: he married Doyle's sister, Constance. Hornung and Doyle also played together on a cricket team captained by *Peter Pan* creator James M. Barrie. Doyle biographer Andrew Lycett cites another fellow teammate, George Ives, as an inspiration for Raffles. Ives, whose papers are at the Ransom Center, was a writer, amateur criminologist, early gay rights activist, and co-founder of the British Sexological Society.

R. Holmes & Co.: Being the Remarkable Adventures of Raffles Holmes, Esq., Detective and Amateur Cracksman by Birth by John Kendrick Bangs (1862–1922, US). Illustrated by Sydney Adamson. London: Arthur F. Bird, 1906.

While most combinations of Raffles and Holmes pit them against each other as opponents, *R. Holmes & Co.* brings them together as opposing impulses within the same person: Raffles Holmes, the son of Sherlock and grandson of Raffles. The younger Holmes fulfills his dual lineage by committing audacious thefts of objects whose provenance is dubious, then ensuring the return of the stolen items to their rightful owners. With his own sense of honor whether among thieves or detectives, Raffles Holmes pays homage to both his illustrious forebears.

***A Double Barrelled Detective Story* by Mark Twain (1835–1910, US).
Illustrated by Lucius Hitchcock. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1902.**

Mark Twain puts his own unique stamp on the great detective in this satiric tale of revenge and murder in a California mining camp. Fetlock Jones, Holmes's American nephew, is dismayed when his famed uncle arrives just as Jones is planning to murder his abusive employer. Jones proceeds with the crime regardless, and Holmes applies his powers to create an elaborately logical (and entirely wrong) explanation of the evidence. Ultimately, another character's preternatural sense of smell trumps Holmes's science of deduction in catching the culprit, in a plot twist that suggests the inadequacy of mere logic to account for the full range of human absurdity.

This copy of the first edition is from Twain's own library and is signed by the author.

***The Painful Predicament of Sherlock Holmes* by William Gillette (1853–1937, US). Chicago: Ben Abramson, 1955.**

In 1899, Holmes may have been officially still drowned at Reichenbach Falls, but his avatar, as embodied by actor-writer William Gillette, was just beginning an immensely popular theatrical career. In bringing Holmes to the stage, Gillette had the imprimatur of Doyle to adapt the detective to the conventions of melodrama. Unwilling to do without a love interest for his hero, Gillette had cabled to Doyle, “May I marry Holmes?” Doyle callously replied: “You may marry or murder or do what you like with him.” Gillette’s play thus ends on a romantic note for Holmes and the Irene-Adler-esque heroine, Alice Faulkner.

Gillette invented many elements for his characterization that would fuse with the popular image of Sherlock Holmes and appear in illustrations for the stories, including the now-emblematic deerstalker hat and meerschaum pipe. The play also marks Holmes’s first utterance of what would become his apocryphal catchphrase: “Elementary, my dear Watson.”

While Gillette’s *Sherlock Holmes* was hugely influential, his *The Painful Predicament of Sherlock Holmes* was only an afterthought. In 1905, needing a curtain-raising one-act to warm up the London audience for his comedy *Clarice*, Gillette put together this nod to his best-known role, in which a silent Holmes and his servant Billy (played by a young Charlie Chaplin) deal with an indefatigably voluble client.

“Het geval van de man die gezocht werd” [“The Man Who Was Wanted”] by Arthur Whitaker (1882–1949, UK). Translated into Dutch by C. Helling. Published in *Detective Magazine*. Amsterdam: C. V. Uitgeverij, ca. 1948.

Many Sherlockians have imagined discovering Dr. Watson’s “travel-worn and battered tin dispatch-box” lodged in the vaults of Cox & Co, full of untold adventures, like the Giant Rat of Sumatra, “for which the world is not yet prepared.” The dream of additional Holmes stories from Doyle’s own pen seemed to come true in 1942, with the discovery of an unpublished Holmes tale among some Doyle family papers. Hesketh Pearson, in his 1943 biography *Conan Doyle: His Life and Art*, described the manuscript as “certainly not up to scratch, though the opening is worth quoting because it carries the authentic trade-mark.” While Pearson’s biography included excerpts from the story, Adrian Conan Doyle initially refused to release the full manuscript, despite fervent pleas from the Baker Street Irregulars and other Holmes fans.

Doyle’s heirs finally allowed publication of the story in *Cosmopolitan Magazine* in August 1948. Pearson’s excerpts, however, had already caught the attention of the real author: Arthur Whitaker, an architect and amateur ornithologist, who had sent the story to Doyle in 1911. Whitaker wrote to Pearson in 1945, “My pride is not unduly hurt by your remark that ‘The Man who was Wanted’ is certainly not up to scratch, for the sting is much mitigated by your going on to remark that it carries the authentic trade-mark! This I feel, is a great compliment to my one and only effort at plagiarism.” After some legal wrangling, the true provenance of the story was publicly acknowledged in 1949.

“The Sleuths” by O. Henry (William Sydney Porter, 1862–1910, US). New York: The Winthrop Press, 1914. Originally published in *Sixes and Sevens*, 1911.

The current CBS television show *Elementary* is far from the first adaptation to transplant Sherlock Holmes to New York City. Austin’s own O. Henry wrote three short stories featuring “Shamrock Jolnes” in the American metropolis. In “The Sleuths,” O. Henry infuses Holmesian deduction with his own characteristically dry wit: for example, the presence of a hatpin among a missing woman’s effects leads Jolnes to conclude that she has not gone to Brooklyn, as “no woman attempts to board a car at the Brooklyn Bridge without being sure that she carries a hatpin with which to fight her way into a seat.”

Before taking O. Henry as his *nom de plume*, William Sydney Porter had his own share of trouble with the law. In 1894, he lost his job at the First National Bank of Austin after the discovery of discrepancies in his accounts, and eventually faced a federal indictment for embezzlement. The day before his trial was to begin in 1896, Porter fled the country, eventually settling in Honduras. His wife intended to join him there, but became too ill with tuberculosis to travel. Porter returned to Austin to face charges a few months before his wife died in 1898. He served three years in the Ohio Penitentiary, during which time he began publishing stories as O. Henry. After his release in 1901, Porter moved to New York, and his affection for the city is evident in “The Sleuths.”

The tiny dimensions of this publication are due to the manner in which it was distributed: as a free prize inside packets of cigarettes.

De allerlaatste avonturen van Sir Sherlock Holmes: Prikkel-idyllen (I) [*The Final Adventures of Sir Sherlock Holmes: Stimulating Idylls (I)*] written and illustrated by Cornelis Veth (1880–1962, Dutch). Bussum, The Netherlands: C. A. J. van Bishoeck, 1912.

In this collection of linked tales, the manager of the London Bioscope Theatre hires Sir Sherlock Holmes and his companion, Dr. Watson Doyle, to bring him new and exciting adventures to be re-enacted on film. Holmes and Watson subsequently embark on three cases with an eye to their cinematic possibilities. Complications in the first two render them unsuitable for filming, but the third, featuring the return from the dead of Holmes's archnemesis Moriarty, seems more promising—until Holmes reveals to Watson that the case is a fake, and he had hired an actor to play the late villain: "I could never reconcile myself to the fact of Moriarty's death. That was the beginning of the end. We had each completed each other. He cared only for crime, I only for detection. Right now I'm like a champion chess player with no worthy opponents." In the end Holmes decides to cede the cinema to pulp-fiction gumshoe Nick Carter and his imitators, concluding that "each generation gets the detectives it deserves."

While Veth's Holmes ultimately rejects the offer of a film career, by 1912 the detective was already a recognized franchise on the silver screen. Holmes's first cinematic appearance was in "Sherlock Holmes Baffled" (1900), soon followed by at least three multi-episode serials, numerous one-offs, and even "A Canine Sherlock Holmes" (1912).

***The Adventures of Herlock Sholmes* by Peter Todd (Charles Hamilton, 1876–1961, UK). Illustrated by Lewis R. Higgins. Yonkers, N.Y.: The Mysterious Press, 1976. Originally published in *The Greyfriars Herald*, 1915–1916.**

Officially recognized by the Guinness Book of Records as the world's most prolific modern writer, Charles Hamilton is estimated to have published 100 million words in his lifetime, starting in his early teens. Hamilton was best known for his school stories, especially the Greyfriars School series featuring schoolboy antihero Billy Bunter. Hamilton published the Greyfriars stories in *The Magnet* under the name Frank Richards, one of a multitude of pseudonyms he used throughout his career.

Hamilton's persona for his Sholmes stories, Peter Todd, was more than just a simple byline. These stories first appeared in *The Greyfriars Herald*, which began its fictional existence in *The Magnet* as the Greyfriars school newspaper. The popularity of the Greyfriars series led to its editor issuing *The Greyfriars Herald* as a spin-off, with stories ostensibly written by Greyfriars students (ventriloquized by Hamilton-as-Richards). "Peter Todd," a minor character in the Greyfriars stories, became more fleshed out as the author of one hundred Herlock Sholmes adventures in the *Herald* from 1915 to 1916. While Hamilton channeled the imagination of a Holmes-obsessed schoolboy to write these stories, essentially playing the part of a fan writing fanfiction, his obvious familiarity with the source material suggests that in this case the role was not that far from the reality.

Los 38 asesinatos y medio del castillo de Hull: Novismas aventuras de Sherlock Holmes [*The 38 and a Half Murders in Hull Castle: New Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*] by Enrique Jardiel Poncela (1901–1952, Spain). Madrid: Editores Reunidos—Central de Librería, 1936.

This “pastiche holmesiano” is the last installment in a series of seven Holmes tales written and illustrated by the Spanish humorist Enrique Jardiel Poncela, which were first published in magazines beginning in 1928. Jardiel Poncela’s narrator, Harry, encounters Sherlock Holmes in a London park, and joins him as his assistant. (Holmes, hitherto presumed dead at Niagara Falls, had returned to the city disguised as a stray dog.) The pair travels to Scotland to investigate a series of murders at Hull Castle. Each time Holmes fixes his suspicions on someone, however, that supposed culprit becomes the next victim. The “half murder” refers to the narrator, who is knocked unconscious but recovers. When the final two suspects both turn up dead, Holmes deduces that, based on the evidence, he himself must be the murderer, and calls upon Scotland Yard for his own arrest.

By 1928, Holmes’s reputation in Spain was already well established. The first Spanish translation of *A Study in Scarlet* (as *Estudio en rojo*) appeared in Madrid in 1906, and complete editions of the tales soon followed. Holmes also thrived on the Spanish stage, with several plays produced and published between 1908 and 1916. While some of these drew directly on the canon, many were original works that borrowed only the character of Holmes, often pitting him against Hornung’s Raffles or Leblanc’s Lupin. By 1920, *The Bookman* could say that Barcelona is “the birthplace of an Iberian Sherlock Holmes,” and that “the fabrication of his adventures is an industry of the city,” with publications printed “by the millions” and circulated throughout the Spanish-speaking world.

***“In Re: Sherlock Holmes”*: The Adventures of Solar Pons by August Derleth (1909–1971, US). Sauk City, Wisc.: Mycroft and Moran, 1945.**

At nineteen, August Derleth, already a published writer of three years' standing, wrote to Arthur Conan Doyle asking if any further Holmes adventures were forthcoming. Doyle replied with an emphatic negative, spurring Derleth to begin writing his own stories in the Sherlockian vein. Thus was born Solar Pons, “the Sherlock Holmes of Praed Street,” who began appearing publicly in pulp magazines in February 1929.

The Pons stories form a peculiar hybrid of fanfiction, imitation, and homage. Pons's first adventure is set five years after Holmes's last; while the stories' characters are well aware of Sherlock Holmes, they seem unperturbed by the extent to which they parallel their predecessors. The plots mix and match elements and tropes from the canon, including cases mentioned but never narrated by Dr. Watson, such as “The Adventure of the Remarkable Worm.” As Vincent Starrett writes in his introduction, “Solar Pons is not a caricature of Sherlock Holmes. He is, rather, a clever impersonator, with a twinkle in his eye, which tells us that he knows he is not Sherlock Holmes, and knows that *we* know it, but that he hopes we will like him anyway for what he symbolizes.”

“In Re: Sherlock Holmes” inaugurated Mycroft and Moran, the detective fiction imprint of publisher Arkham House. Derleth and Donald Wandrei co-founded Arkham House in 1939 to publish in hardcover the works of H. P. Lovecraft, which had hitherto mostly appeared only in ephemeral pulp magazines. Derleth's fascination with the Cthulhu mythos also emerges in the Pons stories: counted among Pons's publications is *An Examination of the Cthulhu Cult and Others*, and in one case Pons's first clue to a hoax is the inclusion of the *Necronomicon*, an imaginary book invented by Lovecraft, in a rare books catalogue. The tacit allusions reward those fans “in the know,” connecting the fan-author and fan-reader through shared arcane knowledge.

***A Taste for Honey: A Mystery* by H. F. Heard (1889–1971, UK/US). New York: The Vanguard Press, 1941.**

In “His Last Bow,” Doyle gives a glimpse of the aged Holmes in rural retirement, having turned his focus from detection to bees. H. F. Heard’s novel suggests that bee-keeping and crime-solving may be complementary pursuits, with bees playing a central role in the story’s murderous plot. Pressed into unwilling service as a temporary Watson, narrator Sydney Silchester initially sees Holmes, here camouflaged under the name Mr. Mycroft, as an eccentric old man. Even when the detective reveals his true name, Silchester immediately forgets it, never having heard of him before. Silchester’s unfamiliarity with Holmes grants the reader the opportunity to see the character with fresh eyes, as if encountering him for the first time.

H. F. Heard, also known as Gerald Heard, wrote extensively about Eastern religions and philosophy. Like his friend Aldous Huxley, Heard experimented with LSD as a means to achieving heightened states of consciousness, and also introduced Huxley to the Hindu philosophy Vedanta. In 1963, Heard published *The Five Ages of Man*, about the development of human consciousness beyond a limited focus on the individual self. While such concerns may seem far afield from Sherlock Holmes, they emerge briefly in the words of Heard’s “Mr. Mycroft,” who, considering the murderer’s self-aggrandizing motivations, expresses “the hope that elsewhere, under other conditions, those who have found this life and body only a noose in which their struggles of greed and fear strangle them and make them in their blind strivings only a peril to all near them, may awake to their illusion, it may drop from them like an evil dream and they begin again to live and understand.”

***The Misadventures of Sherlock Holmes* edited by Ellery Queen (Frederic Dannay, 1905–1982, and Manfred Lee, 1905–1971, US). Little, Brown and Company: Boston, 1944.**

This anthology brings together thirty-three Holmes homages, pastiches, and parodies, dating from 1892 to 1943, selected and introduced by Ellery Queen. The diverse range of authors represented includes Agatha Christie, James M. Barrie, Bret Harte, and Stephen Leacock.

The frontispiece, by American Holmes illustrator Frederic Dorr Steele, captures a moment from “The Adventure of the Clothes-Line” by Carolyn Wells (1862–1942, US), originally published in *The Century* magazine in 1915. Wells’s story describes a meeting of the Society of Infallible Detectives, presided over by Sherlock Holmes and counting among its members Poe’s Dupin, Gaboriau’s Lecoq, Leblanc’s Arsène Lupin, and Hornung’s A. J. Raffles—the latter two as liaisons from the Society of Incurable Criminals, perhaps?—as well as a host of other luminaries. (Dr. Watson is absent at the start of the meeting, but leaves as substitute a phonograph in the corner, which he has rigged up to declare “Marvelous, Holmes, marvelous!” at intervals.) Each detective brings his distinctive skills to bear on a mystery featuring the titular clothesline, but the solution proves to be beyond the scope of even their multifarious talents. While many of the Society’s members are now known only by aficionados, Wells’s tale recalls the rich contemporary context of popular detective fiction that appeared alongside Holmes’s adventures.

***Unpopular Opinions* by Dorothy L. Sayers (1893–1957, UK). London: Victor Gollancz Ltd., 1946.**

The peculiar Sherlockian occupation known as “the Higher Criticism” or “the Great Game” treats Dr. Watson’s narratives as if they were true, if sometimes inaccurate, accounts of Holmes’s cases. The founding of the Higher Criticism is commonly dated to 1911, when Monsignor Ronald Knox presented a mock-serious textual analysis of the stories to an audience at Oxford. Knox is also credited with introducing the use of the word “canon” to refer to the published works “edited” by Doyle, in a nod to his appropriation of the methods of Biblical exegesis.

Dorothy L. Sayers, best known for creating gentleman detective Lord Peter Wimsey, contributed five essays to the Higher Criticism. In “The Dates in ‘The Red-Headed League’,” Sayers dissects and corrects the case’s inconsistent chronology. “Holmes’ College Career” offers a tour-de-force argument for Sidney Sussex at Cambridge as Holmes’s college, while also pinning down his birth year. “Dr. Watson’s Christian Name” devises an ingenious explanation for why Watson’s wife calls him “James” in “The Man with the Twisted Lip,” originating the idea that the “H.” in John H. Watson stands for “Hamish.” In “Dr. Watson, Widower,” Sayers takes up the contentious debate on exactly how many wives Watson had.

Unlike many other practitioners of the Higher Criticism, who often indulged in unsupported speculation, Sayers favored evidence-based deduction. She held that the Great Game “must be played as solemnly as a county cricket match at Lord’s: the slightest touch of extravagance or burlesque ruins the atmosphere.” Sayers took a similar approach when treating Holmes as fiction, but with a judicious admixture of playfulness. In a radio script for the Holmes centennial, her character Lord Peter tells the story of how his seven-year-old self consulted the famous detective in the urgent matter of a missing kitten. While the case may have been trivial, the appreciation for Sherlock Holmes expressed by Lord Peter, and Sayers, rings sincere.

“The Singularge Experience of Miss Anne Duffield” written and illustrated by John Lennon (1940–1980, UK). Published in *A Spaniard in the Works*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1965.

A Spaniard in the Works is the second of John Lennon’s published collections of stories and illustrations, demonstrating the Beatle’s surreal sense of humor and fondness for wordplay. Lennon’s stories evoke familiar figures from popular culture, but with an absurd twist: “The Singularge Experience of Miss Anne Duffield” features detective Shamrock Womlbs and his assistant Dr. Whopper. In a 1968 interview for the BBC, Lennon describes his introduction to Holmes while vacationing in 1964 on a boat full of books: “I read a whole stack, sort of ‘The Madman’s Sherlock Holmes,’ where you get all the stories in one, and I realized that every story was the same story, so I just wrote one Shamrock Womlbs after three weeks of Sherlock Holmes in Tahiti. And that was the end of it.”

Shamrock Womlbs also appears in the one-act play based on Lennon’s stories, written by Adrienne Kennedy and Victor Spinetti, that premiered in 1968 at the National Theatre’s Old Vic. Lennon and Spinetti recorded a series of audio effects for the production; some of the outtakes re-surfaced as part of the sound collage in *The White Album*’s “Revolution 9.”

***The Adventure of the Peerless Peer* by Philip José Farmer (1918-2009, US).
Boulder, Colo.: The Aspen Press, 1974.**

Philip José Farmer's extravagantly elaborate crossover stories posit a world in which all fictional characters co-exist. In what is known as the Wold Newton Universe, larger-than-life heroes and villains trace their origins to ancestors present at the fall of a meteorite at Wold Newton, Yorkshire in 1795 (an actual historical event). In Farmer's alternate history, the meteorite's radioactivity caused genetic mutations in those near the crash site, leading to their descendants' propensity for fabulous exploits.

The Adventure of the Peerless Peer focuses on two such descendants, Sherlock Holmes and Lord Greystoke (better known as Tarzan), tracking a German agent during World War I. Alert readers will catch a multitude of references to other characters from both Holmes canon (Von Bork from "His Last Bow," Lord Saltire from "The Adventure of the Priory School") and elsewhere (H. Rider Haggard's Allan Quatermain, Dorothy L. Sayers's Lord Peter Wimsey). Due to copyright issues, Tarzan was replaced by Rudyard Kipling's Mowgli in later editions.

Farmer echoes the Higher Criticism's conceit of treating the characters as real, presenting himself as the mere editor of a hitherto unpublished manuscript by Dr. John Watson, which, unlike the canon adventures, has not been bowdlerized for public consumption. This and other works by Farmer magnify the tendency for iconic characters like Holmes and Tarzan to expand beyond their original textual incarnations and take up independent residence in the cultural imagination.