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Lydia Alix Fillingham

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"THE COLORLESS SKEIN OF LIFE": THREATS TO THE PRIVATE SPHERE IN CONAN DOYLE'S *A STUDY IN SCARLET*

BY LYDIA ALIX FILLINGHAM

> There's the scarlet thread of murder running through the colorless skein of life, and our duty is to unravel it, and isolate it, and expose every inch of it.[1]

So Sherlock Holmes describes his fascination with crime in Conan Doyle's *A Study in Scarlet*, the novella that introduced Holmes in 1887. For Holmes, life without violence is contentless. As the cocaine-addict aesthete whose psyche is constantly threatened with dissolution by the ordinariness of existence, he needs the stimulus of the blood-spattered room, and the "malignant and terrible contortion" of the dead (32). And a murder is necessary, not simply to allow him to delve into the dark and colorful secrets of the private realm, but to sanction the thought that such secrets exist. The skein of life is not colorless, but the gaze focused on it is governed by a willful colorblindness that blocks out all colors but red.

When, however, the sight of blood gives Holmes a motive for viewing the rest of the spectrum, his scrutiny is unparalleled in its intensity. Holmes becomes the exemplary reader of the scene of the crime. In *A Study in Scarlet*, faced with a corpse in an empty room in an abandoned house, he proceeds by first expanding the definition of the text to be read. The police have looked at the body, its clothes, and its belongings, and have given a glance around the room. Holmes begins his reading while still outside on the road, and includes the front yard and steps and the hall. Then Holmes redefines what will be blank page and what writing, or, as he calls it, data. As Watson puts it,

> For twenty minutes or more he continued his researches, measuring with the most exact care the distance between marks which were entirely invisible to me, and occasionally applying his tape to the walls in an equally incomprehensible manner. (36)

What is a blank wall to others is covered with signifiers to Holmes—and even as he examines them, they remain invisible to

Watson. To the police, Holmes is frenetically reading a blank page, his running chain of "exclamations, groans, whistles, and little cries" (36) indicating that he is in fact reading aloud, and so they question his sanity. Watson, however, has a little more faith, and believes that "Holmes's smallest actions were all directed towards some definite and practical end" (36), that while the mood is on him, Holmes is as saturated with significance as he proves the room to be.

The question then oddly becomes, with all this significance floating around, why doesn't Holmes solve the murder at once? Why does the trace left in the room serve to go so far and no farther? In fact, when Holmes is done examining this room, he seems to have amazingly detailed information about the murderer. He announces, while the police still have only a single false clue:

> There has been murder done, and the murderer was a man. He was more than six feet high, was in the prime of life, had small feet for his height, wore coarse, square-toed boots and smoked a Trichinopoly cigar. He came here with his victim in a four-wheeled cab, which was drawn by a horse with three old shoes and one new one on his off foreleg. In all probability the murderer had a florid face, and the finger-nails of his right hand were remarkably long. (37)

He also knows, though he does not say so, that the murderer was a cabdriver, who forced the dead man to take poison in revenge for some earlier event involving a woman. And yet all this information avails him nothing without outside help. He cannot start looking for the murderer, Jefferson Hope, until he has cabled to the U.S. and gotten his name.

What forestalls Holmes here is precisely what Walter Benjamin has identified as essential to the detective novel:

> "It is almost impossible," wrote a Parisian secret agent in 1798, "to maintain good behaviour in a thickly populated area where an individual is, so to speak, unknown to all others and thus does not have to blush in front of anyone." Here the masses appear as the asylum that shields an asocial person from his persecutors. Of all the menacing aspects of the masses, this one became apparent first. It is at the origin of the detective story.[2]

The question of identity is crucial for the detective story—not solely for the criminal, since it is as often the corpse that cannot be identified. The city provides a location where the masses mask the individual, and industrial capitalism provides a society in which

individuals are interchangeable. London's peculiar position in the economic structure of the country made it a particular site for the "residuum." As Gareth Stedman Jones argues in *Outcast London*, London's largely preindustrial situation relied on and produced a massive casual labor force, drifting in and out of work and in and out of the sight of the middle classes.[3]

This situation created a gap within representation such that society could no longer be mapped out completely. In the fantasy of a feudal golden age, the social hierarchy could theoretically be charted from the king down to the lowliest serf. This is a particularly powerful fantasy for Conan Doyle: what he considers his serious works are historical novels of the Middle Ages, such as *The White Company*; and he begins his autobiography, he tells us, with a genealogy before him which his mother had worked out with Sir Arthur Vicars, Ulster King of Arms, tracing their family back more than five hundred years, establishing the family's stability back into the chartable golden age.[4]

But in nineteenth-century Britain, only the royal family and the titled aristocracy can be nailed down as firmly as in Debrett's and Burke's—even the collateral branches of the Doyle family fade off into the darkness. The working classes can only be represented in the statistical aggregate or as "types," and the residuum is barely visible: "numerically very large, though the population returns do not number them among the inhabitants of the kingdom."[5] Charles Booth and Beatrice Potter were starting their frantic collection of statistics on the East End and their elaborate categorizations of its inhabitants just as Conan Doyle was tossing off *A Study in Scarlet* in March and April of 1886. Like the sociologist, Sherlock Holmes is an expert at assigning the individual to his category; he can spot a "retired sergeant of Marines" from across the street (26). Indeed, his main activity at the scene of the crime is refining the category of the murderer. He starts from the general and continually adds detail until he has the fairly precise description quoted above. Unlike the feudal village, however, capitalist London yields no individual from the category. Until Holmes has the name, he has nothing: and once he has the name, his precise description serves only to show his own cleverness and has no role in catching the murderer.

In fact, it is Jefferson Hope's own knowledge of the anonymity of the city that leads to his ultimate capture. Coming to London specifically to kill two men, he goes about always under his own name (as do the two men who are trying to escape from him), and having

driven Enoch Drebber in his cab to a deserted house and killed him, he keeps on at the same job. As Holmes assumes, and later explains, Hope does so because he has no reason to believe that anyone in England, other than two men now dead, has any idea that he exists. Holmes relies utterly on Hope's presumption of his own invisibility—"if he had the slightest suspicion, he would change his name, and vanish in an instant among the four million inhabitants of this great city" (69).

From the murder room Holmes derives the category to which Hope belongs: to bridge the gap between the category and the individual, he turns to the individual who is known—the corpse. He cables to Cleveland for information on Enoch Drebber, the murdered man, and charts the intersection of the murderer's category and Drebber's private life story. The detective novel thus opens the private realm suddenly to narration, an indiscreet narration that would not exist but for the crime.

The body, as violated corpse, has left the private realm for good and is now the subject of public inquiry, to be put on display like the bodies in the French morgue. The murdered man and those who have surrounded him become the objects of intense scrutiny until the murderer is discovered and surrendered to the public sphere, perhaps to the unending gaze of the panopticon prison. For the reader, the purpose of the investigation is to restore the public world, to explain the murder in a way that reestablishes faith in the *status quo ante*, to restore the social balance that the murder has upset.[6]

The detective is a distasteful voyeur—the more distasteful if he is of a lower class than those subject to his gaze. Holmes and the other private gentlemen detectives, therefore, are infinitely preferable to the police—while they may violate the secrets of the family, at least they are already privy to the secrets of class. So there is a distinct limit to Holmes's curiosity; he resists the exposing of private life to the public that is essential to the detective story.

In the nature of things, detective stories contain two intersecting stories—the story of the murder, and the story of detection. The former logically ends with the crime, which is the motive force of the beginning of the latter. *A Study in Scarlet* makes the separation between its two stories far more complete than usual. The story behind the crime, its anchoring to a motive that witnesses to its stance within the rational, is utterly divorced from the story of detection—Holmes does not know it, and the murderer dies without

revealing it. Having solved the crime, Holmes preserves a gentlemanly reticence: once public order has been restored, the excuse for voyeurism is at an end, whether the story is complete or not. The reader, however, is never a gentleman, and no limit to her curiosity is expected.

Holmes's reticence incarnates and justifies the minimalist impulse of the Liberal state. The state's duty is to stay out of the private lives of its citizens, or, more fundamentally, the state's duty is to preserve private life inviolate. The Metropolitan Police were created specifically to preserve the greater social order, and the enforcement of individual property rights was indeed secondary. The Liberal ideology was challenged on all sides in 1886, but murder still provided its justification: a murderer on the loose is an outrage against private life, a potentially political protest (since it is a socially levelling act) that takes the most personal form, and until the murderer is caught, no freeborn Englishman really has his God-given rights.

But while the police are a body formed to preserve the private lives of those who can afford to have them, they are an essentially intrusive body. In their insistent tendency towards investigation and invasion, they partake more of a bureaucratic ideology than of a Liberal one. And by 1886 investigation was becoming a crucial focus of the police force. Although detective work had been going on, in somewhat desultory fashion, since the police were formed, it was not regularized and brought under a unified control, that is to say rationalized, until the formation of the Criminal Investigations Department in 1878.

A more centralized and hierarchical bureaucratic structure developed in response to the Scotland Yard scandal of 1877, in which an Inspector and two Chief Inspectors were found to be investigating the police force itself, to help a criminal avoid detection. Sir Howard Vincent became head of the new CID after presenting himself as an authority on the French police system, renowned for its intrusions on individual rights. He increased the number of detectives from 207 to about 800, centralized criminal records, increased supervision, tightened regulations, and compiled the *Police Code and Manual of the Criminal Law*; the centralizing and hierarchical quality of his changes, as well as the emphasis on rules and the written document, all indicate their bureaucratic nature.[7] Later still, in response to Fenian bombings in London in 1883, the Special Branch of the CID was formed. Originally the Special Irish

Branch, it was soon expanded to include surveillance of all of the politically suspect: German, Russian, Italian and French political refugees, as well as home-grown anarchists and socialists.[8]

The police were not alone in their invasion of the private sphere: its violation pervaded the bureaucracy in the form of the never-ending collection of information. Josephine Butler's 1879 pamphlet, *Government by Police*, speaks of "the hydra-head of a vast bureaucracy whose thousand eyes and hands are in every place at every moment," and notes that "private life is not secure against their prying observation."[9] Bureaucratic tax-collection gave the state ever-increasing information on every detail of the citizen's economic life. Election records registered the citizen's status and vote. The Census counted everyone and where they slept, and in 1851 had tried to force all citizens to reveal their religious affiliation, until Parliament heard of this intention and was outraged. And, since its authority is based upon the written document, what a bureaucracy once writes down, it never throws away.

But in the 1880s the British bureaucracy had not yet developed the means of dealing with the flood of information it had unloosed upon itself. What the bureaucracy needed was to develop an efficient means of sorting and collating information. Once it had done that, it had invented the computer. (To overcome the enormous difficulties of manually compiling the census, Herman Hollerith invented the punched card sorting machine in the U.S. in 1889, and the company he formed eventually became IBM.) But as yet different parts of the bureaucracy could not communicate with each other and had great difficulty sharing information. The individual tended to slip through the cracks.

The picture of the police that Conan Doyle gives is not one of all-knowledgeable, penetrating surveillance—the bumbling incompetence of the police helps the freeborn Englishman sleep at night. At the same time, of course, the threat of murder keeps him awake.

Conan Doyle's solution is to plug up the holes in the bureaucracy with an extragovernmental agent. In *A Study in Scarlet*, Holmes's crucial function is to ask the right question to extract information already held by the bureaucracy. Although the police have already cabled to Cleveland to ask for any information that might relate to Drebber's death, it is not until Holmes knows to ask about Drebber's marriage that the bureaucracy immediately kicks out Hope's name. Without this hint, the authorities apparently were unable to

make the rather simple connection between a man arrested for threatening Drebber's life in connection with a woman, and Drebber's murder a short time later. Implausible as this lapse is, it points precisely to the bureaucracy's weakness—its inability to make connections between the myriad pieces of information it holds. Holmes, the exemplary reader, both of the traces of the individual and of the bureaucracy's archives, becomes the key figure in this bureaucracy when unresolved crime disturbs the social balance.

This solution, whereby the bureaucratic adjunct makes the connections that the bureaucracy cannot, is epitomized in a much later story, in a description of Holmes's brother Mycroft's role within the government. In the 1913 story "The Adventure of the Bruce-Partington Plans," Holmes tells Watson:

> [Mycroft's] position is unique. He has made it for himself. . . . He has the tidiest and most orderly brain, with the greatest capacity for storing facts, of any man living. The same great powers which I have turned to the detection of crime he has used for this particular business. The conclusions of every department are passed to him, and he is the central exchange, the clearing-house, which makes out the balance. All other men are specialists, but his specialism is omniscience. We will suppose that a minister needs information as to a point which involves the Navy, India, Canada and the bimetallic question: he could get his separate advices from various departments upon each, but only Mycroft can focus them all, and say offhand how each factor would affect the other. They began by using him as a short-cut, a convenience; now he has made himself an essential. In that great brain of his everything is pigeon-holed and can be handed out in an instant. Again and again his word has decided the national policy.[10]

Certainly this picture of Mycroft is a recognition of the necessity of collating and connecting information. It is also the picture of a man quickly transforming himself into the computer the government needs.

In *A Study in Scarlet* the detective, as bureaucratic adjunct, and the murders, as violence that cuts through the public/private dichotomy, help reconcile bureaucracy and the Liberal ideology. Murder justifies bureaucratic intrusion as necessary for the protection of the private realm from destruction, and the gentleman detective shows reassuringly that when real intrusion is necessary, it is not carried out by the lower-class bumblers of the bureaucracy itself, but only by those with true discretion.

The author and the reader, however, display no such reticence. Although not heard by Holmes and not told by Watson, the second section of the novel reveals the story of love and violence that lies behind the crime. As so often in the Sherlock Holmes stories, the origin of the crime is a former crime that has gone unpunished. Here again, as in other stories, only the later crime takes place in England.[11] "Part 2: The Country of the Saints" is a tale of love and death in Mormon Utah.

Mormonism is crucial to *A Study in Scarlet* both for its utter foreigness and for its familiarity to the English. Polygamy represented the furthest reaches of taboo exoticism, but many of those polygamous wives and husbands had emigrated from England. The religion seemed bizarre and perhaps heathen, but it could not with certainty be classified as non-Christian. At times reports came of barbaric acts of violence, at others of the pioneering spirit of Anglo-Saxon virtue.

The ambiguous position of Mormonism and the ambivalent English reaction to it center, in *A Study in Scarlet*, on two key anxieties threatening both private and public spheres: while tensions about marriage and the position of women challenge the closure and stability of the private realm, the public social structure feels endangered by both the concept and the physical presence of a state within the state. The English did not need to look to Utah to encounter these anxieties, but for Conan Doyle they are more comfortably discussed when projected onto a Mormon background. And yet it is more than a mere matter of comfort. The Mormons do not represent only a distanced Other: the liminal position of Mormonism means that their otherness always contains much sameness, that the horror directed against them would eventually be brought home.

The Mormon plot focuses on Lucy Ferrier, who as a child, along with her father, had been rescued by the Mormons from death in the desert, on the condition that they convert.[12] She grows up and becomes secretly engaged to Jefferson Hope, our murderer-to-be. Hope, a passing miner, is a non-Mormon and a rugged individualist. In Hope's absence, Brigham Young declares that the girl must wed, offers her a choice between the sons of two of the most prosperous Mormon families, and gives her thirty days to decide. Each morning, despite her father's most constant and wakeful nightly vigils, the number of days Lucy has left is displayed prominently in the house—the first day, the number appears pinned to the blanket

above the father's chest. Naturally enough, the young polygamists carry the day, killing the father and dragging the unwilling Lucy into a wedding that brings her, more willingly, to an early grave. These evil polygamists, then, are the corpses that Sherlock Holmes meets some twenty years later. Jefferson Hope has sought revenge steadily for twenty years and has at last achieved it.

If Holmes does not know all of this story, he does know that it involves love. He describes his analysis of the motive of Drebber's murder:

> And now came the great question as to the reason why. Robbery had not been the object of the murder, for nothing was taken. Was it politics, then, or was it a woman? That was the question which confronted me. I was inclined from the first to the latter supposition. Political assassins are only too glad to do their work and to fly. This murder had, on the contrary, been done most deliberately, and the perpetrator had left his tracks all over the room, showing that he had been there all the time. It must have been a private wrong, and not a political one, which called for such a methodical revenge. . . . When the ring [a wedding ring] was found, however, it settled the question. Clearly the murderer had used it to remind his victim of some dead or absent woman. (132–33)

The question is ended precisely because a woman has entered it. A murder that involves a woman must be a "private wrong." That it centered on a conflict with the Mormon Church and was based on an earlier essentially economic crime could not change matters for Holmes in the least.

While the presence of a woman anchors matters firmly in the private, the plurality of polygamy renders the family an unstable social grouping that threatens to devour young girls. Although English conversion to Mormonism and emigration to Utah had somewhat died down by this time, the idea of servant girls being abducted to form the new blood in the Mormon harems, in a form of barely legalized white slavery, was undoubtedly still causing alarm, especially in the wake of the *Pall Mall* scandals of 1885—the sensational investigation of white slave traffic in young girls, and the subsequent trial and conviction of the editor, W. T. Stead, and others for abduction.[13]

Conan Doyle's one undoubted source on Mormonism, the autobiography of Mrs. T. B. H. Stenhouse, an Englishwoman who converted to Mormonism and lived in Utah for twenty years before leaving the Church, freely mixes moral indignation and hints of

titillating secrets. Her assessment of polygamy would fully agree with John Ferrier's in *A Study in Scarlet*: "Such a marriage he regarded as no marriage at all, but as a shame and a disgrace" (92). Unwilling herself to write on the sexual secrets of polygamy, she repeatedly insists on their existence:

> In this book I have endeavored to be true to my title and to "*tell all*," as far as such a thing was possible. But there are thousands of horrible incidents, too degrading for mention, which form part and parcel of the system of Polygamy, but which no woman who had any respect for herself would think of putting upon paper.[14]

But Stenhouse recognizes polygamy, and attacks it, as contributing to patriarchal power and oppression.

Polygamy appears as exotic behavior, but, in the face of the extreme difficulty of getting a divorce, bigamy in England was an undoubted domestic reality. The public-private split hinges on an idea of monogamous marriage as the natural moment of constitution of the private. As Tony Tanner writes in *Adultery in the Novel*, "The most important mediation procedure that attempts to harmonize the natural, the familial, the social, and even the transcendental is, of course, marriage. . . . Ideally, then, marriage offers the perfect and total mediation between the patterns within which men and women live."[15] Polygamy, emerging as a kind of institutionalization of adultery, reveals radical instability in the private realm, the family, and the relations of men and women.

Mormon polygamy also reveals marriage as exchange and women as possessions in a startling way. In *A Study in Scarlet*, Brigham Young calls wives "heifers" (95), and Conan Doyle feels called upon to footnote the authenticity of the term. Women lose any pretense of individual identity, and become simply animals and objects of exchange. When the novel's prior crime, the basis of the London murders, stands exposed, it shows itself to have had very little to do with love indeed. The two young Mormons want Lucy Ferrier not because of any personal attractions she may have, but solely for her father's property. The motive for their crime is purely an economic one, demonstrating the evils of Mormon marriage in a way that hardly limits them to Mormons or to Utah. Indeed, this crime could easily have taken place in England, as various similar plots among the later Holmes stories show.[16]

But unlike in England, here the crime is not actionable: the invasion of private life by violence based on economic principles, a

crime against both privacy and property, is fully sanctioned by the church state. The difference does not stem from any ideological difference between England and the United States: it resides instead specifically in the local Mormon government, which is opposed to the overall federal government. (Utah did not become a state of the Union until 1896). The Mormon church state, self-sufficient as it seemed and may have been, was not the ultimate power in the land: it was a smaller structure of authority competing for power with the larger entity—it was a state (if not yet united among the states) within the state.

A state within a state must always seem a threat to the larger entity when the internal group establishes relations of the individual to the group that are significantly different from those the larger group considers natural. When the Mormons allow the state to intrude into the Liberal taboo space of the private, then the private world of non-Mormons is immediately threatened by the idea that a legitimate state might act in this way, and their interest therefore lies in denying the legitimacy of such a state. At the same time, the Liberal state must realize that the smaller, intrusive state has much more control over its members, and thus implicitly might use them against the larger state. The fear of a state within the state is also a fear of violent revolution.

The picture of a community in which all power and knowledge resides in and is made manifest through the church necessarily raises the question of the role of church and state in England. The Mormon church state completely denies any separation of public and private, a consequence of uniting religion and politics when neither participates in the Liberal ideology. In contrast, the Church of England, despite its connections with the state, violates no one's rights—except those of Dissenters and the Irish; in fact, it demands so little in the way of belief that it rarely sets foot in the private domain of the soul.

Conan Doyle's accusations of the Mormon Church serve to exonerate the Church of England from any wrongdoing, but they deeply implicate the Catholic Church. Although an Irish Catholic on both sides, and educated in a Jesuit school, Conan Doyle renounced Catholicism in 1882, thus breaking with many powerful relatives. By 1891 his daughter was christened in, and his mother had entered, the Church of England.[17] In 1886 he was just beginning his lifelong involvement with spiritualism (*MA*, 82–92). It was

a period of religious crisis, and there was real anger and resentment in his rejection of his relatives and their church.

In his autobiography, he says of the Jesuits who schooled him:

> In all ways save in their theology, they were admirable, though this same theology made them hard and inhuman upon the surface, which is indeed the general effect of Catholicism in its more extreme forms. The Convert is lost to the family. Their hard, narrow outlook gives the Jesuits driving power, as is noticeable in the Puritans and all hard, narrow creeds. (*MA*, 20)

Conan Doyle's Mormons are just such a hard, narrow creed. Their driving power is what he can, at moments, find to admire about them: "The savage man, and the savage beast, hunger, thirst, fatigue, and disease—every impediment which Nature could place in the way—had all been overcome with Anglo-Saxon tenacity" (85). When extremism leads to courageous imperialism, he can admire it in the Jesuits as well: "They are devoted and fearless and have again and again, both in Canada, in South America and in China, been the vanguard of civilization to their own grievous hurt" (*MA*, 20). What he cannot accept is the church's inability to allow for the individual among the civilized. But for others than the savage man—who only exists to be subjugated—it is intolerable that a hierarchical elite ("The inner Italian directorate," or Brigham Young and "The Council of Four") should dictate beliefs that must be accepted in their totality by all.

In *A Study in Scarlet*, the power-saturated Mormon Church can display its force within the furthest reaches of the privacy of the home. The church invades John Ferrier's very bedroom and bed to deliver to him the message of its power, showing itself the invincible master of signification. The church is revealed as no more than a means of forcing unanimity and submission on its members. When Brigham Young must decide the fate of the man and young girl found by the Mormons in the great alkali desert Conan Doyle believed to have stretched across the Midwest, the religious tyrant makes his position clear:

> If we take you with us . . . it can only be as believers in our own creed. We shall have no wolves in our fold. Better far that your bones should bleach in this wilderness than that you should prove to be that little speck of decay which in time corrupts the whole fruit. (84)

No diversity of voice can be tolerated, not even that of blond-haired pretty little girls. It is this unanimity of voice which makes the ideology of a state within a state so powerful, and so apparently threatening to the larger society. But the threat is not primarily represented in terms of working within the political structure of the greater state. In its representation, threat is taken to its most violent extreme and here ignites the fear of violent revolution.

In the first section of the novel, in the room where Drebber was killed, the murderer has scrawled "RACHE" on the wall, the German word for revenge. This is a ruse by the murderer, a false clue, but is taken up with alacrity by the newspapers. The *Daily Telegraph*, for instance, believes the crime to be perpetrated by "political refugees and revolutionists," assumes it to be a matter of socialists killing one of their own, and alludes to the Vehmgericht and the Carbonari (52).

The Carbonari and the early German socialist societies are, in their origins, typical primitive social movements like those discussed in E. J. Hobsbawm's *Primitive Rebels*—movements in which the socially and economically marginal mobilize in anger, but without any clearly defined political program. Mormons were, in the popular conception, similar to these groups in their emphases on ritual, initiation ceremonies, oaths of loyalty, and a pervasive use of symbolism.[18] The Mormons in *A Study in Scarlet* feel justified in killing apostates partly because these people, like John Ferrier, have taken oaths that bind them to the church for life. Conan Doyle calls up similar elements in his references to German secret societies. The fictional newspaper accounts speak of the Socialists' "unwritten laws" (52), and their "stringent code of honor, any infringement of which was punished by death" (53). These groups also share a totalizing revolutionary view, a desire to rebuild society from scratch.

Hobsbawm emphasizes the hierarchical or pyramidal structure of such groups, and speaks of "self-selected elite groups, imposing the revolution on an inert, but grateful mass" (171). When Conan Doyle's Mormons arrive in Utah, the church immediately sets about defining each member's exact relative position:

> Young speedily proved himself to be a skilful administrator as well as a resolute chief. Maps were drawn and charts prepared, in which the future city was sketched out. All around farms were apportioned and allotted in proportion to the standing of each

> individual. The tradesman was put to his trade and the artisan to his calling. (85)

In such a place Holmes's six-foot florid cabdriver could surely be located within minutes. The dominance of hierarchy creates a society once again fully known, chartable and representable.

The folklore of anti-Mormonism focused the fear of Mormon violence on a smaller group within the Mormon community, the "Danite Band" or "Avenging Angels." *A Study in Scarlet* describes the group:

> Its invisibility, and the mystery which was attached to it, made this organization doubly terrible. It appeared to be omniscient and omnipotent, and yet was neither seen nor heard. The man who held out against the Church vanished away, and none knew whither he had gone or what had befallen him. (92)

When Conan Doyle first mentions the Danite Band, he says that "not the Inquisition of Seville, nor the German Vehmgericht, nor the Secret Societies of Italy" (92) were ever more violent or more effective.

The Danite Band figures the worst dangers of a secret police. As Stenhouse puts it,

> It is beyond a doubt that, notwithstanding all the social changes and improvements of late years, the secret police of Salt Lake City are in matters of crime, as well as *in fact* . . . the successors of the original "death society;"—many of its members are known to have committed grievous crimes and to have repeatedly dyed their hands in blood. (304–5)

And to emphasize the implications of such a situation, she later insists, "it is the police who there commit murders and other inhuman outrages" (579). Not that the police are among those who commit murders, but that when the physical force which lies behind political power is fully revealed, as in state death squads, murder no longer exists as a private matter. Not that some police murder, but that murder becomes a police, and thus a state, function.

Fear of violence and of revolution are strong, immediate fears, obscuring and perhaps used to obscure the political issues involved. A number of contemporary crises made the issues of a state within a state particularly resonant and problematic in the eighties, and worked to destabilize a social structure founded on separation of public and private spheres. Conan Doyle can refer obliquely to

some of these crises, but the main force of the novel is to render the issues less problematic—to show the Liberal ideology triumphant even as he himself was splitting off from the Liberal party. The Mormon state within a state is in this novel specifically associated with German and Italian secret societies, socialist societies seeking revolutionary change. The larger question of socialist thought, in England and out of it, seemed to threaten the private sphere with annihilation by the state, as is pictured in the Mormon political structure. But the most immediate and violent threat to the English state, the Irish separatists, and specifically the Fenians, goes unmentioned in the novel.

German secret societies like the groups mentioned by the newspapers in *A Study in Scarlet* aroused much ambivalence. German refugees came to London largely after the German Anti-Socialist Laws of 1878. Many of them belonged to the kind of superstition-ridden secret brotherhoods that Marx particularly disapproved of. In fact, according to Hobsbawm, the League of Communists had grown out of just such a brotherhood, the League of Outlaws (169). But certainly by the time of the Second International, in 1881, these leagues could not be described as prepolitical: all of them were developing explicit political agendas amid vigorous debate. The mention of secret societies in *A Study in Scarlet*, in stressing the primitive, prepolitical side of these organizations, makes them perhaps more violent, but ultimately less disruptive and threatening. The fear is ignited only to be immediately defused.

An ambivalent attitude towards German and other refugees was inherent in British policy concerning them. England's controversial policy was to admit freely all political refugees, and not to prevent them from planning revolutions for their own countries while they stayed in London. As Phillip Thurmond Smith explains,

> Paradoxically, England's open-arms policy to refugees was built on a heavy degree of xenophobia, stemming from middle-class liberalism. . . . If liberalism was taken as the shedding of archaic restrictions and the unfolding of various "freedoms," then liberty in all forms was the result . . . . Would not political liberalism and free speech encourage an open healthy government capable of holding its own in an otherwise hostile world? . . . The English middle-class liberal was convinced of the manifest superiority of British institutions, so that a few wild-talking foreigners were little worse than nuisances even when they hatched conspiracies

> against their own countries. They could not be a real threat to Britain.[19]

Nevertheless the policy was constantly under attack. The Liberal desire to promote the freedom of private opinion was occasionally counteracted by the difficulty of separating private political views from public political action.

In *A Study in Scarlet*, the *Daily News* report on the murder displays the Liberal attitude when secret societies are suspected: "The despotism and hatred of Liberalism which animated the Continental Governments had had the effect of driving to our shores a number of men who might have made excellent citizens were they not soured by the recollection of all that they had undergone" (53). The novel's *Daily Telegraph* article, which ends by "admonishing the Government and advocating a closer watch over foreigners in England" (52), exhibits the countervailing tendency.

While Conan Doyle was writing, socialism in general and English socialists in particular were widely disapproved of. Socialists were seen as menacing the key points of the Liberal ideology. Socialism represented as full an intervention into private life as the Mormon Church possibly could. Charles Booth, for instance, opposed socialism to individualism, and disapproved of any but the most limited state socialism, where the state would interfere only in the lives of those unable to take care of themselves.

> In taking charge of the lives of the incapable, State Socialism finds its proper work, and by doing it completely, would relieve us of a serious danger. The Individualist system breaks down as things are, and is invaded on every side by Socialistic innovations, but its hardy doctrines would have a far better chance in a society purged of those who cannot stand alone.[20]

Booth's category of the "incapable" was clearly synonymous with the residuum, who are once again outside the control and the information of the bureaucracy. The invisibility of the residuum referred specifically to their lack of existence in the public sphere. They had no legitimate role in the political world, and only the most marginal in the economic. Only those with an acknowledged place in the public sphere had the right to a place in the private. Booth wished his State Socialism radically to disempower the residuum by placing them in huge work camps—thus rendering them thoroughly visible and removing the threat of their liminality. The

residuum represents a space that neither Booth nor Holmes hesitates to invade and to expose to the public eye.

At the same time, English socialists were seen as empowering the residuum, creating it as a revolutionary threat. The socialist invasion of the middle-class private sphere and the danger of the residuum seemed to many suddenly and explosively to meet in the West End riots of February 8, 1886, just before Conan Doyle set pen to paper. Some were for the suspension of Liberal freedoms in the face of such violence. Indeed, free speech and assembly were effectively banned from Trafalgar Square just as *A Study in Scarlet* was appearing in *Beeton's Christmas Annual* for 1887, a ban that continued for five years.[21]

Much of the blame for the riots was assigned to the Metropolitan Police and focused specifically on issues of the bureaucratic flow of information: the police never notified the Home Secretary of the riot—he first received word of it from his wife; different divisions of the police had no idea what others were doing; the District Superintendent in charge of police action was lost in the crowd through most of the demonstration (and had his pockets picked); and the police system of telegraphic communication was found to be seriously flawed.[22]

The threat of violence against the British state which the English, and especially Londoners, would have feared most immediately in the eighties came from secret societies that are not mentioned in *A Study in Scarlet*—indeed, they are conspicuous in their absence. The mention of violent secret societies at this time must have brought to mind the various Irish secret societies—the Irish Republican Brotherhood, the Irish Invincibles, and the Fenians, American in origin.

The 1882 Phoenix Park assassinations, and the London bombing campaign by the Fenians and the Brotherhood that lasted from 1883 through 1885, were fresh in the public mind. A bombing of Scotland Yard was particularly embarrassing, although it hurt no one. There were no injuries precisely because there was absolutely no one in the building at the time, which certainly did not speak for the vigilance of the police. In 1886, Conan Doyle himself could hardly have forgotten the Fenians. While he wrote, Gladstone's 1886 government was tottering through its brief life, and Conan Doyle was making his first move into active politics. He joined the Liberal Unionist party, in opposition to Gladstone's Home Rule bill, and in June gave his first political speech. According to his

own account, he found himself pouring out impassioned, overblown rhetoric against Irish Home Rule (*MA*, 92).

Although both Conan Doyle and his biographer John Dickson Carr maintain that it was the author's love for Ireland that made him want to keep Ireland part of Britain, he clearly felt as much anger and resentment towards his Irish as towards his Catholic background. A single sentence in his notebook sufficiently indicates the state of his feelings: "Ireland is a huge suppuration which will go on suppurating until it bursts."[23]

In July he would write a letter to the *Portsmouth Evening News*, laying out the Unionist platform. As the very first item in this platform he puts: "That since the year 1881 the agitation in Ireland has been characterised by a long succession of crimes against life and property."[24] While deeply concerned about the violence of secret groups within Ireland (in which he clearly feels implicated by his own origins), and feeling that he must oppose his own party on the issue of Ireland's becoming a separate, self-governing state within Britain, he writes a story of the dangers of a state within a state, and of the secret violent groups that tend to spring up within them, as well as of the violence of similar secret societies in London.

If Conan Doyle could not write of the Mormons and the Fenians in the same work, still he found them juxtaposed in one of his main sources, Robert Louis Stevenson's *The Dynamiter*.[25] Stevenson's novel is dedicated to two police officers, "Messrs. Cole and Cox," who attempted to remove the bomb found in the crypt of the House of Commons on January 24, 1885, and, when the bomb went off, were severely injured and buried in the debris. Cole was later given the Albert Medal.[26] In the dedication, Stevenson criticizes the policy towards political refugees, saying that England has "so long coquetted with political crime" (5), and yet is shocked by it when it appears at home.

Part of what horrifies Stevenson and others about the Fenian bombings is that they are aimed not at specific public figures, but at places. The people injured and killed in a successful bombing have no applicable public role, and thus are being attacked, "senselessly," as private individuals. Cole and Cox are praised specifically for protecting those prototypical private figures, the child and the "breeding woman" (5).

The Dynamiter concerns a group of dynamiting fanatics, but the work is structured far less around active adventures than around a

series of stories told by members of the dynamiting group, and by others. The first long, involved, colorful tale is of a young woman's upbringing in Mormon Utah, and her subsequent escape after her father is killed by the Destroying Angels.

Although a desire for justice for oppressed groups is occasionally mentioned by those who talk of having joined the dynamiting group, this group is given no hint of any definite, particular political ends, which would lead the modern reader to look on it as a group of anarchists. Stevenson intends the dynamiters to be Fenians but can only indicate their affiliation by the dedication, by the Irish last names of several members, and by their paying for lodging in American money. Such discreet hints at Irish terrorism are typical of detective novels of the period. In H. F. Wood's 1888 *The Passenger from Scotland Yard*, an organization in Paris is reasoned to be a dangerous political one based solely on the arrival of a box from Boston and "the Irish dialect of the English language as spoken in America" used by one of its members.[27]

A conflict is clearly at work between the desire to speak and the desire to deny. Even Stevenson's dedication, although it brings up Parnell's name and thus leaves no doubt of the subject matter, still does not actually mention Ireland, and is overwhelmingly cryptic in a way that suggests not wishing to stir up the fears of women and children. Conan Doyle can coyly bring up foreign secret societies existing in London, and even the idea of their causing violence, but England must remain free from this violence, and from secret societies involved in domestic issues. The fear of violence from the Fenians and other groups is easiest to deal with when displayed in all its danger, but stripped of its political content—a fear simply of irrational violence directed by a small group at all outsiders, preferably far away from England. The projection of this fear onto the Mormons was practically inevitable given several violent conflicts between Mormon and other settlers, and the great wealth of anti-Mormon folklore.

In Stevenson's Mormon tale, the family tries to make the same escape from Salt Lake City as the family in *A Study in Scarlet*, but they are soon stopped:

> Judge of our dismay, when turning suddenly an angle of the cliffs, we found a bright bonfire blazing by itself under an impending rock; and on the face of the rock, drawn very rudely with charred wood, the great Open Eye which is the emblem of the Mormon faith .... The mules were turned about; and leaving

> that great eye to guard the lonely canyon, we retraced our steps in silence. Day had not yet broken ere we were once more at home, condemned beyond reprieve. (42)

Once they know they are under surveillance, they simply give up. The young woman feels the same helplessness on her trip to England, when she realizes she is being watched every step of the way. "Thus I crossed the States, thus passed the ocean, the Mormon Eye still following my movements; and when at length a cab had set me down before that London lodging-house from which you saw me fleeing this morning, I had already ceased to struggle, and ceased to hope" (60–61). This inability to escape is here specifically connected to the secret societies: "To the child born on Mormon soil, as to the man who accepts the engagements of a secret order, no escape is possible" (61). And indeed, one of the dynamiters later tells a story of his attempt to escape from the group which is strangely similar to the Mormon story. As soon as he determines that he is being followed he too gives in immediately, thinking that "timely submission might yet preserve a life which otherwise was forfeited and dishonored" (124).

Conan Doyle's Mormons also give their signs of the inescapableness of the power of a state within a state, in numbering the days of freedom for Ferrier and daughter, and they are fully as vicious in backing up their signs with the violent fact. But Jefferson Hope, whose very name has echoes of individual rights and of deferment, resists the power of these Mormons. In Utah he can do nothing against them, but in England, the true land of the free, he can reassert the importance of private life by wreaking private vengeance for private wrongs. In doing so he in turn upsets the balance of public and private in England, where vengeance is a function of the bureaucratic state, and thus becomes subject to the state's vengeance himself. His prompt death from a heart attack absolves the state from the necessity of punishing one of the few defenders of the Liberal ideology.

University of Colorado at Boulder

NOTES

I would like to thank the Stanford Humanities Center for providing the environment in which this essay originated.

[1] Arthur Conan Doyle, *A Study in Scarlet* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1981), 44. Further references will appear in the text.

[2] Walter Benjamin, *Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism*, trans. Harry Zohn (London: New Left Books, 1973), 40.

[3] Gareth Stedman Jones, *Outcast London: A Study in the Relationship between Classes in Victorian Society* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1971), part 1.

[4] Conan Doyle, *Memories and Adventures* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1924), 9. Further references are cited in the text as *MA*.

[5] Anonymous, "The Charities of London," *Quarterly Review*, no. 194 (1855), 411.

[6] See D. A. Miller, "The Novel and the Police," in *The Poetics of Murder: Detective Fiction and Literary Theory*, ed. Glenn W. Most and William W. Stowe (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1983), 299–326.

[7] Margaret Prothero, *The History of the Criminal Investigation Department at Scotland Yard from Earliest Times until To-day* (London: Herbert Jenkins, 1931), 74–85, 98.

[8] Prothero, 99–115, and Richard Hawkins, "Government versus Secret Societies: The Parnell Era," in *Secret Societies in Ireland*, ed. T. Desmond Williams (Dublin and New York: Gill and Macmillan, and Barnes and Noble Books, 1973), 110.

[9] Josephine E. Butler, *Government by Police* (London: Dyer Brothers, 1879), 19, 21.

[10] Conan Doyle, *The Complete Sherlock Holmes* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1930), 914. Although Mycroft is described as an employee of the government, I describe him as an adjunct to the bureaucracy because his position is too anomalous to be essentially a bureaucratic one. The essence of the bureaucratic office holder is that he is *not* unique and has *not* made his position for himself.

[11] *The Sign of Four*, "The Five Orange Pips," "The 'Gloria Scott'," "The Crooked Man," "The Resident Patient," "The Adventure of the Dancing Men," "The Adventure of Black Peter," "The Adventure of the Golden Pince-Nez," *The Valley of Fear*, "The Adventure of Wisteria Lodge," "The Adventure of the Red Circle," and "The Adventure of the Veiled Lodger" all concern prior crimes; only in "The Resident Patient" and "The Adventure of the Veiled Lodger" do the prior crimes take place in England.

[12] John Ferrier is, oddly, not her real father. He is the only other survivor of a group heading west, and claims her for his own.

[13] Michael Harrison, *In the Footsteps of Sherlock Holmes* (New York: Frederick Fell, 1960), 114–15.

[14] Mrs. T. B. H. Stenhouse, *"Tell It All": The Story of a Life's Experience in Mormonism* (Hartford, Conn.: A. D. Worthington & Co., 1874), 507. Further references appear in the text. For Conan Doyle's ownership of this book, as well as information on a number of other sources, I am indebted to Jack Tracy's *Conan Doyle and the Latter-Day Saints* (Bloomington, Ind.: Gaslight Publications, 1979).

[15] Tony Tanner, *Adultery in the Novel: Contract and Transgression* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1979), 16.

[16] "The Adventure of the Solitary Cyclist" is closest, with a young woman being kidnapped and forced into marriage after her father's death. "The Greek Interpreter" also has a kidnapped fatherless woman, whose brother, come to save her, is tortured and killed. There is apparently no actual marriage here, but that does not improve matters. "A Case of Identity," "The Adventure of the Speckled Band," and "The Adventure of the Copper Beeches" all concern young women whose relatives use various evil means to prevent their marriage and the loss of their income to the family. These indeed represent the perversion of natural, private relations into unnatural (as the young woman who is courted by her own stepfather in disguise), and even deadly ones, by the presence of the economic within the private.

[17] John Dickson Carr, *The Life of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1949), 44–46, 80.

[18] See E. J. Hobsbawm, *Primitive Rebels: Studies in Archaic Forms of Social Movement in the 19th and 20th Centuries* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1959), 151–52. Further references will appear in the text.

[19] Phillip Thurmond Smith, *Policing Victorian London: Political Policing, Public Order, and the London Metropolitan Police* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1985), 83.

[20] Charles Booth, *Life and Labour of the People*, 1st ed. (London and Edinburgh: Williams and Norgate, 1889), 1:27.

[21] Donald C. Richter, *Riotous Victorians* (Athens, Oh.: Ohio Univ. Press, 1981), 141.

[22] Richter, 103–32, and Victor Bailey, "The Metropolitan Police, the Home Office and the Threat of Outcast London," in *Policing and Punishment in Nineteenth Century Britain*, ed. Bailey (New Brunswick: Rutgers Univ. Press, 1981), 100–104.

[23] Carr (note 17), 66.

[24] Conan Doyle, *Letters to the Press*, ed. John Michael Gibson and Richard Lancelyn Green (Iowa City: Univ. of Iowa Press, 1986), 23.

[25] Robert Louis Stevenson. *Kidnapped and The Dynamiter* (New York: P. F. Collier and Son, 1902). Page references are cited in the test; note that the two novels in this volume are paginated separately.

[26] *Times*, (London) January 25, 1885, 10–11. Prothero, 209.

[27] H. F. Wood, *The Passenger from Scotland Yard*, 2nd ed. (London: Chatto and Windus, 1888; rpt. New York: Dover Publications, 1977), 87, 90.