More than a century after first emerging

into the fog-bound, gas-lit streets of Victorian London,

Sherlock Holmes is universally recognizable.

Even his wardrobe and accessories are iconic:

the Inverness cape,

deerstalker hat,

and calabash pipe,

and figures such as his best friend and housemate Doctor Watson,

arch-nemesis Moriarty,

and housekeeper Mrs. Hudson

have become part of the popular consciousness,

as have his extraordinary, infallible powers of deduction

utilized in the name of the law,

his notorious drug use,

and his popular catchphrase, "Elementary, my dear Watson."

And yet many of these most recognizable features of Holmes

don't appear in Arthur Conan Doyle's original stories.

Doyle's great detective solves crimes in all sorts of ways,

not just using deduction.

He speculates, and at times even guesses, and regularly makes false assumptions.

Furthermore, Mrs. Hudson is barely mentioned,

no one says, "Elementary, my dear Watson,"

and the detective and his sidekick live apart for much of the time.

Moriarty, the grand villain, only appears in two stories,

the detective's drug use is infrequent after the first two novels,

and Holmes is rarely enthralled to the English legal system;

He much prefers enacting his own form of natural justice

to sticking to the letter of the law.

Finally, many of the most iconic elements of the Holmesian legend

aren't Doyle's either.

The deerstalker cap and cape were first imagined by Sidney Paget,

the story's initial illustrator.

the curved pipe was chosen by American actor William Gillette

so that audiences could more clearly see his face on stage,

and the phrase, "Elementary, my dear Watson,"

was coined by author and humorist P.G. Wodehouse.

So who exactly is Sherlock Holmes?

Who's the real great detective, and where do we find him?

Purists might answer that the original Sherlock

inspired by Arthur Conan Doyle's university mentor Dr. Joseph Bell

is the real one.

But the fact remains that that version of Sherlock has been largely eclipsed

by the sheer volume of interpretation,

leaving Doyle's detective largely unrecognizable.

So there's another, more complex,

but perhaps more satisfying answer to the question,

but to get there, we must first consider the vast body of interpretations

of the great detective.

Since Conan Doyle's first story in 1887,

there have been thousands of adaptations of Holmes,

making him perhaps the most adapted fictional character in the world.

That process began with Victorian stage adaptations,

and accelerated with the emergence of film.

There were more than 100 film adaptations of Holmes

in the first two decades of the 20th century alone.

And since then, there have many thousands more in print,

and on film,

television,

stage,

and radio.

Holmes has been reinterpreted by people everywhere,

in remarkably different, and often contradictory ways.

These adaptations demonstrate both Holmes's popularity

and his malleability.

For instance, he featured in a number of allied anti-Nazi propaganda films

during World War II.

And both Winston Churchill and Franklin Delano Roosevelt

were avid enthusiasts,

the latter even joining the Baker Street Irregulars,

a Holmesian appreciation society,

and nicknaming one secret service hideout Baker Street.

And yet, at the very same time,

Holmes also appeared in various German-language film adaptations,

some of which were said to have been much-loved favorites of Adolf Hitler.

So let's return to our question.

Would the real Sherlock Holmes please stand up?

The truth is that this world of adaptation has made him into a palimpsest.

Sherlock is a cultural text,

repeatedly altered over time as each new interpretation becomes superimposed

over those that proceed it.

This means that Sherlock continually evolves,

embodying ideas and values often far removed

from those found in Conan Doyle.

And after each particular story ends, Sherlock rises again,

a little changed, perhaps,

with a new face and fresh mannerisms or turns of phrase,

but still essentially Sherlock, our Sherlock.