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The Maze, the Fog, the Mass, the Dog: Sherlock Holmes in London

ABSTRACT: The article revolves around the concept of the late-Victorian London as an accomplice in crime. Employing a number of literary examples but mostly concentrating on Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes stories, the text investigates specific techniques the metropolis uses in order to aid criminals and hinder the work of law-enforcement officers. The labyrinthine structure of the city, its ability to envelop itself in impenetrable yellow fog, and its vast population make the late nineteenth-century London a haven for wrongdoers.

The final part of the article presents arguments in favour of the claim that only Sherlock Holmes is capable of leading a successful career of a private investigator in such a crime-aiding city. This is made possible not just because of his extraordinary observational skills, but also due to the fact that the detective, as presented in the stories, possesses a number of unique canine features which make him immune to London's tricks.

KEYWORDS: dog, fog, mass, maze, Sherlock Holmes, Victorian London

New York as a character in a mystery would not be the detective, would not be the murderer. It would be the enigmatic suspect who knows the real story but isn't going to tell it.

Donald E. Westlake
Epigraph of Thomas Pynchon's *Bleeding Edge* (2013)

Although taken from a twenty-first-century novel and pertaining to New York, the above epigraph bears a close resemblance to the literary perception of late-Victorian London. Unlike Westlake's New York, however,

London of the last decades of the nineteenth-century mystery literature would not just be an enigmatic suspect; rather, it would be an accomplice actively assisting the criminals in their activities and hindering the work of the detectives. The capital of the Empire seems to have earned a reputation of a haven for law-breakers: its labyrinthine streets served as convenient getaways, its impenetrable yellow fog prevented effective pursuit, and finally the sheer number of its inhabitants allowed for inconspicuous blending in. Such urban crime-aiding features attracted particular attention of the writers of the period, most notably Arthur Conan Doyle. The aim of the article is to trace these London-specific properties as shown in the late-Victorian popular literature and present arguments in favour of the claim that only Sherlock Holmes—due to his very unusual characteristics—could have matched the felonious city.

The Maze

A single look at the plan of London reveals the city's biggest advantage for potential wrongdoers: with the numberless interconnected streets, lanes, and alleys, its construction is reminiscent of a maze or labyrinth¹ which seems to advertise itself as means of committing crimes with impunity. Some characters from Sherlock Holmes stories are shown to make use of this particular opportunity. In "The Adventure of the Blue Carbuncle" (1892) a suspect (who later transpires to be completely innocent) employs this convenient method of vanishing into thin air when he is

1 Although the meaning of the terms "maze" and "labyrinth" differs slightly (the former containing a number of dead ends and passages and the latter—being a single albeit convoluted tour), they can be used interchangeably as W. H. Matthews clearly states: "What is the difference, it may be asked, between a *maze* and a *labyrinth*? The answer is, little or none. Some writers seem to prefer to apply the word 'maze' to hedge-mazes only, using the word 'labyrinth' to denote the structures described by the writers of antiquity, or as a general term for any confusing arrangement of paths. Others, again, show a tendency to restrict the application of the term 'maze' to cases in which the idea of a puzzle is involved." W. H. Matthews, *Mazes and Labyrinths: Their History and Development* (New York: Dover Publications, 1970), 1–2, emphasis in the original.

confronted with a representative of the law: “the man, shocked at having broken the window, and seeing an official-looking person in uniform rushing towards him, dropped his goose, took to his heels, and vanished amid the labyrinth of small streets which lie at the back of Tottenham Court Road.”² Similarly, the protagonist of Herbert George Wells’s *The Invisible Man* (1897) uses the same method when he attempts to escape pursuit: “This running warmed me to a certain extent, and I went on with a better courage through the maze of less frequented roads that runs hereabouts.”³ These words, however, indicate the other facet of the London labyrinth; apart from being a crime-assisting structure, the urban maze is also a deadly trap: it allows instant disappearance but does not guarantee the escape.

A number of late-Victorian stories employ this feature of the city to add the air of mystery and, at the same time, to highlight its mammoth size and the easiness with which it lures victims into its labyrinthine snares. Finding one’s way in it is near impossible, as Jefferson Hope, a character from *A Study in Scarlet* (1887) remarks: “The hardest job was to learn my way about, for I reckon that of all the mazes that ever were contrived, this city is the most confusing.”⁴ Yet this contrivance in regard to London is of ambiguous origin. Of course, the city is a man-made structure and thus disconnected from any natural creation. At the same time, it repeats natural patterns; the maze may be associated with a complicated network of corridors in caves or with entangled jungle. Just like any living being, it generates itself relentlessly and constantly grows, reaching inconceivable and uncontrollable size of a real ever-multiplying, monster-like urban jungle.

Sherlock Holmes’s grasp of London’s topography seems almost supernatural in this respect, although he considers it more in terms of useful interest: “It is a hobby of mine to have an exact knowledge of London,”⁵

2 Arthur Conan Doyle, “The Adventure of the Blue Carbuncle,” in *The Adventures and Memoirs of Sherlock Holmes* (Ware: Wordsworth Editions, 1996), 135.

3 Herbert George Wells, *The Invisible Man* (London, Vermont: Everyman, 1995), 97.

4 Arthur Conan Doyle, *A Study in Scarlet* (London: Penguin Books, 2001), 114.

5 Arthur Conan Doyle, “The Red-Headed League,” in *The Adventures and Memoirs of Sherlock Holmes* (Ware: Wordsworth Classics, 1996), 40.

he remarks casually. A passage from Doyle's *The Sign of Four* (1890) confirms his reputation as the capital's psychogeographer. In the scene Holmes, Watson, and their client Mary Morstan travel to Pondicherry Lane to find some answers. The travel, as Watson reports, is lengthy and very confusing:

At first I had some idea as to the direction in which we were driving; but soon, what with our pace, the fog, and my own limited knowledge of London, I lost my bearings, and knew nothing, save that we seemed to be going a very long way. Sherlock Holmes was never at fault, however, and he muttered the names as the cab rattled through squares and in and out by tortuous by-streets.

'Rochester Row,' said he. 'Now Vincent Square. Now we come out on the Vauxhall Bridge Road. We are making for the Surrey side, apparently. Yes, I thought so. Now we are on the bridge. You can catch glimpses of the river.'

We did indeed get a fleeting view of a stretch of the Thames with the lamps shining upon the broad, silent water; but our cab dashed on, and was soon involved in a labyrinth of streets upon the other side.

'Wordsworth Road,' said my companion. 'Priory Road. Lark Hall Lane. Stockwell Place. Robert Street. Cold Harbour Lane. Our quest does not appear to take us to very fashionable regions.'⁶

This example is particularly interesting because it is one of the very few in which it is possible to verify Holmes's assumptions. To a casual reader these remarks only prove Sherlock's superior knowledge of the London streets. However, a closer look at the plan of London⁷ shows certain inconsistencies: the route from Priory Road to Lark Hall Lane that Holmes mentions does not lead to Stockwell Place but to Stockwell Park

6 Arthur Conan Doyle, *The Sign of Four* (London: Penguin Books, 2001), 22–23.

7 I used the 1871 Whitbread's Map of London, 1889 Charles Booth's Poverty map, and 1895 Reynolds' Shilling Map, all of which are available at <http://www.victorianlondon.org/frame-maps.htm>, accessed May 20, 2014.

Road, which in turn intersects with Robsart Street, not Robert Street,⁸ leading to Cold Harbour Lane. According to Peter Ackroyd, these errors are Doyle's fault entirely: "There are one or two casual or inadvertent mistakes. Conan Doyle's grasp of urban topography is not altogether assured, but in a narrative where the city becomes a veritable labyrinth the occasional blind turn is of no consequence."⁹ This reasoning makes sense also with regard to the map of London: it seems very likely that Doyle's description is not based on his first-hand knowledge of the city but rather on the plan; on it, the streets south of the Thames, between Wandsworth Road and Brixton Road are very small and their names particularly difficult to decipher. We must not forget, however, of the additional explanation of these blunders; because Holmes does not speak for himself but through Watson, his chronicler, some minor inaccuracies are only understandable. Even the above quote serves as some kind of justification: since Sherlock "muttered" these names in the rattling cab, it is plausible that Watson, not being a native Londoner, might have misheard him. Not to mention the significant little fact that his attention might have been compromised by the disturbing presence of Mary Morstan—his future fiancée.

It seems that the motif of the labyrinth is not only employed by Doyle as an ornament, but also serves an additional function. Not without a reason are Sherlock Holmes's investigations, at least from Watson's perspective, full of dead-ends, false steps, and unimaginable complications. This observation seems also valid when it comes to other specimens of late-Victorian popular prose, such as, for example, Robert Louis Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Grey* or Richard Marsh's *The Beetle*; they are written in such a manner that they confuse and mislead the reader and present him a panoply of various possibilities of solution before they reveal the truth—if that eventually happens. It appears that their main purpose is

8 According to the Whitbread's plan, the street between Ingleton and Thornton (all of which are parallel branches of the Brixton Road) is called "Robert St." but both the later Reynolds' map and Charles Booth's Poverty map refer to it as "Robsart S."

9 Peter Ackroyd, Introduction to *The Sign of Four*, by Arthur Conan Doyle (London: Penguin Books, 2001), xiv.

first and foremost to conceal; so that the reader must go along a lengthy labyrinth of plot in order to earn the prize: the solution.

The Fog

“These thick, impenetrable fogs were a regular feature of urban life in the second half of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century, bringing with them respiratory infections, accidents, and the perfect cover for maniacal serial killers.”¹⁰ Aitch’s tongue-in-cheek description of the “pea-soupers” is not very distant from the depiction of this phenomenon in the literature of the time. One could even argue that the enormous popularity of the ever recurring image of London fogs has its source in Victorian prose. This vision was so powerful that it became a sort of icon of popular culture, forever connecting the city with the fog, and a very special type of fog at that. It is exceptional because, apart from the fact that it possesses all the features of normal, “natural” mist, it has a very unusual colour. It is not a white, pure, refreshing haze; London fog is thick, dense, suffocating, impenetrable and, last but not least, *yellow*.

Of course, there is a sensible explanation for this peculiarity. As Charles Dickens Jr. puts it,

what Mr. Guppy called ‘a London particular,’ and what is more usually known to the natives as ‘a peasouper,’ will very speedily dispel any little hallucination of this sort. As the east wind brings up the exhalations of the Essex and Kentish marshes, and as the damp-laden winter air prevents the dispersion of the partly consumed carbon from hundreds of thousands of chimneys, the strangest atmospheric compound known to science fills the valley of the Thames.¹¹

¹⁰ Iain Aitch, *We’re British, Innit? An Irreverent A–Z of All Things British* (London: Collins, 2008), 141.

¹¹ Charles Dickens Jr., “Dickens’s Dictionary of London,” in *The Victorian Dictionary: Exploring Victorian London*, ed. Lee Jackson (2005), March 14, 2007, www.victorianlondon.org/dickens/dickens-f.htm.

These pea-soupers are simply a combination of industrial and domestic smokes and their colour is the result of burning low quality coal.

The Victorian writers often emphasised the incongruity of the urban fog. One of the characters from “In the Fog,” a short novel published in 1901, makes an interesting remark:

At sea a fog is a natural phenomenon. It is as familiar as the rainbow which follows a storm, it is as proper that a fog should spread upon the waters as that steam shall rise from a kettle. But a fog which springs from the paved streets, that rolls between solid house-fronts, that forces cabs to move at half speed, that drowns policemen and extinguishes the electric lights of the music hall, that to me is incomprehensible. It is as out of place as a tidal wave on Broadway.¹²

This comment points not only to the discrepancy of the fog itself, but also to the city as being something unnatural when compared to, say, the sea. What seems appropriate in its original setting of the natural environment, appears completely out of place in the artificial urban space. The Victorian smog is suspended in-between the two worlds. It does not, as a natural phenomenon, belong to the man-made city—the fog rather invades it from time to time than poses as its legitimate element. On the other hand, since it is an unnaturally yellow smoke, it cannot be called an integral part of the environment either.

“In the Fog,” a novel developed around this phenomenon, may in a way be treated as a helpful guide book of how a villain could behave while the city envelops itself. When at some moment in the story, due to a number of circumstances, the main protagonist encounters a corpse, his reaction is almost immediate: “My instinct was to leave the body where it lay, and to *hide myself in the fog*, but I also felt that since a succession of accidents had made me the only witness to a crime, my duty was to make myself a good witness and to assist to establish the facts of this murder.”¹³ Just like the maze in Doyle’s and Wells’s narratives, so is

12 Richard Harding Davis, “In the Fog,” in *Victorian Villainies*, ed. Graham Greene and Hugh Greene (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1984), 401.

13 Davis, “In the Fog,” 406, emphasis mine.

fog here employed as a device aiding impunity. It is enabled due to its absolute impenetrability which simultaneously helps and hinders, as the quotation from “In the Fog” shows:

‘You have never seen a London fog, have you?’ he asked. ‘Well, come here. This is one of the best, or, rather, one of the worst, of them.’ I joined him at the window, but I could see nothing. Had I not known that the house looked out upon the street I would have believed that I was facing a dead wall. I raised the sash and stretched out my head, but still I could see nothing. Even the light of the street lamps opposite, and in the upper windows of the barracks, had been smothered in the yellow mist. The lights of the room in which I stood penetrated the fog only to the distance of a few inches from my eyes.¹⁴

The fog seduces and intrigues, and, not surprisingly, distorts reality. It has some properties of a maze—it is very easy to go in but virtually impossible to get out of: “Since last night I know all that there is to know about a London fog. I was lost in one for three hours.”¹⁵

In the Sherlock Holmes’s world fog serves two functions. To Watson it is an effective rhetorical device which instantly sets the gothic atmosphere of his narrative: “It was a September evening, and not yet seven o’clock, but the day had been a dreary one, and a dense drizzly fog lay low upon the great city. Mud-coloured clouds drooped sadly over the muddy streets. Down the Strand the lamps were but misty splotches of diffused light which threw a feeble circular glimmer upon the slimy pavement. The yellow glare from the shop-windows streamed out into the steamy, vaporous air, and threw a murky, shifting radiance across the crowded thoroughfare.”¹⁶ Watson uses fog to wrap the city in a romantic mist of mystery so it resembles his own state of mind: dazed and confused, “befogged in mind,”¹⁷ unable to see with his companion’s clarity.

14 Ibid., 400.

15 Ibid., 437.

16 Doyle, *The Sign of Four*, 21.

17 Ibid., 65.

To Sherlock, on the other hand, the urban fog is a sign of the commonplace and mundane; he expresses his opinion explicitly in *The Sign of Four*: “Stand at the window here. Was ever such a dreary, dismal, unprofitable world? See how the yellow fog swirls down the street and drifts across the dun-coloured houses. What could be more hopelessly prosaic and material?”¹⁸ While Watson is prone to ascribing some supernatural characteristics to it, to Sherlock the incongruous yellow urban fog belongs to the material world, explainable through science and hence lacking any interest. There is but one exception to this rule; in the most Gothic of Doyle’s stories, *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, Holmes has to account for the fact that Dartmoor in which majority of the action takes place is not his homely London and the urban-tested techniques do not work in the countryside. Even the fog, so mundane in the city, becomes an almost supernatural entity in the countryside:

I have said that over the great Grimpen Mire there hung a dense, white fog. It was drifting slowly in our direction and banked itself up like a wall on that side of us, low but thick and well defined. The moon shone on it, and it looked like a great shimmering ice-field, with the heads of the distant tors as rocks borne upon its surface. Holmes’s face was turned towards it, and he muttered impatiently as he watched its sluggish drift.

‘It’s moving towards us, Watson.’

‘Is that serious?’

‘Very serious, indeed—the one thing upon earth which could have disarranged my plans. [...]’¹⁹

Perhaps it is due to Watson’s anthropomorphising description that the fog is enabled to fulfil its concealing function which Holmes denies it in London. There, if he ever does refer to this phenomenon, Sherlock tends to use its metaphorical meaning: “Lestrade is a well-known detective. He got himself into a fog recently over a forgery case, and that was

18 Ibid., 12.

19 Doyle, *The Hound of the Baskervilles* (London: Penguin Books, 1996), 154.

what brought him here.”²⁰ Thus Holmes, who takes pride in his clear-cut reasoning, is the one who can actually fight fog with a huge percentage of efficiency—as long as he does it at home.

The Mass

As Steven Connor notes, the fog is quite similar to another singularity of the late-Victorian London: “a phenomenon of mass, metropolitan existence, smog perhaps signifies the horror of ‘the mass’ itself. Like the mass, fog is a oneness without centre or edge, a uniform multiplicity.”²¹ In order to stand the comparison with ‘pea-soupers,’ the urban crowd would have to present itself in vast, almost incomprehensible, numbers. And in the late nineteenth-century literature it does: according to J. G. Bartholomew’s *The Pocket Atlas and Guide to London*, in 1891 the population of the metropolis reached 4,231,431 inhabitants and was still increasing.²² No wonder then that the city was claimed to be the most crowded in the world and its fame reached far beyond the English borders. Even Count Dracula of Bram Stoker’s novel (1897) in his secluded Transylvanian castle has heard of this great mass: “I long to go through the crowded streets of your mighty London, to be in the midst of the whirl and rush of humanity, to share its life, its change, its death, and all that makes it what it is.”²³ In the late-Victorian literature, not only do the crowd and smoke appear simultaneously but they also seem to share a number of characteristics: both are referred to as dense and dirty, both are perceived as nuisance and burden and both cause violent reactions of hatred and disgust.

Such a great mass of almost identical inhabitants provides an extraordinary opportunity to hide oneself by simply plunging into the crowd.

20 Doyle, *A Study in Scarlet*, 21.

21 Steve Connor, “Smoke.” A talk broadcast in BBC Radio 3’s *Nightwaves*, December 2, 2002, accessed September 3, 2014, <http://stevenconnor.com/smog.html>.

22 J. G. Bartholomew, “The Pocket Atlas and Guide to London,” in *The Victorian Dictionary: Exploring Victorian London*, ed. Lee Jackson (2005), March 14, 2007, www.victorianlondon.org/population/population.htm.

23 Bram Stoker, *Dracula* (Ware: Wordsworth Editions, 2000), 18–19.

Sherlock Holmes is perfectly aware of such a risk when he dogs the footsteps of Jefferson Hope: "As long as this man has no idea that anyone can have a clue there is some chance of securing him; but 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."²⁴ This particular crime-aiding feature of the capital of the Empire is apparently well known all around the world. In Fergus Hume's novel, which is set in Melbourne, such a remark is made: "But it is impossible that the body can remain long without being identified by someone, as though Melbourne is a large city, yet it is neither Paris nor London, where a man can disappear in a crowd and never be heard of again."²⁵ Just like the maze or fog, so do crowds offer similar sense of liberty to potential criminals. Once again, however, their respective threats are reintroduced in the case of the urban mass which, according to Richard Lehan, was "unstable and volatile [and] made city life increasingly unpredictable,"²⁶ just like the ever-growing urban maze and the irregular emergence of the London particular.

However, such a mass of millions, although statistically significant, does not indicate unification; on the contrary, as John Murray remarks: "There is no place where the isolation of individual man is more complete than in London [...]. In London, every individual man revolves in two orbits: first, round his own axis in his individual sphere of action, be it little or great, narrow or widely extended; he revolves also with the huge mass of which he is but an atom, but which is, nevertheless, carried onwards in its course by the united exertion of aggregated atoms like himself."²⁷ What Murray points out is the surprising anonymity and lack of community that characterises the urban crowd. The people of London are constantly referred to as unified mass but, in fact, there is no unity within the crowd: it is a composite of isolated individuals, distancing themselves from the mass.

24 Doyle, *A Study in Scarlet*, 65.

25 Fergus Hume "The Mystery of a Hansom Cab," *Project Gutenberg*, Etext-No. 4223 (July 2003), www.gutenberg.org/dirs/etext03/mhnscl0.txt, September 25, 2006.

26 Lehan, *The City in Literature*, 8.

27 John Murray, "The World of London," in *The Victorian Dictionary: Exploring Victorian London*, ed. Lee Jackson (2005), www.victorianlondon.org/population/londoners.htm, March 14, 2007.

This distance is only understandable when we realise that very often the writers describe the mob with words which are usually connected with insects: teeming, buzzing, swarming, thus suggesting the inhuman character of the urban crowd. In Doyle's *The Sign of Four*, Watson employs such a metaphor when he describes the long stream of people: "There was, to my mind, something eerie and ghost-like in the endless procession of faces which flitted across these narrow bars of light—sad faces and glad, haggard and merry. Like all human kind, they flitted from the gloom into the light, and so back into the gloom once more."²⁸ His depiction evokes the image of moths—night butterflies attracted by the light of flame, whose pursuits and ultimate deaths are of nobody's interest. Watson rhetorically distances himself from the crowd by assuming the position of the outsider, a superior and condescending observer of the mob who sees their meaningless actions and petty problems but stresses that they do not concern him.

Moreover, apart from being compared to insects, quite often the crowd of people is ascribed the features of water, especially when it is spotted in motion: "the roadway was blocked with the immense stream of commerce flowing in a double tide inward and outward, while the footpaths were black with the hurrying swarm of pedestrians."²⁹ The metaphor of water allows Watson to adopt a more generous stance when observing the movement of the crowd: "For three hours we strolled about together, watching the ever-changing kaleidoscope of life as it ebbs and flows through Fleet Street and the Strand,"³⁰ he describes his trips with Holmes around London. The metaphors of swarm and water seem very similar in regard to the human mass: the indescribable and limitless size, uncontrollable power and constant risk of escaping the weak bonds that were created to manage them. In the Victorian metropolis the crowd stands as a force which can never be controlled or tamed.

If the people en masse are compared to water, the streets of the metropolis could be compared to a labyrinthine network of pipelines

28 Doyle, *The Sign of Four*, 21.

29 Doyle, "The Red-Headed League," 39.

30 Arthur Conan Doyle, "The Resident Patient," in *The Adventures and Memoirs of Sherlock Holmes* (Ware: Wordsworth Editions, 1996), 413.

through which sewage flows. When Dr Watson returns a veteran from the war campaign in Afghanistan, having in fact no place to go, he “naturally gravitate[s] to London, that great cesspool into which all the loungers and idlers of the Empire are irresistibly drained.”³¹ The city is thus associated with the sewer, sucking all the dirt which finally reaches the centre of London—the open drain of the Thames, which itself is referred to as the “perfect labyrinth.”³² Thus the three urban techniques of concealment: the maze, the fog, and the mass unite in the heart of the city in which Sherlock Holmes reigns supreme.

The Dog

Sherlock Holmes does not find London a labyrinth or a convoluted jungle but something quite familiar. The metropolis is his home, he knows its construction by heart. This obviously is not surprising at all, since “the long walks, which appeared to take him into the lowest portions of the city”³³ seem to be one of his favourite hobbies. Watson, on the other hand, perhaps just like Doyle himself, is an outsider, a newcomer, and thus he perceives London as “the great wilderness,”³⁴ a maze-like structure in which a man inevitably gets lost. Holmes gives very little attention to such a matter as the convoluted topography of London; the problem of the fog concerns him even less. The famous and ever-recurring images of foggy London which are so strongly associated with the Baker Street 221b and its inhabitants are entirely due to Watson’s descriptions. Sherlock Holmes does not seem to care about something as mundane as the simple meteorological issue. For him the big city is the masses. He knows and understands people, his passion is to walk about London and observe crowds in the streets. Like the epitome of a man of the crowd, Holmes cannot do without “this great mass of humanity.”³⁵

31 Doyle, *A Study in Scarlet*, 8.

32 Doyle, *The Sign of Four*, 64.

33 Doyle, *A Study in Scarlet*, 15.

34 *Ibid.*, 8.

35 *Ibid.*, 76.

The impression one may experience while reading these stories is that nothing gives Holmes more delight than to plunge into the ocean of four million people. Due to his extraordinary power of observation, he is even able to mimic the mob and pretend—even if only for a moment—to be one of them.

However, the sense of sight is not the only one the detective employs in his work. Quite often he makes use of his nose, literally and metaphorically speaking. For that reason, Holmes sometimes seems to evoke an image of a dog. This is Watson's observation at the crime scene in *A Study in Scarlet*:

So engrossed was he with his occupation that he appeared to have forgotten our presence, for he chattered away to himself under his breath the whole time, keeping up a running fire of exclamations, groans, whistles, and little cries suggestive of encouragement and of hope. As I watched him I was irresistibly reminded of a pure-blooded well-trained foxhound as it dashes backwards and forwards through the covert, whining in its eagerness, until it comes across the lost scent.³⁶

A dog, especially a scent hound, cannot be lost in a maze of streets or be fooled by fog. The only means of confusing a hound's nose would be olfactory overload, but even such a case would not affect Holmes's efficiency. Unlike the extraordinary mongrel Toby from *The Sign of Four*, Sherlock cannot be confused by crossing and overlapping paths of scent; sooner or later he should be able to get on the right track. Indeed, Holmes's wild wanderings around the city bring to mind the old English tradition of fox hunting: the detective is the hound, the suspect—a fox. When the former picks out the latter's scent, the game is over, there is no foxhole in which the pursued victim could hide. Paradoxically, although for all the villains the metropolis is their *natural* conducive environment it is the famous detective who is in charge of the whole situation.

In many of the Holmes stories, the motif of a hound is constantly recurring. The streets are empty if there is “not a livin' soul, sir, nor

36 *Ibid.*, 34.

as much as a dog.”³⁷ The police force are portrayed as a troop of silly pups who busy themselves with a lot of barking but usually under wrong trees. What is more, they appear to have a lot of physical canine features; though originally detective Lestrade is described as “little sallow rat-faced, dark-eyed fellow”³⁸ later on he metamorphoses into “a small, wiry bulldog of a man”³⁹; whereas detective Tobias Gregson of *A Study in Scarlet* “returns” in a way in *The Sign of Four* as the smart mongrel Toby. Besides, apart from the image of the bloodhound, Holmes seems to embody another canine figure, namely a guard dog. It appears that his main role is to act as the guardian of his home—the city, and its law-abiding dwellers. As Richard Lehan puts it, “Holmes exists to protect London, to root out evil in the center of the imperial world, whether it arises from the machinations of a crime ring or from an isolated crime. The system must be made secure; Sherlock Holmes both embodies the system and helps keep it intact.”⁴⁰ Just like the Victorian Cerberus, Holmes uses his multiple senses to protect the heart of the Empire, upholding order and keeping crime in check.

In this respect, the image of a dog symbolises the Victorian two-sidedness. A dog seems to evoke extreme associations: to call one a dog is considered a huge insult, for such claim seems to question the very humanity of the person insulted. The offences such as “You hound!”⁴¹ or “You dog!”⁴² are repeated several times in the Holmes canon, as if to highlight the canine aspect of the villains. When Jefferson Hope takes his revenge on Enoch Drebber in *A Study in Scarlet*, he does not hesitate for a single minute: “There’s no murder [...]. Who talks of murdering a mad dog?”⁴³ On the other hand, a dog is generally perceived as a smart, trustworthy animal which inspires respect, even admiration and is praised for its loyalty and companionship. To be a hound is to comprise the best and worst features of a dog.

37 Ibid., 40.

38 Ibid., 19.

39 Doyle, *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, 151.

40 Lehan, *The City in Literature*, 86.

41 Doyle, *A Study in Scarlet*, 116.

42 Ibid., 118.

43 Ibid., 118.

In the urban fog, maze or crowd, the dog whose name is Sherlock Holmes seems to find his way most of the time. Where his extraordinary observation skills appear insufficient, he employs his canine features, adapting himself to the challenges posed by the metropolis. Sherlock Holmes is undoubtedly the hound of London—his tricks, however, work only within the bounds of the great city. Once removed from his comfort zone, he begins to lose scent, as the example of *The Hound of the Baskervilles* shows. Acting as London's guard dog, he sniffs out the murderers' bloody trails and roams the city, proving the optimistic claim that, though apparently chaotic, the metropolis concealed by yellow fog and concealing itself with labyrinthine structure and urban masses, unlike the countryside, is in fact subject to strict moral rules of which he remains the guardian.

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Justyna Jajszczok

Labirynt, mgła, masa, pies: Sherlock Holmes w Londynie

STRESZCZENIE

W artykule przedstawiony jest obraz Londynu w późnowiktoriańskiej literaturze jako miasta, które sprzyja zbrodni. Analizie poddane zostają przykłady prozy ostatnich dekad XIX wieku, a zwłaszcza przygody Sherlocka Holmesa napisane przez Arthura Conana Doyle'a, które pokazują, w jak sposób metropolia pomaga przestępcom i utrudnia pracę stróżom prawa. Jak zostaje ukazane w artykule, dzięki swej labiryntowej strukturze, umiejętności okrycia się nieprzeniknioną mgłą oraz czteromilionowej populacji, Londyn staje się współwinny zbrodniom, które dzieją się w jego granicach.

W końcowej części artykułu udowadnia, że Sherlock Holmes jest idealnym miejskim detektywem, nie tylko dzięki swoim wyjątkowym zdolnościom obserwacji, ale również pewnym szczególnym psim cechom. Sprawiają one, że Holmes doskonale odnajduje się w środowisku dziewiętnastowiecznego Londynu, nie są mu bowiem straszne ani miejski labirynt, ani mgła, ani masa ludzi zamieszkujących metropolię.

Justyna Jajszczok

Labyrinth, Nebel, Masse, Hund: Sherlock Holmes in London

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Der Artikel schildert London, die in literarischen Werken vom 19. Jh. als eine den Mord begünstigende Stadt erscheint. Die Verfasserin untersucht ausgewählte aus den letzten Dekaden des 19. Jhs stammende Prosawerke, darunter vor allem die Abenteuer des Sherlock Holmes von Arthur Conan Doyle, die zeigen, auf welche Weise diese Metropole den Verbrechern hilft und den Gesetzeshütern ihre Arbeit schwer macht. Dank seiner labyrinthartigen Struktur, der Fähigkeit, sich mit dem Nebel zu bedecken und seiner Viermillionen Bevölkerung wird London an den Morden mitschuldig, die auf seinem Gebiet begangen werden. Zum Schluss beweist die Verfasserin, dass Sherlock Holmes ein idealer Stadtdetektiv ist nicht nur wegen seiner besonderen Beobachtungsfähigkeiten, sondern auch dank seinen spezifischen Hundeeigenschaften, die verursachen, dass er sich in Londoner Umgebung ausgezeichnet einlebt; es schrecken ihn weder die Stadtlabyrinth noch Nebel und die Menschenmasse in der Metropole.