Conan Doyle's "The Adventure of the Six Napoleons" and the Mechanical Reproduction of the Sherlock Holmes Formula

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Abstract

Three points are made in this article about Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and his production of the Sherlock Holmes canon. The first point concerns the contextualization of the Sherlock Holmes stories within the issues raised by the progress and modernity in the historical period of their production and reception. Here the article concludes that Doyle was able to provide his readers with a narrative containment of the insecurity caused by modernity and progress.

The second point is about Conan Doyle's own artistic ambitions as a writer. His doubts about the artistic value of his popular, formulaic and repetitive Sherlock Holmes stories were so serious that he with the help of Professor Moriarty murdered Holmes at the Reichenbach Falls in "The Adventure of the Final problem" (1893), so that he himself could concentrate on his artistic ambitions to write historical novels.

The third and final point is a continuation of the first two. Based on a reading of "The Adventure of the Six Napoleons" (1904) in the light of Walter Benjamin's essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction", the article concludes that Doyle actually came to terms with the formulaic and repetitive detective genre, so that he brought Sherlock Holmes back to life in "The Adventure of the Empty House" (1903). Benjamin's essay has been chosen as the approach to the analysis of "The Adventure of the Six Napoleons" as this case foregrounds the serial (re)production of works of art at

the same time as it combines it with textual production and the art and craft of the writer.

Between Victorianism and Modernism

It can be difficult to call Conan Doyle either a Victorian writer or a modern one, yet he is not a literary modernist. With a backward-looking awareness though, we may wonder why Conan Doyle did not become a literary modernist. A chronological survey, however, may explain his position between the two poles of Victorian realism and Modernist experimenting prose or poetry. Doyle lived from 1859 to 1930, and the publication period of his Sherlock Holmes stories and novels goes from 1887 with *A Study in Scarlet* to 1927 with *The Casebook of Sherlock Holmes*. In 1922 T.S. Eliot published *The Waste Land*, and the same year Joyce published *Ulysses*, both landmarks of European Modernism. However, Doyle's literary production had peaked already in 1902 when he published *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, and in 1922 he was 63 years old and an established writer and public figure. Yet Doyle and his chief literary figure Sherlock Holmes were not outdated, and even though Doyle never became a literary modernist, it is modernity with its progress and changes which runs through most of his pro-

Billeder tilgængelige i trykt udgave.

Conan Doyle on a ROC motorcycle at Undershaw, 1905 (Photographer unknown). Here Doyle embraces modernity and its new technologies, and in a letter to his mother Mary Doyle (September 28, 1891) he told her about his type-writer and his new tandem tricycle, just as he in the same year bought photographic equipment.

duction as the main theme, or rather it is the encounter with modernity that is his most important theme: Darwinism, urban or metropolitan life, imperialism, new gender roles, transport, science and technology. In this respect Doyle is modern, and even more so as modern scientific methods are an integral part of Sherlock Holmes' rational and positivist detective method, though as we shall see they are quite complex.

Sherlock Holmes and the Formula

In a review from 1904 of *The Novels of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle* Andrew Lang writes: "But the adventures of Sherlock are too brief to permit much study of character. The thing becomes a formula, and we can imagine little variation, unless Sherlock falls in love, or Watson detects him blackmailing a bishop" (Orel: 233), and practically all of the fifty-six short stories and four novels share the same narrative structure. The point of departure is that a victim of a crime or one suspecting a crime consults Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson in Baker Street 221B. The consultation often mercifully interrupts Holmes' boredom and ennui, and he makes surprisingly detailed deductions from the client's appearance, narrative and the exhibits he has brought along. The client seems mistrustful, and Dr. Watson also attempts to deduce something, but without any luck. In his autobiography Doyle describes this part of the formula: "He shows his powers by what the South Americans now call *Sherlockholmitos*, which means clever little deductions, which often have nothing to do with the matter in hand, but impress the reader with a general sense of power. The same is gained by his offhand allusion to other cases" (Doyle 2007: 91). A quiet period now follows during which Holmes reflects upon the case and lays plans. He may consult one of his many monographs, e.g. "Upon the Distinction Between the Ashes of the Various Tobaccos", but this sedate step in the formula is followed by one of active investigation when Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson visit the scene of the crime. An additional crime may follow the first one, and Holmes may put on a disguise that fools even Dr. Watson. The investigation sometimes includes excursions into the underworld of London and in a few cases

even railroad travels outside London. At the end of the investigation there is the stake-out when Holmes and Dr. Watson set a trap for or they lie in wait for the criminal. Holmes may have told Dr. Watson to bring along his service revolver to the stake-out, and the criminal turns up and is caught, though Holmes may decide to let him go. After the arrest everybody else than Sherlock Holmes now demonstrates their incompetence, when Dr. Watson and the police guess erroneously about possible solutions; but they are soon brought to right when Sherlock Holmes presents his brilliant explanation. This part of the formula may overshadow the actual arrest of the criminal and his subsequent punishment.

Just as the narrative structure is formulaic and stereotypical, so are the characters, e.g. the slow-witted, but arrogant policeman, the mysterious foreign nobleman, ex-colonials, and by and large only male characters with the exception of Holmes' housekeeper Mrs. Hudson. The geography of the cases is often simply an excursion from Baker Street.

Though the narrative structure is based on crime, it follows this movement: disharmony – conflict – harmony, and as such it may be expressed in brief as Reassurance after all! With this stable and strictly controlled formulaic pattern the question is where do the narrative drive and its dynamics come from? The answer may well be that just below the surface of the formula there is the complex and unpredictable disharmony of modernity with its societal and cultural changes. In the Sherlock Holmes canon, modernity is very much present as a factor of fear: Holmes' arch-enemy Professor Moriarty is the representative of organized crime, which is also active in "The Case of the Six Napoleons", and as such Moriarty may be read as a symbol of monopoly capitalism threatening the liberalism of the Victorian Period. The glory of the Empire has backfired so that London is represented as its cesspool, and this metropolis of modernity has in itself become a crime scene. The woman question of the period is reflected with subtlety as the canon almost exclusively deals with male gender roles, so that women are almost negated. The Sherlock Holmes character itself presents a contradictory attitude to modernity. As a consulting detective upholding law and order and sometimes serving

the government, nobility and royalty he is allied with the established classes. On the other hand, he lives the life of a metropolitan bohemian and as such he is outside the class structure in the same way as an early modernist artist was. In particular Sherlock Holmes' detective methods are contradictory and ambivalent in relation to modernity. On the one hand they are scientific and positivist based on empirical studies and the testing of hypotheses, but even this certainty based on science is on the other hand disrupted by his virtuoso performances that correspond to Charles Sanders Peirce's (1839-1914) pragmatism, especially abduction, which can be defined as *inspired* deduction, a method which is scientifically incomprehensible. This ambivalent nature of Holmes' relation to modernity is also reflected in his coolly rational deductions that sometimes ignore conventional morality. This detachment of his detective methods may be regarded as a parallel to the estrangement of literary modernism, and as such one of the few concessions Conan Doyle has made to this cultural movement.

Modernity in these many guises is certainly present in the Sherlock Holmes universe, and though modernity takes on specific forms as described above, modernity is a general ontological cause of fear and angst. It is in this respect that the formulaic Sherlock Holmes stories are appealing to their readership. They are able to offer the readers a narrative containment of modernity. It is the formula that invariably reassures the readers that the world can be brought back to harmony, and this it does without relying on an escapist negation or repression of modernity. Conan Doyle has in other words managed the art of writing about the complex ontology of modernity in a popular form.

Two Literary Deaths

In private letters and also in his autobiography Conan Doyle expressed a strong fatigue with his repetitive work of writing Sherlock Holmes cases, and he longed for more demanding and more artistic tasks:

> It was still the Sherlock Holmes stories for which the public clamoured, and these from time to time I endeavoured to sup-

> ply. At last, after I had done two series of them I saw that I was in danger of having my hand forced, and of being entirely identified with what I regarded as a lower stratum of literary achievement. Therefore, as a sign of resolution, I determined to end the life of my hero (Doyle 2007: 83ff).

In 1893 using Professor Moriarty, who was invented for this purpose, as his instrument Conan Doyle in "The Adventure of The Final Problem" did away with his creation. He wrote to his mother in April 1893: "I am in the middle of the last Holmes story, after which the gentleman vanishes, never never to reappear. I am weary of his name"

Billeder tilgængelige i trykt udgave.

Print in *The Illustrated London News* in 1865 vol. xlvii, p. 420 after drawing by J.M.W. Turner. In *Memories and Adventures An Autobiography* Doyle wrote: "We walked down the Lauterbrunnen Valley. I saw there the wonderful falls of Reichenbach, a terrible place, and one that I thought would make a worthy tomb for poor Sherlock, even if I buried my banking account along with him" (Doyle 2007: 84).

(Doyle 2008: 319). However, another writer, Dr. Watson, is not so relieved, when he is writing "The Adventure of The Final Problem": "IT IS with a heavy heart that I take up my pen to write these the last words in which I shall ever record the singular gifts by which my friend Mr. Sherlock Holmes was distinguished" (Doyle 1986: 415). This split between the author and the author persona is significant when we consider Doyle's position in cultural history between the Late Victorian Period and 20th-century Modernism, but let us first compare the death of Sherlock Holmes with an equally famous literary death, the death of Little Nell in Charles Dickens' *The Old Curiosity Shop* (1840-41). The Victorian attitude to death was shared between readers and writer alike. Dickens himself reacted as strongly as his readership to the death of one of his characters. Charles Dickens' closest friend and biographer John Forster describes the effects of writing the two chapters of Nell's death on Dickens, and he quotes from their correspondence in which Dickens wrote:

> I went to bed last night utterly dispirited and done up. All night I have been pursued by the child; and this morning I am unrefreshed and miserable. I don't know what to do with myself… … I am the wretchedest of the wretched. It cast the most horrible shadow upon me, and it is as much as I can do to keep moving at all… Nobody will miss her like I shall. It is such a very painful thing to me, that I really cannot express my sorrow. Old wounds bleed afresh when I only think of the way of doing it (Forster, Vol. 1: 138-139).

In his *Dickens* biography (335-338), also Peter Ackroyd recounts how Dickens walked the streets at night, yet the thematic necessity made it unavoidable that Little Nell had to die. Dickens told his friends: "I am breaking my heart over this story, and I cannot bear to finish it… I am slowly murdering that poor child, and grow wretched over it. It wrings my heart. Yet it must be… I am for the first time being nearly dead with work – and grief for the loss of my child."

The Mid-Victorian Dickens is at one with his text, his characters and his audience, and in the writing process he shares the audience's

reaction in their reading process. The Late Victorian and Edwardian Doyle is detached from his text, his character and his audience. In this respect Doyle shows literary modernist tendencies in so far as he is not a mouthpiece of his age as the Mid-Victorian writers were. We begin to see the move towards the estranged and bohemian modernist artist, who belonged nowhere, and who had no direct didactic societal function. Yet, in the case of Conan Doyle this is only a tendency. Doyle was not allowed his detachment and modernist stance. The readers of *The Strand Magazine* were indignant and protested, and one correspondent wrote to Doyle after having read "The Final Problem": "You brute!" The editor of the magazine George Newness told his shareholders that Holmes' death was "a dreadful event" as the circulation of the magazine suffered (Pound: 45).

It was not until October 1903 that Sherlock Holmes was resurrected in "The Adventure of the Empty House". One of these reasons for this was financial as Doyle was offered $45,000 for thirteen Sherlock Holmes stories, irrespective of length, by *Collier's Weekly* in America, and to this Doyle could add his fee from *The Strand Magazine* in Britain. He wrote to his mother: "I have done no short Sherlock Holmes Stories for seven or eight years, and I don't see why I should not have another go at them and earn three times as much money as I can by any other work" (Doyle 2008: 512). In comparison: Doyle was paid thirty guineas for each story in the first series in *The Strand Magazine*, and fifty guineas for each of the second series.

"The Adventure of the Six Napoleons", which was published half a year later, may be read as Doyle's coming to terms with his formulaic and serial production of the Sherlock Holmes stories, and thus this case embeds Doyle's development as a writer from "The Adventure of the Final Problem" to "The Adventure of the Empty House". Though Doyle let his serial hero plunge into the deeps of the Reichenbach Falls in "The Adventure of the Final problem" (1893), he did not let his Sherlock Holmes production lie entirely dormant before Holmes was resurrected in 1903. Towards the end of 1897 he wrote a play called *Sherlock Holmes*, and in 1902 he published *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, the action of which was set before Holmes' death.

The Adventure of the Six Napoleons

"The Adventure of the Six Napoleons" was first published in *The Strand Magazine*, May 1904[1]. The narrative structure of this case follows the formula, yet the initial consultation is not with an actual victim of a crime, but with Inspector Lestrade, who comes for help as a seemingly insane criminal is stealing and smashing plaster casts of Napoleon I. The burglaries are followed by murder outside a journalist's, Mr. Horace Harker, home. Holmes and Dr. Watson's investigation takes them to Gelder and Co., the factory in Stepney where the busts were cast. Here the production process of the busts is explained in a surprisingly detailed way, and hundreds of casts had been taken from a marble copy of Devine's head of Napoleon. According to the factory's German owner "Their wholesale price was six shillings, but the retailer would get twelve or more" (Doyle 1904: 489). In the pocket of the murdered man Holmes had found a photograph. "It represented an alert, sharp-featured simian man with thick eyebrows, and a very peculiar projection of the lower part of the face like the muzzle of a baboon" (Doyle 1904: 487), and the factory owner recognizes the man on the photograph as an Italian, Beppo, who once worked for him, but was arrested for knifing another Italian. Beppo had just completed a one-year sentence for this crime. In the

1 The story has been adapted once for film and once for television. Roy William Neill's film *The Pearl of Death* (Universal Studios) from 1944 with Basil Rathbone and Nigel Bruce employs film noir style with a femme fatale (Naomi Drake) added to the plot. The original Beppo has been divided into two characters: A Professor Moriarty-like master criminal, (Giles Conover) and his degenerate and gorilla-like henchman, the Hoxton Creeper. The Napoleon busts have been retained, and litters of broken crockery are used as a red herring to conceal the broken plaster; but the original discourse about the craft of writing has been boiled down to Nigel Bruce 's Dr. Watson clowning with newspaper clippings and glue.

The episode in the Granada Sherlock Holmes television "The Six Napoleon" directed by David Carson with Jeremy Brett and Edward Hardwicke is from 1986. The Italian and Mafia elements of the original story have been expanded; stylistically reminiscent of Coppola's Godfather films, and the Napoleon busts have been made prominent and conspicuous in the episode. All in all, this adaptation is faithful to the original story.

meantime Lestrade has identified the murdered man, who was a hired killer working for international, organized crime as he was a member of the Mafia. He was apparently killed himself while trying to murder Beppo. Holmes had established that the smashed busts belonged to a batch of six, and by following the way of these through various retailers Holmes arranged a stake-out where he expected the next burglary to be, and Beppo was duly apprehended there just as he had smashed another plaster bust of Napoleon to pieces. Inspector Lestrade was dismissive about the importance of the busts, and Holmes invited him to the presentation of his solution to the mystery: "If you will come round once more to my rooms at six o'clock to-morrow I think I shall be able to show you that even now you have not grasped the entire meaning of this business, which presents some features which make it absolutely original in the history of crime" (Doyle 1904: 493). Before Holmes revealed the criminal plot, a Mr. Sandeford of Reading brought the last plaster copy of the bust to Baker Street 221B, and Sherlock Holmes bought it from him for the sum of ten pounds and made him sign a document that transferred all possible rights in the bust to him. When Mr. Sandeford had left, Holmes smashed the bust into fragments, and it was revealed that it contained the famous black pearl of the Borgias. The pearl had been stolen by Beppo's sister, who was a chambermaid, and being hunted, Beppo had hidden it inside one of six busts that were drying at the factory. He had then sought out these busts, which had been sold to different customers, one by one to retrieve the costly pearl.

The Mechanical Reproduction of the Formula

Beneath the criminal plot of "The Adventure of the Six Napoleons" there run two interrelated discourses. The first about the serial production of the plaster casts and their manufacture, wholesale distribution and retail distribution is crucial to the plot[2]. Doyle fore-

2 In *The Secret Marriage of Sherlock Holmes and Other Eccentric Readings* Michael Atkinson touches upon this aspect of the case and then proceeds to read it in the light of Friedrich Nietzsche's nihilism (Atkinson: 154).

grounds this discourse as can be read from these passages from the case:

> The possession of this trifling bust was worth more, in the eyes of this strange criminal, than a human life (Doyle 1904: 487).

> A reference to his books showed that hundreds of casts had been taken from a marble copy of Devine's head of Napoleon (Doyle 1904: 489).

> The cast was taken in two moulds from each side of the face, and then these two profiles of plaster of Paris were joined together to make the complete bust. The work was usually done by Italians, in the room we were in. When finished, the busts were put on a table in the passage to dry, and afterwards stored (Doyle 190: 489).

> "We have seen both the retailers and also the wholesale manufacturers. I can trace each of the busts now from the beginning" (Doyle 1904: 491).

This quite concrete discourse also contains the more abstract level of the relationship between the original work of art and its reproductions or copies and their respective values.

The other discourse deals with textual production and the craft of the writer, and one of the characters, the journalist Horace Harker is only the victim of burglary, but through his profession he nevertheless comments repeatedly at a metalevel about the case as a story or a text and the production of it, e.g.:

> "It's an extraordinary thing," said he, "that all my life I have been collecting other people's news, and now that a real piece of news has come my own way I am so confused and bothered that I can't put two words together. If I had come in here as a journalist, I should have interviewed myself and had two columns in every evening paper. As it is, I am giving away

> valuable copy by telling my story over and over to a string of different people, and I can make no use of it myself (Doyle 1904: 485ff).
>
> The disconsolate journalist had seated himself at a writing-table. "I must try and make something of it," said he, "though I have no doubt that the first editions of the evening papers are out already with full details. It's like my luck! You remember when the stand fell at Doncaster? Well, I was the only journalist in the stand, and my journal the only one that had no account of it, for I was too shaken to write it. And now I'll be too late with a murder done on my own doorstep.
>
> As we left the room, we heard his pen travelling shrilly over the foolscap (Doyle 1904: 487).

And there is much more. Holmes' in-house writer Watson is duplicated by the journalist, and also Holmes himself comments on the story-telling and textual aspect of his detection: "I reflect that some of my most classic cases have had the least promising commencement" (Doyle 1904: 485) It is as if it is Doyle expresses himself through Jonathan Harker about his own use of the formula and serial production of Sherlock Holmes cases: "As it is, I am giving away valuable copy by telling my story over and over to a string of different people, and I can make no use of it myself", and the distinction between the production of the Sherlock Holmes stories as literature and as journalism has been levelled out.

The two discourses about the original work of art and its reproductions and about the craft of the writer are merged in the concept of the original and unique work of art where both the plaster busts and the formulaic Sherlock Holmes stories fall short. They are not original. The busts are only mass-produced copies, and the Sherlock Holmes stories are merely repetitions of a formula. The seminal text about the relationship between original and reproduction is Walter Benjamin's essay from 1935 "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction", and it will be employed here to illuminate the parallel

between the criminal plot of "The Adventure of the Six Napoleons" and Conan Doyle's reproduction of the Sherlock Holmes formula. I seek in this way to calibrate Benjamin's concept of mechanical mass-reproduction with the formulaic production of literature for the mass market, where Conan Doyle was an innovative entrepreneur with his distribution channel of the *Strand Magazine*. Also I intend to use Benjamin's essay to connect the two distinct discourses in "The Adventure of the Six Napoleons" about the reproductions of the Napoleon busts and about the writing or production of texts.

In his essay from 1935, Benjamin traces the historical development of the technologies that have enabled the reproductions of works of art from ancient Greek founding and stamping through medieval woodcuts and more recent printing techniques and modern lithography, photography and film. The advantages of mechanical reproduction are that it can bring out more than is available in the original in perception, as when a photograph can be enlarged or when a film can slow down motion. Yet, first of all mechanical reproduction of the work of art means accessibility, and as such there is an ideological and democratic value attached to the technologies, many more people can see the reproduction than they could the original.

Benjamin points out that even the most perfect reproduction lacks in its presence in time and space. The copy does not embed the provenance of the original and the history with its traces of age that it has gone through:

> One might encompass the eliminated element within the concept of the aura, and go on to say: what withers in the age of the technological reproducibility of the work of art is the latter's aura. The process is symptomatic; its significance extends far beyond the realm of art. It might be stated as a general formula that the technology of reproduction detaches the reproduced object from the sphere of tradition. By replicating the work many times over, it substitutes a mass existence for a unique existence. And in permitting the reproduction to reach the recipient in his or her own situation, it actualizes that which is reproduced. These two processes lead to a massive

> upheaval in the domain of objects handed down from the past – a shattering of tradition… (Benjamin 1974: 255)[3].

This demolition of cathartic aura and this "shattering of tradition" are part of the cultural movement of Modernism, and Benjamin situates it to the time around 1900. The literary modernist discussion about originality and about the artist's and the work of art's place in tradition is related to Benjamin's examination of the effects of mechanical reproduction. In his "Tradition and the Individual Talent" from 1919 (Eliot in Leitch: 1092-1098), T.S. Eliot defends literary tradition when he discusses the relationship between artistic originality and the writer's re-use of a culture's literary tradition and history. Eliot attacks the concept of the isolated and original poetic genius, and he does not find that "novelty is better than repetition" (1093). The fact that Eliot finds it necessary to argue in favour of literary tradition may in this way be related to Benjamin's claim that the material conditions of artistic production, and in particular artistic distribution or reproduction, have disrupted the work of art's connection to tradition: "The technology of reproduction detaches the reproduced object from the sphere of tradition."

In "The Adventure of the Six Napoleons" Conan Doyle foreshadows this modernist discourse, and viewed internally in Doyle's own literary production it is significant that it is busts of Napoleon I that are smashed. Doyle's ambition to leave the serially produced and formula-ridden Sherlock Holmes behind and turn to original works of historical fiction is not embraced in this case. His historical fiction

3 Man kann, was hier ausfällt, im Begriff der Aura zusammenfassen und sagen: was im Zeitalter der technischen Reproduzierbarkeit des Kunstwerks verkümmert, das ist seine Aura. Der Vorgang ist symptomatisch; seine Bedeutung weist über den Bereich der Kunst hinaus. Die Reproduktionstechnik, so ließe sich allgemein formulieren, löst das Reproduzierte aus dem Bereich der Tradition ab. Indem sie die Reproduktion vervielfältigt, setzt sie an die Stelle seines einmaligen Vorkommens sein massenweises. Und indem sie der Reproduktion erlaubt, dem Aufnehmenden in seiner jeweiligen Situation entgegenzukommen, aktualisiert sie das reproduzierte. Diese beiden Prozesse führen zu einer gewaltigen Erschütterung des Tradierten… (Benjamin, 1974: 477)

included Regency romances, *The White Company* (1891) and among his most successful historical novels there are the popular Brigadier Gerard tales, set in the time of the Napoleonic Wars. The first of these tales was written in 1894. Doyle wrote: "For three years I lived among Napoleonic literature, with some hope that by soaking and resoaking myself in it I might at last write some worthy book which would reproduce some of the glamour of that extraordinary and fascinating epoch" (Carr: 91). When it is busts of Napoleon that are broken in the Sherlock Holmes story, it is a subtle and an almost ironic comment on this part of his historical fiction.

Beppo in "The Adventure of the Six Napoleons" had hidden the stolen pearl of the Borgias in this way: "Six plaster casts of Napoleon were drying in the passage. One of them was still soft. In an instant, Beppo, a skilful workman, made a small hole in the wet plaster, dropped in the pearl, and with a few touches covered over the aperture once more" (Doyle 1904: 495), and it is from here that Holmes had retrieved it. With regard to the production of the busts there is this movement: A marble copy is made of the original bust in marble of Napoleon I by Devine. From this copy hundreds of plaster casts or replicas are made, and into one of these Beppo inserts "the famous black pearl of the Borgias". In other words, from a copy of the original and unique work of art copies are mechanically produced, yet inside one of these serially reproduced copies there is the unique and original, and irreproducible, work of art that has even got its history and provenance intact. The message can be condensed into a statement about recognizing the hidden value of serially produced literature, i.e. Doyle's formulaic Sherlock Holmes cases.

Conan Doyle managed to reach a compromise between his artistic ambitions about original historical fiction and the public demand for more serialised reproductions of the Sherlock Holmes formula in "The Adventure of the Six Napoleons". Modernity, mass (re)production and the mass market of literary or journalist products are accepted and even utilized in the plot: "The press, Watson, is a most valuable institution if you only know how to use it" (Doyle 1904: 490). Holmes used the press to solve the case, and he used photography forensically ("the snap-shot from a small camera" of Beppo). Walter Benjamin

wrote this about photography: "…The unique significance of Atget, who around 1900, took photographs of deserted Paris streets. It has justly been said that he photographed them like scenes of crime. A crime scene, too, is deserted; it is photographed for the purpose of establishing evidence" (Benjamin 1974: 258)[4]. Again we can see that Holmes relates to modernity and its technological progress and that he embraces this part of modernity in his scientific method of detection. We can also see that Doyle in "The Adventure of the Six Napoleons" accepted his role as a popular writer for the modern mass media.

Conan Doyle's formula for the Sherlock Holmes stories did after all contain an element of originality. The Sherlock Holmes formula is in itself original. This formula allowed the reader the familiarity of a serial without necessarily having to read each episode or instalment, as Doyle invented a new fictional character and he used this character in a new fictional form, which was the connected series of illustrated and finished short stories to be published in a popular magazine.

The discourses about mechanical reproduction and the craft of the writer in "The Adventure of the Six Napoleons" run parallel to its criminal plot, and their scope goes beyond the story in two ways. The first reaches outward towards the audience of the Sherlock Holmes stories. The repetitive Sherlock Holmes formula with its reproduction of the same narrative structure is neither artistic nor innovative or original, but it circumscribes the modern, technological, metropolitan world with its ambivalent attitude to progress with a strict narrative pattern that affords its readers reassurance in their reception of the stories. The second extends inward to the author of the Sherlock Holmes canon. The discourse about the mechanical reproduction of the Napoleon busts in Benjamin's sense of the term is combined with the writerly discourse in a way that recognizes and

4 die unvergleichliche Bedeutung von Atget, der die Pariser Strassen um neunzehnhundert in menschenleeren Aspekten fest-hielt. Sehr mit Recht hat man von ihm gesagt, dass er sie aufnahm wie einen Tatort. Auch der Tatort ist menschenleer. Seine Auf-nahme erfolgt der Indizien wegen. (Benjamin 1974: 485)

appreciates the value of the part of Doyle's work that is formulaic, and as such "The Adventure of the Six Napoleons" documents a turning-point in Arthur Conan Doyle's career as a writer between "The Adventure of the Final Problem" and the "Adventure of the Empty House".

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