THE LOTUS, THE LION, AND THE DETECTIVE

AN EXPLORATION OF BUDDHISM AND ITS THEORY OF KARMIC CAUSATION IN ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE'S SHERLOCK HOLMES STORIES

"THE PIPE WAS STILL BETWEEN HIS LIPS."

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DEDICATION

To Dr. Michael S. Newton — The Holmes to my Lestrade, thank you.

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And to my wonderful fiancé. Thank you for your support, for providing me with the time to write this thesis in the first place and most of all, for keeping me sane.

"Violence does, in truth, recoil upon the violent, and the schemer falls into the pit which he digs for another."

— Sherlock Holmes in *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*

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INTRODUCTION

"Violence does, in truth, recoil upon the violent, and the schemer falls into the pit which he digs for another."

— Arthur Conan Doyle, *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*

When Sherlock Holmes excitedly exclaims these words after having solved the murder of a young woman, he essentially sums up the underlying constant that we find both in classic detective fiction and in all Eastern philosophical thought and religious traditions. It is the law of Karma: the idea that "all actions have consequences which at some point will affect the doer of the action at some future time" (Reichenbach 1).[1] The quote above has been taken from "The Adventure of the Speckled Band", a story steeped in the brine of the British Raj, its colonial connections operating similarly in many of Holmes's adventures (Pascal 76). Arthur Conan Doyle wrote his stories during an eventful era. The Victorian Age saw the rise of industrialism, the British Empire, the decline of traditional Christianity, the rise of agnosticism, and the enormous impact of Darwinian evolutionary theory. Like many of his contemporaries, Doyle very much struggled to fit his ideals and beliefs into the religious framework into which he had been born. He quickly concluded, as I shall discuss in this thesis, that what he was looking for was, in fact, a very different philosophical framework. He embarked on a life-changing spiritual journey which, as I hope to prove in this thesis, would affect his personal understanding as well as impressing itself upon the characters and stories in the fictional worlds he created.

Holmes's words, with which I have chosen to start this thesis, might as well have been spoken by a Buddhist teacher. In fact, references to Buddhism are abundantly present in the Holmes stories, and the idea of Karma, or "what goes around comes around", permeates the narratives. In this thesis, I shall argue that

[1] In this thesis the terms law, theory, doctrine, concept and idea will be used interchangeably when referring to Karma.

Doyle's interest in Buddhist ideas, primarily Karma and reincarnation, acts as a controlling concept in the Sherlock Holmes stories as well as working through the character of Holmes himself. To demonstrate this, I shall explore Doyle's own relation to 'Eastern' religions and the cultural context (particularly in relation to colonialism), while offering a close reading of the Holmes stories that draws out how notions of Karma are central to them.

In Chapter One, I examine Doyle's interest in these matters by delving into his life and character more deeply. I shall also lay out key aspects of the cultural context within which Doyle wrote his stories and how he, as well as his contemporaries, were affected by matters such as religion, Empire and the crisis of faith. I shall also discuss how Buddhism eventually ended up suffusing Western thought, ideals and literature and thus became available to Doyle.

Chapter Two deals with detective fiction and why the genre would have appealed to Doyle. I shall pay special attention to the genre's rules, its narrative shape and the various roles of the victims, the villains and the heroes. The aim of this analysis is to provide a general overview of what detective fiction entails, as well as establishing it as a profoundly ethical genre.

In Chapters Three and Four, having fully established the context for the discussion, the thesis investigates the processes of Karma and of Doyle's detective stories. Chapter Three deals with both the historical and doctrinal consensus of Karma and with the Victorian construction of it. It analyses the theory of karmic fruition in some selected works by Arthur Conan Doyle. I shall focus on how Karma theory affects the victims, the villains and the heroes in these stories and on how they set the wheel of karmic justice into motion. My aim is to investigate how the novels and stories represent and use Karma in their plots and in the beliefs and ideologies they propagate. I shall set up a theoretical framework, using the most widely accepted features of Karma theory as described in contemporary works by, for example, Johannes Bronkhorst, Bruce Reichenbach and David Burton as well as late-nineteenth-century texts from J. Jeffrey Franklin and Max Müller to name but a few. Special focus will lie on the principle of causality through the notion of *phalas*.[2] My research will focus on the causative chain of events present in the

[2] *Phalas* is the immediate effect, which is physical and visible. *Saṃskāras* is the transformative effect that moral action has upon the character of the agent, which is moral and invisible. The terms

stories. As Karma revolves around the idea that no bad deed goes unpunished and that good deeds will be rewarded, I expect that this approach will offer an interestingly new perspective to answering the question: 'Who is guilty'? This question is significant because, as Heta Pyrhönen points out, it is one of the two generic questions that orient and structure each and every detective narrative (4). I shall argue that the way that the notion of Karma plays out in the stories tells us something about the moral intentions of the characters.

Finally, in Chapter Four, I shall interpret Holmes's spiritual journey through the notion of *saṃskāras*, the transformative effect that moral action has upon the character of the agent. Whereas Chapter Three only focusses on one central aspect of Buddhism, in this chapter, I shall discuss a wider range of Buddhist influences. I shall argue for Holmes's reliance on the Eastern teachings while defending justice and how Doyle presents him as a spiritual teacher. It essentially discusses how Buddhism teaches us to be like Sherlock Holmes.

Due to the limited length of this thesis, I shall confine myself primarily to what scholars consider to be Doyle's best and most popular works. *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* (1892) are the collected reprint of the first twelve short stories that gripped a mass audience (Knight 69). The next eleven stories were brought together in 1894 in *The Memoirs of Sherlock Holmes*, with the concluding story "The Final Problem" ending the volume. Many critics believe these twenty-three stories are the best of the fifty-six Holmes stories (Humpherys 9). I shall also analyse two of Doyle's full-length novels: *A Study in Scarlet* (1887) and *The Sign of Four* (1890). However, to demonstrate the transformative effect of Karma on the character of Holmes, I shall now and then also refer to later works.

Over 130 years after first appearing in *Beeton's Christmas Annual* in *A Study in Scarlet*, Arthur Conan Doyle's world-famous detective still speaks to the imagination. Sherlock Holmes is arguably the "most constantly popular fictional character ever created" (Clausen 51). He has been labelled by scholars as "a synonym for detective", (Knight 67) and not just the most popular character ever to emerge from the mystery genre but "a genre —virtually an industry — unto himself" (Hockensmith 27). This thesis endeavours to explore both the moral universe in which our beloved detective walked and the sleuth himself, without

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have slightly different meanings in different religious traditions. I have adopted these terms and their accompanying meaning from Bruce Reichenbach's Law *of Karma: A Philosophical Study*.

disregarding his creator. It is time, therefore, to get to know the man behind the legend a little better, as a biographical approach reveals the extent of Doyle's interest in 'Eastern' religions and the impact on him of colonial ideologies.

CHAPTER 1 THE MAN WHO CREATED SHERLOCK HOLMES

In the eyes of many, Sir Arthur Ignatius Conan Doyle (1859-1930) will always be just that: the creator of Sherlock Holmes. Even when the legendary author got married himself, he could not escape his creation. Upon hearing about his elopement, a newspaper in Buenos Aires announced: SHERLOCK HOLMES QUIETLY MARRIED (Pascal 8). Doyle had hoped to be remembered as a prophet of spiritualism, not as the author of escapist detective stories. However, it turns out that fate had other plans for him.

While this thesis deals with Buddhism and Karma, Conan Doyle was born into an Irish-Catholic family and grew up in Britain during a time when England was very much a Christian country. Given Doyle's background and the religious standards of his time, there are other religious frameworks that might seem like a more straightforward choice when it comes to analysing his tales, such as Christianity, for example. Also, linking an Eastern doctrine to what might be regarded as the most quintessentially 'English' literary work ever written, may seem like a big leap at first. Therefore, some justification seems in order.

To substantiate my claim that Doyle might consciously or subconsciously have been writing his famous stories with Buddhism and in particular the theory of Karma in mind, it is necessary to get to know the man behind the myth a little better. Those who study the flamboyant author will soon find that, as is the case with Sherlock Holmes himself, there is more to him than meets the eye. As Jon Lellenberg, Daniel Stashower, and Charles Foley quite rightly note: Arthur Conan Doyle was not just the creator of the legend of Sherlock Holmes, he was also "a physician, a sportsman, a crusader for criminal and social justice, a war correspondent, a military historian, and ultimately a spokesman and missionary for a new religion" (12).

By exploring Doyle's attitude towards religion, his philosophical and spiritual struggles, as well as the cultural impact of Empire and the arrival of Buddhism in the West, I aim to substantiate Doyle's interest in Buddhism and Karma and his affinity with the East and its people. To back up my argument, I shall, among other works, rely upon Doyle's autobiography: *Memories and Adventures,* which was published in *The Strand* magazine between 1923 and 1924.

1.1 The Search for Truth

Doyle's childhood was by no means been easy. His family was poor, and his father was an alcoholic who eventually got locked up in an asylum. By the age of seventeen, Doyle had openly rejected the Catholic faith, claiming at that time to be an agnostic. In his biography, we read that "[t]he suffering and disease he encountered in medical school further weakened his ability to believe in the divine, benevolent God of Christianity" (Pascal 38). However, he did not doubt that some great spiritual and moral truth existed that should guide human life. He began his long search for a philosophy of life that could be tested and proved, yet still had a place in it for the Divine (39). Even though in the end, spiritualism provided Doyle with the moral and religious framework he had been seeking all his life, this did not happen until after he finished his most popular Sherlock Holmes story (139). In the meantime, other systems of belief, among which Buddhism and the Laws of Karma, might have dominated Doyle's way of thinking. As the Victorians saw Buddhism more as a philosophy than a religion, this could very well have been what drew Doyle to the doctrine in the first place (Almond 94-5).

It is no secret that Doyle, like some of his contemporaries, very much struggled to find a philosophy in life that he could fully accept. Doyle once wrote that "[t]here is nothing which makes the monstrous claim that God supports one clique of mankind against another … If a man be kindly and gentle, there is no fear for him in the beyond whether he is or is not the member of any recognized Church on earth" (Pascal 139). Given his childhood, it is easy to see why Doyle would quickly have failed to be able to explain the vicissitudes of life through the religious framework that he had been given. More importantly, it is easy to see why the reassuring idea of Karma as an explanation for seemingly unfair individual hardships would have appealed to him. While reading his *Memories and Adventures*, we find out that during his search for this philosophical truth, Doyle indeed found himself very much intrigued by Buddhism and especially its theory of Karma. He studied Blavatskian Theosophy for a while, an esoteric religious movement which draws upon Eastern religions like Buddhism. He writes that Theosophy presented him with "a very well thought-out and reasonable scheme,

parts of which, notably reincarnation and Karma, seemed to offer an explanation for some of the anomalies of life" (Doyle, *Memories* 73).

Not only did Doyle express great interest in the laws of Karma, but from his biography, we also learn that he had some substantial knowledge of the matter. Around the year 1884, only a few years before the release of his *A Study in Scarlet*, Doyle studied the work of Alfred P. Sinnett, a recognised late-nineteenth-century authority on the subject of Karma and reincarnation. In his biography, Doyle refers to Sinnett's *Esoteric Buddhism* as "a most notable book" (Doyle, *Memories* 73). *Esoteric Buddhism* (1883) documents the life of the Buddha and his reincarnations and introduces the laws of Karma. Doyle even makes mention of his own possible rebirth when he comments on the idea of rebirth and reincarnation in his biography; a matter on which his mind, at that time, "is still open" (Doyle, *Memories* 7).

Traces of Sinnett's work can be found throughout the Sherlock Holmes stories. In one of the many Mahatma letters written to Sinnett, we come across the following passage:

> Bearing ever in mind the wise old adage, 'As below so above' — that is the universal system of correspondences — try to understand by analogy. Thus will you see that in this day on this present earth in every mineral, etc., there is such a [*cosmic*] spirit. I will say more. Every grain of sand, every boulder or crag of granite, *is* that [*universal*] spirit crystallized or petrified. … How then can we doubt that a mineral contains in it a spark of the *One* as everything else in this objective nature does? (Barker, *The Mahatma Letters to A. P. Sinnett*)

In *A Study in Scarlet*, John Watson finds an article written by Holmes, which is very significantly entitled "The Book of Life". In it, we see this same idea reflected:

> From a drop of water, a logician could infer the possibility of an Atlantic or a Niagara without having seen or heard of one or the other. So all life is a great chain, the nature of which is known wherever we are shown a single link of it. Like all other arts, the Science of Deduction and Analysis is one which can only be acquired by long and patient study, nor is life long enough to allow

> any mortal to attain the highest possible perfection in it. (Doyle, *The Complete Sherlock Holmes* 13)

What this demonstrates is that "Holmes often relies on the Eastern esoteric teachings in developing and using his deductive powers" (Aveline). This is a matter to which I shall return to in Chapter Four.

Finally, Doyle's *The Mystery of Cloomer*, a story which entirely revolves around three Buddhist priests in search of enlightenment, was published about a year after Doyle's first Sherlock Holmes novel. To write such a book, Doyle would have had to do research on Buddhism and the laws of Karma. Doyle's knowledge of and affinity with Buddhism and its theory of Karma are evident and might have been, at least for a while, Doyle's predominant conviction before he eventually became increasingly preoccupied with the supernatural and spiritualism.

1.2 The Colonial Conan Doyle

In late nineteenth-century fiction, imperial fiction and detective fiction frequently overlap, an interconnection that begins with Wilkie Collins's *The Moonstone* (1868). The Sherlock Holmes stories are no exception to this rule. With his colonial background, Doyle was himself very much a product of Empire. But what were his views on British imperialism and colonialism? Did he, like so many of his contemporaries, support the idea that the British way of life was superior and should be forced upon other cultures?

Many scholars have commented on the presence of foreignness and "The Other" in Doyle's work.[3] Most of them simply conclude that the Holmes's stories reflect society's anxieties of the time: the belief that the foreign was dangerous, their savage ways contagious and their rituals and beliefs a threat to the Victorian way of life as well as the Empire's supremacy. Holmes, then, serves as a mediator between late-Victorian British society and the 'foreign' threatening it (Taylor-Ide 55). Others have claimed that Doyle's work presents a more divergent view of imperialist endeavours, by stating that the stories also reflect the fact that the Victorians were very much in awe of countries such as India, and that the Oriental

[3] For an elaborate analysis of the presence of foreignness and "The Other" in Doyle's work see Simon, Franklin, Dixon, Hodgson, and Otis.

elements in the stories are not solely presented as negative but rather as enticingly exotic and decadent (Fraser 19). An example of this is the description of Thaddeus Sholto's house in *The Sign of Four*, which is practically an advertisement for the spoils of Empire as it is steeped to the brim with Oriental souvenirs. It is described as a "diamond of the first water in a setting of brass" (Doyle, *Complete* 99). In *Teller of Tales: Life of Arthur Conan Doyle* (2008), Daniel Stashower even states that Doyle's work is "largely free of the [racial] slurs and stereotypes that mar the work of his contemporaries" (47).

It is likely that Doyle's tales inhabit a late Victorian contradiction, equally enamoured of and fearful about Eastern influences. Whatever Doyle's personal interests and beliefs may have been, the Sherlock Holmes stories reflect some of the nineteenth century popular responses to British Imperialism. Certain points of view or statements that would be considered racist and xenophobic today were considered perfectly normal in the Victorian era. Doctrines like Buddhism were constructed through Western images of the Oriental Mind and influenced by many local concerns. Thomas H. Huxley's *Evolution and Ethics* (1893) is a good example of how scholars of that time tried to tie Buddhist concepts and beliefs to concepts that would be easy for the Victorians to grasp. Huxley's readiness to take Buddhist ideas into serious account in the course of a general intellectual discussion shows that in the latter quarter of the nineteenth century, Buddhism had had an impact on intellectual circles in the Victorian milieu (Rajapakse 301). Scientists like Huxley lost their faith because they believed that science and Christianity were in opposition. This strengthened the appeal of a religion without a God (Gilley and Loades 307).

Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978) is often seen as the first and most influential critique of misconceptions of cultural knowledge and imperial power. Scholars like Bernard Lewis and Ibn Warraq have been critical about Said's book, labelling it as anti-Western. However, their criticism mainly focusses on what Said has to say about scholarly research, not literary fiction. Also, academics today continue to refer to Said's findings when discussing misinterpretations of the Orient.[4] In *Orientalism*, Said states that, due to the European Colonial rule and political domination, all Western writing on the Orient is based on romanticised

[4] One of the main criticisms of Said's work is that he fails to make a distinction between Orientalism in the media and popular culture and academic studies of the Oriental, see Adiong 8.

images of Asia and are steeped in bias. He makes the case that Western attitudes towards Eastern culture, customs and beliefs, are a reflection not of reality, but of European imperialism and racism.

There are plenty of Victorian misconceptions to be found in Doyle's work. Doyle's ignorance of certain foreign aspects is very clearly demonstrated in "The Speckled Band". In Holmes's, arguably most famous adventure, Dr Grimesby Roylott has murdered one of his stepdaughters using an Indian Swamp adder and is planning on doing the same thing to her sister. According to Holmes, Roylott had trained the snake using milk. He would put the snake through the ventilator between his bedroom and his stepdaughter's, with the certainty that it would crawl down the rope and land on the bed and eventually bite her. He would then summon the snake by blowing his whistle, upon which the snake would then climb back up the rope, through the vent, and back into the large iron safe in which Dr Roylott kept it. As everyone who has read the story knows, Roylott's plan eventually backfires when he himself is bitten by the snake. However, as Cait Murphy quite rightly points out: "Snakes don't have ears, so they cannot hear a low whistle. Snakes can't climb ropes. Snakes can't survive in an airtight safe. There's no such thing as an Indian swamp adder. No snake poison could have killed a huge man like Grimesby Roylott instantly" (65). Murphy's point demonstrates that this snake, as well as many other Oriental elements in his stories, are a product of Doyle's imagination and by no means a representation of reality.

Furthermore, some of the passages in the tales sound quite racist and prejudiced. In *The Sign of Four*, when Holmes describes the culprit as having "[d]iminutive footmarks, toes never fettered by boots, naked feet, stone-headed wooden mace, great agility, poisoned darts", Watson immediately exclaims: "A savage!" (Doyle, *Complete* 127). The villain, Jonathan Small himself, describes his black accomplice Tonga as a "hell-hound", and a "little devil" with "savage instincts", and when Watson and Holmes finally catch Tonga we are confronted with the following passage:

> a little black man — the smallest I have ever seen — with a great, misshapen head and a shock of tangled, dishevelled hair. Holmes had already drawn his revolver, and I whipped out mine at the sight of this savage, distorted creature. He was wrapped in some sort of dark ulster or blanket, which left only

> his face exposed, but that face was enough to give a man a sleepless night. Never have I seen features so deeply marked with all bestiality and cruelty. His small eyes glowed and burned with a sombre light, and his thick lips were writhed back from his teeth, which grinned and chattered at us with half animal fury. (Doyle, *Complete* 139)

This quote is an example of how Doyle is sometimes guilty of racial bias. Even though Doyle is in the habit of attributing negative characteristics to bad people, as will become evident in Chapter Three, he rarely chooses to portray them in such a bestial way. However, as discussed before, comments like these were common in Doyle's time. One needs not look further than Rider Haggard's *King Solomon's Mines* (1885) or Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1899), to find examples.

As Doyle was knighted for using his medical training to serve the British Empire, it is unsurprising that several scholars describe him as an enthusiastic supporter of the Empire.[5] Doyle dismissed the anti-war movements of, for example, Leonard Hobhouse and John A. Hobson in his book on the war in South Africa (*The War in South Africa* 82). However, I believe that despite this, Doyle was also aware of the fact that the Empire came at a price; not because these countries were 'contagious', as some scholars have argued, [6] but because deep down, he understood that there were some things ethically wrong with it. In this same book Doyle writes that the high mortality rate among the imprisoned Boer children "lies heavy … upon the heart of our nation" (Doyle, *The War* 75). This attitude is reflected in Doyle's stories through the concept of Karma. In Holmes's adventures, people who encounter the Empire rarely meet good fortune. Even Watson himself, at the beginning of *A Study in Scarlet*, falls ill after having spent time in the colonies. Also, the characters in his stories are never pardoned for their theft and murder in the colonies; just take Roylott's snake, which functions as an instrument of colonial retribution, as an example. The thorn that kills Bartholomew in *The Sign of Four* is, symbolically, not an English thorn but an Indian one.

However, it is not my aim just yet to stray into the realm of karmic retribution any further. Instead, I shall first explain the appeal of Buddhism and its

[5] For a discussion of Doyle's Imperialist attitude see Otis, Wynne, and Lally.
[6] For an examination of Holmes as an immune system against Empire see Thomas, Fraser, and Otis.

Law of Karma to the Victorians and how it eventually entered popular consciousness.

1.3 The Lotus and the Lion

When Holmes discoursed on the Buddhism of Ceylon during a dinner party at his house in *A Sign of Four*, he was being less awesomely erudite than Dr Watson gave him credit for. It is a misconception that the Europeans of a century ago had no accurate knowledge of, and little interest in, the cultures and religions of Asia. Buddhist themes and allusions are abundantly present in modernist literature such as works by Joseph Conrad, T.S. Eliot and Hermann Hesse, among others. In this chapter I shall explain how Buddhism, accompanied by its Law of Karma, ended up in the minds of the Victorians.

Scholars like J. Jeffery Franklin have analysed the British constructions of Buddhism in Victorian times and have presented us with a range of Victorian responses to Buddhism. Franklin demonstrates that Buddhism strongly affected late-nineteenth-century British thought as a side-effect of Britain's colonial rule. "Many Victorians were fascinated by the life story of the Buddha", he writes. Within the British imagination, the Buddha was "an ideal Victorian gentleman, a 'verray parfit gentle knight'", (Almond 79) not unlike Holmes. Subsequently, "reincarnation and Karma infiltrated the discourse of the late Victorian decades and early twentieth century" (Franklin 21). Two of the most significant contributors in this regard were Marie Corelli and H. Rider Haggard, two of the period's most widely read authors of romance novels. Rudyard Kipling's *Kim*, which is suffused with ideas about reincarnation and leaving the wheel of suffering, is another popular contribution. One of the most popular long Victorian poems was Edwin Arnold's *The Light of Asia*. It was first published in 1879 and went through at least 100 editions (Almond 1). Some other key events in introducing the theory of Karma into Western thought are Charles Wilkins's 1785 translation of the *Bhagavad Gita* and later the commencement of the study of comparative religion through works of anthropologists and linguists such as Müller (Kippenberg 280, Franklin 57). The result of this was "a substantial body of translations, analyses, and commentaries" with a predominant focus on Buddhism (Franklin viii). Buddhist terms like 'enlightenment' and 'Karma' were popularised in the Western world, and

Christopher Clausen even identifies Buddhism as "the most appealing of non-Christian religions to the nineteenth-century mind" (13).

Karma is no longer a solely Indian, or even an Eastern concept. To use the words of Ronald Neufeldt, "Karma and rebirth have become part of the religious history and therefore, the cultural fabric of the western world" (xi). Several other scholars have discussed the increasing popularity of Karma-like doctrines in the West.[7] Popular culture often uses phrases like 'Karma is a bitch' and 'what goes around comes around'. Mentions of Karma are now commonplace and abundantly present in Western literature, TV shows, films and song lyrics. Western scholars have shown an increased interest in the theory of Karma, an overview of examples of which is provided by Silvestre in *Logica Universalis* (36). Today, even "basic assumptions of modern scientific psychology are being challenged by Karma" (Coward 272). How did this development come to pass?

Even though Buddhism had already been around for millennia, it practically did not exist in the West until the moment the British colonised the sub-continent, which was near the beginning of the Victorian period. However, Victorian sources teach us that ideas like the doctrine of reincarnation and Karma had already been introduced into Western intellectual discourse a long time before, through the writings of Pythagoras. We can find it in works like Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*, which deals with the concept of metempsychosis: that is, the transmigration of the soul and especially its reincarnation after death. Another early philosopher, Lucretius, noted: *ex nihilo nihil fit,* 'nothing comes from nothing',[8] which also reflects the idea of Karma. The Biblical phrase 'as you sow so shall you reap' which can be found in Galatians VI bears a close resemblance to Karma theory and is, of course, a phrase with which the English would have been familiar.

However, the doctrine did not truly enter popular consciousness in the West until after its encounter with Buddhism in the mid-nineteenth century. During this time, Buddhism became "a familiar topic in literature and the periodical press" (Franklin 88). But what is it exactly that made Buddhism so appealing for the Victorian public?

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[7] For an in-depth analysis of the increasing popularity of Karma in the West see Kaufman, Bender, and Franklin.

[8] This phrase originally appears in Greek in a poem by Parimedes titled *On Nature*, of which only fragments survived. Later it appears in Lucretius's *De Rerum Natura* in Latin, which is more well-known (Bailey 563-65).

Because of the nineteenth-century 'crisis of faith', which happened to coincide with the introduction of Buddhism to England, the Victorian era saw the birth of many hybrid-religions such as that practised in the Theosophical society. Moreover, Darwin's *The Origins of Species* (1859), which was released in the same year as Arthur Conan Doyle was born and to which Holmes alludes in *A Study in Scarlet* (Doyle, *Complete* 28), had a significant impact on a world which was already gradually becoming more and more scientific. People were trying to make sense of a world in which God might not exist (Neufeldt 233). As a result of this, the Victorians invented many new types of religion during the last quarter of the nineteenth century in order to resolve their conflict between spiritualism and materialism. These alternative, hybrid religions were generated at a rate "unprecedented in modern Western history" (Franklin 50). Philip Almond states that the Victorian period was:

> united by its concern for the issues that Buddhism brought into focus. Buddhism in theory spoke eloquently to a period united by the questions of creation and cosmology, of the Bible and biology, of theism and atheism, of annihilation and immortality, of human nature and its apparent exceptions. Buddhism provided diverse answers, but the questions asked of it were pointedly Victorian ones. (80)

What Almond demonstrates here is that to the Victorians, Buddhism was the "more inspiring, nourishing, and intellectually convincing alternative" to the religion that they were now beginning to question (Puttick 6). As Max Müller put it: "If religion is meant to be a bridge between the visible and the invisible, between the temporal and the eternal, between the human and the divine, true Buddhism would be no religion at all; for it knows nothing invisible, nothing eternal; it knows no God, in our sense of the word" (Quoted in Almond, 94).

The Victorians constructed Buddhism in such a way that it would be able to bridge the gap between materialism and spiritualism. Many reporters writing in the periodical literature assumed a parallel between a scientific law and the law of karmic causality and thus saw it as a solution to this problem (Franklin 59). As Franklin puts it, "Victorian Buddhism was both a model of a just universe and a universe without the need of a God" (59). For many Victorians:

> Buddhist thought appeared to fill the gap between Darwinian evolutionary theory and a Judeo-Christian moral universe in jeopardy from that theory … The perceived compatibility of Buddhism with science, Darwinian science in particular, but, at the same time, its reassurance that the universe, rather than being governed by "random selection", is ordered by immutable law that is undeservingly just, resonated strongly with the post-Darwinian British sensibility. (Franklin, *The Lotus and The Lion* 148)

Rajapakse explains that even though Buddhism encompasses a moral philosophical dimension, it is, of course, a religious doctrine of salvation. He writes that "[i]ts philosophical statements are spiritual in orientation, and their roots are to be found in meditational and related esoteric experiences acquired in the course of a quest for salvation" (Rajapakse 298-9). If we link this to Doyle's search for truth as described previously, we shall find that Buddhism embodies all that Doyle was looking for. He was, after all, in search of a philosophy of life that could be tested and proved and which at the same time, still had a place in it for spiritualism and the Divine.

There is one final aspect of Buddhism and Karma that the Victorians found particularly appealing that I still need to discuss. Victorians considered Buddhism's morality a key factor in its success (Almond 112). In his 1905 essay "The Message of Buddhism to the Western World", W.S. Lilly states that "there is really one sole dogma of Buddhism —that the whole universe is under one and the self-same law of causation which is ethical" (209). Thomas Huxley suggests it is to these ethical qualities that Buddhism owes its marvellous success (Almond 112). Almond writes that "[t]he Victorian stress on the moral sense as a key element in religious consciousness was a central theme in the nineteenth-century analysis of Buddhism" and that "[e]ven among those most critical of Buddhist doctrine, there was an almost unanimous appreciation of its morality" (Almond 111-2). Even the former prime minister and writer John Russell, Viscount Amberley declared that Buddhism:

> has the credit of placing morality far above everything else as a means of obtaining the blessing promised to believers … Whatever objections may be made to the doctrine of 'Karma' there can hardly be a question that it is in accordance with the highest conception of

> morality … It is our Karma that determines the character of our successive existences … The balance, either on the credit or debit side of our account must always be paid — to us or by us, as the case may be. (Quoted in Almond 88)

Today, Karma is a crucial concept in two out of five world religions as well as many smaller religious movements and spiritual traditions and New Age movements (Bender, 2010). The concept of Karma became further embedded into Western culture through the teachings of Helena P. Blavatsky, the founder of the above-mentioned Theosophical society. This was one of the first societies to preach a doctrine of Karma in the modern Western world. In his *Esoteric Buddhism* (1883), a book held in high regard by Doyle, as previously discussed, Sinnett argues that the esoteric doctrine of Theosophy was "really the missing link between materialism and spiritualism" because it was a "spiritual science" (66). As Clausen explains, "as time went on Buddhist terms and concepts became available for general use in moral, philosophical and religious discussion even by people who were not particularly attracted by the system as a whole" (Clausen 13). And thus the concepts of Karma and reincarnation, as well as vivid images of the exotic and mysterious orient, were injected into nineteenth-century literature of, for example, Rudyard Kipling, Joseph Conrad, W.B. Yeats and, as should become abundantly clear from this paper, Arthur Conan Doyle.

Both the law of Karma and detective fiction inevitably touch upon the questions of guilt and responsibility. In the next chapter, I shall, therefore, discuss how the idea of Karma is central to the detective story.

CHAPTER 2 THE MORAL DETECTIVE

The primary appeal of Buddhism to the Victorians was its ethics. An ethical concept subsequently requires an ethical genre. Detective stories like those by Doyle assert the "the inevitableness with which wrongdoing is punished" (Symons 19). The stories have a deep moral conviction and can, therefore, function as a source of ethical insight in a similar way as the law of Karma does.

Detective fiction is, as Symons calls it: "a unique literary form" (9). This becomes particularly evident when one considers how many critics have attempted to formulate strict rules for the genre. Its retrospective pattern usually follows one of the typical detective fiction formulas, some of which I shall discuss in this chapter. The stories revolve around the themes of life and death, innocence and guilt, crime and punishment, and judgement and forgiveness (Bray 2). They inevitably touch upon the debate of what is right and what is wrong and ultimately aim to answer the question: Who is guilty?

In this chapter, I shall provide an overview of the detective fiction formula, its narrative shape and especially its deep moral structure. I shall argue that a lot can be learnt from detective fiction because behind the familiar 'whodunit' lies a moral universe waiting to be explored. It is one of the many reasons why it, and especially Doyle's works, lends itself perfectly for a case study of the theory of Karma. After all, as Rachael Haliburton states, "those who pick up a detective novel for the pleasure of reading an intriguing plot cannot help but be exposed to a world in which choices matter, justice is important, and evil must be fought" (23). I aim to substantiate these claims in the following discussion.

2.1 Theories of Detective Fiction

Scholars have frequently discussed the status of detective fiction, referring to it in many different ways varying from cheap pulp at worst to guilty pleasures at best. They often regard it as escapist literature, which people should not take too seriously.[9] However, Stephen Knight's statement from the 1980s that "[n]ot much

[9] Ousby, Knight, Dennis Porter, Priestman and Haliburton, to name but a few, all start their books with a discussion as to whether or not detective fiction should be considered serious literature.

has been written about crime fiction" (1), can no longer be held true. Countless books, theses and articles followed Knight's *Form and Ideology in Crime Fiction*, demonstrating that detective fiction can no longer be considered mere entertainment or an inferior branch of literature, but that it is worthy of academic research.

The genre is considered formula literature and therefore follows an archetypal story pattern (Cawelti 122). Pyrhönen calls it "a game played according to a set of rules" (103). According to Wystan H. Auden, the basic formula is as follows: "a murder occurs; many are suspected; all but one suspect, who is the murderer, are eliminated; the murderer is arrested or dies" (406). This formula only partly applies to the Holmes stories. First of all, because 'main problem' in Doyle's work often does not revolve around murder. Furthermore, we are often left in the dark as to the possible suspects, as Holmes is usually the only one who knows who they might be. Finally, as I will demonstrate later, even if there is a murderer, the conclusion in a Holmes story is not necessarily one where the murderer either gets arrested or dies. In Holmes' case, there is a third option.

Other scholars such as Ronald Knox, Julian Symons and Stephen Knight have also attempted to establish the ultimate set of rules by which all detective fiction should abide. Whether meant to be taken seriously or merely intended as a joke, in a nutshell, all these rules boil down to this: a problem is put forward, and this problem should be solved (Symons 9). Ronald Knox, one of the members of the famous Detection Club, even went as far as to put together Ten Commandments for detective fiction.[10] These commandments list laws varying from "[n]ot more than one secret room or passage is allowable" to "[t]he detective must not himself commit the crime". Agatha Cristie notoriously broke this rule in *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* (1926). This story led to a lot of controversy at the time as people felt cheated because of the unexpected climax. All in all, as Symons quite rightly notes: "few books actually conform to all of these rules" (11).

Alternatively, Dennis Porter states that the fundamental formal rule in this set is embodied in the familiar question: 'Whodunit?' The structure of the detective narrative is provoked by the investigation that flows from this question (121). It is therefore unsurprising that the teleological form of the detective story is known for

[10] The Detection Club was formed by a group of British mystery writers in the 1930s. In order to be allowed membership an aspiring member had to swear that they would abide by Knox's fair-play rules.

its typical strong closure and thus relies heavily upon its dénouement (Segal 153). Or as Susan E. Sweeney writes: “Nothing is more definitive, complete, and single-minded than the ending of a detective story” (5).

Edgar Allan Poe, who is often regarded as the founder of the detective fiction genre, stresses the importance of the resolution and the backward reconstruction of the plot in his “Philosophy of Composition” (1846). He writes that “[i]t is only with the dénouement constantly in view that we can give a plot its indispensable air of consequence, or causation, by making the incidents … tend to the development of the intention” (1). What Poe explains here is that the plot of a detective story, like Karma, relies upon a causative series of events. Holmes echoes this thought in *A Study in Scarlet* when he explains to Watson that “[i]n solving a problem of this sort, the grand thing is to be able to reason backwards” (Doyle, *Complete* 81). Since a truth needs to be discovered, we are confronted with an unbreakable chain of events, “no one link of which can be shifted” (Todorov 90). Or as Sherlock Holmes himself remarks: “You see, the whole thing is a chain of logical sequence without a break or flaw” (Doyle, *Complete* 83). This is again an example of how the genre functions as an analogy, as it were, to Karma theory.

In the case of the detective story, this causative chain will eventually lead to the unravelling of the case. According to Tzvetan Todorov in “The Typology of Detective Fiction”, the genre is characterized by not one but two stories — the story of the crime that tells “what really happened” and the story of the investigation, which explains “how the reader (or the narrator) has come to know about it” (160). It, therefore, consists of two intersecting stories. The solution to the problem can never look arbitrary. It is crucial that enough clues are dropped throughout the story to prevent the causative chain from being broken. To quote Suzanne Bray, “[t]he plot unfolds in a universe based on natural and eternal law, where the connection between cause and effect holds good” (13). Something Holmes would agree upon as he explains to Watson: “the little things are indefinitely the most important” (Doyle, *Complete* 197).

2.2 Components of the Game

In order to introduce the different components that the detective story requires, I shall rely upon the five elements that Auden introduces in his essay "The Guilty Vicarage" (1963): the *milieu*, the victim, the murderer, the suspects and the detective (407). Even though Auden mainly refers to detective fiction from the 1920s onwards, these elements are also present in the Sherlock Holmes stories and therefore provide a solid framework for describing the different characters present in the stories. By linking these elements to Doyle's work, I aim to offer a good sense of what general detective fiction entails.

The Milieu

The milieu in the detective story is, in general, the setting where the story takes place. In Holmes' case, we usually find that the people that call upon him for help are in a certain state of confusion. The detective's clients often come from broken family backgrounds and have to deal with family issues such as inheritance and stepparents. His clients, just like the Victorian public, are disturbed and in need of reassurance. It is easy to see, therefore, why the comforting figure of the detective hero would have appealed to its late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century reader. Through the detective hero, they were presented with "a reassuring world" in which those who try to disturb the established order are always discovered and punished (Symons 18). In general, the genre offers its readers "a glimpse of the world as it might be, a world in which good men and women do not stand idly by and allow the worst aspects of human nature to triumph without opposition" (Burke xvii). As Symons puts it: "The aloof, super-intelligent and slightly inhuman detective like Holmes, who occasionally acts outside the law, was particularly attractive when posed against such terrifying figures because he was a kind of saviour of society, somebody who did illegal things for the right reasons, who was really *one of us*" (18).

The Villain

As mentioned in the passages above, a good detective story requires a strong closure, as is typical for the genre. Therefore, the criminal can never escape his or her punishment. Justice will always have to be served. The villain disturbs the

natural equilibrium within society, and this balance needs to be restored before the resolution.

The causative chain should always remain intact. As Auden states, it is vital that the villain repents in order for society to forgive him (409). LeRoy Panek explains this as follows: “The discovery and punishment of the criminal clears the slate. It brings justice and makes society whole again. Innocence is rewarded, and faith restored” (169). This is the way 19th and 20th-century detective stories work. However, this does not automatically mean that the culprit is always punished by law - and especially not the case in the Sherlock Holmes stories. This is something that I shall come back to later.

The culprit’s identity should come as a surprise to the reader, but at the same time, he or she should be convinced that everything he has previously been told about the culprit is consistent with his being a villain (Auden 409). The latter fits the previously discussed retrospective pattern of the detective story.

The Victim

No fictional character’s suffering is as unrelenting and inevitable as that of the victim in a detective novel. In fact, in said stories, the victim’s suffering is not only expected by the reader but “welcomed with gleeful palm-rubbing and a devilish chuckle” (Collins). After all, if there is no victim, there is no case and therefore, no mystery to be solved. The role of the victim is clear. He or she must suffer in one way or another in order for the story to commence. The death or suffering of the victim means ‘curtain-up’ for the detective story.

So what typifies the detective novel victim? Auden explains that these stories call for a special kind of victim. The victim’s character traits and actions are paradoxical: on the one hand, the victim's intentions or actions should be bad enough to evoke murder, blackmail or any other kind of crime as the victim needs to “involve everyone in suspicion” (408). On the other hand, it is required that society feels emotionally invested enough to want to solve the mystery surrounding his or her suffering. In other words, the victim should have both a good as well as a bad character to fulfil the requirements needed for the story to be able to move forward.

Auden’s description implies there is no such thing as an innocent victim. For why else would they have become a victim in the first place? In the case of the

Sherlock Holmes stories, we shall find that the victim's themselves are indeed often guilty of something themselves. In fact, as I shall demonstrate in the subsequent chapters, the roles of victim and villain are often ambiguous in Doyle's stories, more so than Auden implies is the case in general detective fiction.

The Hero

Whereas there are many classic police detectives such as Inspector Morse or John Rebus, some detectives like Holmes seem to uphold justice outside of the institutions that represent justice and the law. In Doyle's stories, these institutions often prove to be imperfect and are thus inevitably prone to error (Priestman 61-2). Collins even goes as far as to state that "[t]he very presence of the detective novel implies a critique, rather than a celebration, of a given society's judicial system. As a genre, it is the affirmation of an alternative sense of justice, an alternative vision of law represented by a figure outside the state established channels" (105).

In many detective stories, we find this discrepancy between legal justice and human justice, which means that the detective himself is at times forced to resort to violence. Of course, Holmes only does so if this is inevitable and required in order to enforce natural justice. The detective thus serves as "an agent of justice", as someone "who responds through his feelings to the imagined harmonious, balanced, and ethical world that we ought to be living in, and whose commitment to it is revealed through his actions" (Haliburton 7).

According to Auden, the hero in the detective story should be "eccentric" and "instinctively ethical" (408). Hans Peter Rickman states that the protagonist in the detective novel should be "intelligent, courageous and resolute" (157). However, this does not mean that the detective himself is morally perfect or omniscient. In fact, the vast majority of detectives in classic detective fiction are flawed in some way (Bray 6). Holmes, who is known for his persistent drug use and questionable social skills, definitely fits into this category. Auden mentions "childish boasting" as one of the trope weakness of the amateur detective genius (410). Again, this is a description in which we can quite easily recognise the famous sleuth. Even though Doyle might not have meant these characteristics to be moral failings of the detective, they still make us question Holmes's intentions. After all, Holmes's motivation for solving crimes is questionable. Does he do so from the

desire to do good, or simply because he enjoys the exhilaration of solving the case and wants to prove his intellectual superiority? It is easy to see how Auden's statement that "[m]ost amateur detectives … are motivated by avarice or ambition and might as well be murderers" (409), would apply to some modern adaptations of the famous sleuth such as BBC's *Sherlock* (2010-2017). But what about the Holmes we find in Doyle's Canon?

The character of Sherlock Holmes is "a contradictory mixture of a man with amazingly unemotional scientific rationality" on the one hand, but "a dreamy romantic violinist and drug taker" on the other (Humpherys 8). Most well-known detectives have a certain duality of mind. It is a trope which derives from Poe's Dupin. Holmes too, seems to have two selves contained within him. Watson captures this dual nature in the following passage from "The Red-Headed League":

> My friend was an enthusiastic musician, being himself not only a very capable performer but a composer of no ordinary merit. All the afternoon he sat in the stalls wrapped in the most perfect happiness, gently waving his long, thin fingers in time to the music, while his gently smiling face and his languid, dreamy eyes were as unlike those of Holmes, the sleuth-hound, Holmes the relentless, keen-witted, ready-handed criminal agent, as it was possible to conceive. In his singular character the dual nature alternately asserted itself, and his extreme exactness and astuteness represented, as I have often thought, the reaction against the poetic and contemplative mood which occasionally predominated in him. The swing of his nature took him from extreme languor to devouring energy; and, as I knew well, he was never so truly formidable as when, for days on end, he had been lounging in his armchair amid his improvisations and his black-letter editions. Then it was that the lust of the chase would suddenly come upon him, and that his brilliant reasoning power would rise to the level of intuition, until those who were unacquainted with his methods would look askance at him as on a man whose knowledge was not that of other mortals. (Doyle, *Complete* 188)

What we can conclude from this passage is that there is more to Holmes than meets the eye. It seems there are two different natures hidden within the famous sleuth, two natures with perhaps different wants and needs. It is through the concept of Karma that I hope to reveal Holmes's true intentions. I shall further elaborate on the importance of these two seemingly contradictory sides of Holmes in my analysis of his character in Chapter Four.

2.3 The Ethical Detective

As discussed in Chapter One, the Victorians saw Buddhism as a primarily ethical system (Almond 112). Similarly, detective fiction explores moral issues with complexity and is a profoundly ethical genre. This idea is captured eloquently by the fictional detective Lord Peter Wimsey in the following passage from *Thrones, Dominations,* an unfinished work by Dorothy L. Sayers, completed by Jill P. Walsh (1998). When Harriet calls detective fiction "frivolous" compared to "real" literature such as *Paradise Lost, Great Expectations, Crime and Punishment* or *War and Peace,* Lord Wimsey explains that detective stories "contain a dream of justice" (173). What the detective describes here is the deep ideological constant that lies at the heart of the detective novel. He continues by saying that the stories "project a vision of a world in which wrongs are righted, and villains are betrayed by clues that they did not know they were leaving. A world in which murderers are caught and hanged, and innocent victims are avenged, and future murder is deterred" (Sayers 173).

What this demonstrates is that the detective novel, like the theory of Karma, offers us valuable insights into concepts of good and evil. In order further to demonstrate this, it is necessary to take a closer look at Porter's formulation of the fundamental formal rule of detective fiction. As mentioned before, he states that the genre's narratives revolve entirely around the question: 'Whodunit?' However, in line with Pyrhönen's observation, I would like to make the case that this question is incomplete. To find out 'who did it', in line with Todorov's discussion of the narrative structure of the plot (1975), a reconstruction of the past is necessary. The analysis of the causal network that eventually leads to crime automatically forces the narrative to touch upon the questions of guilt and responsibility. Therefore, the

detective's quest for the truth has a marked moral dimension. The reader is naturally invited to consider this moral dimension, as well. Hence there are two universal questions that structure every detective narrative: the question 'whodunit?' is paired with the question 'who is guilty?' (Pyrhönen 4).

Detective fiction heightens our ethical sensibilities as it allows us "to imagine a world in which ethical choices matter, good triumphs over evil, justice prevails, harmony can be created or restored, and human beings have what they need to flourish" (Haliburton 6). Several scholars have already demonstrated how fictional works can be morally valuable and should, therefore, be taken seriously by moral theorists.[11] Haliburton describes the subtle nuance of this in the conclusion of her book *The Ethical Detective* (2018). In this book, Haliburton treats detective fiction as a source of ethical insight, and as a tool that can be used to spark the moral imagination. Regarding this notion, she writes:

> If you doubt this, consider the many ways in which fiction has led to social change (with *Black Beauty*, … generating an interest in animal welfare, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* making the evils of slavery real to many readers who then supported politicians who worked for abolition, to novels like *Animal Farm* and *1984* providing the most trenchant critiques of particular political systems); the fact that technological devices like tablets and cell phones were first described in science fiction, not in engineering essays; and the fact that in the film industry, which often transforms books into movies, employs thousands of real people and makes millions of real dollars. The ethical explorations of detective fiction, in the same way, have the potential to transform their readers (by developing their ethical sensibilities and their capacity to think in morally imaginative terms), and our world (by putting forth imaginative descriptions of what worlds in which ethical judgements matter, and in which moral character is important, might look like), which we can then use to reconstruct bits of the world that we actually live in – even if they

[11] *The Moral Imagination* (1986) by Christopher Clausen, for example, considers how moral judgements are represented in imaginative literature in a similar way as Martha Nussbaum does in her *Poetic Justice: The Literary Imagination and Public Life*. Both works demonstrate the critical role fictional narratives can play in philosophical debates.

> are only tiny bits – so that they, too, reflect this underlying moral structure, thereby transforming something that was only imagined into something real. (Haliburton, *The Ethical Detective* 228)

Haliburton's words explain how powerful the moral imagination can be, and this indirectly contributes to our understanding of how detective stories can offer us insights into ethical debates of right and wrong. The way that the characters' actions come back to haunt them tells the reader something about the nature of their intentions and the moral nature that lies within their hearts. The moral universe that lies within the detective novel is reflected in the real world: a world in which choices matter and justice will always be sought after. The backward reconstruction of the plot built on an imperative causative chain of events in combination with the deeply embedded concepts of justice and reciprocity makes the formulaic genre known as detective fiction a promising case study for the theory of Karma. To use the words of Lord Peter Wimsey once more: "Detective stories keep alive a view of the world which ought to be true. Of course, people read them for fun, for diversion, as they do crossword puzzles. But underneath they feel a hunger for justice, and heaven help us if ordinary people cease to feel that" (Sayers 173). Perhaps, then, people read detective fiction for the same reason they adopt religious doctrine. After all, as Stephen Kendrick writes: "We all desperately crave both internal order and cosmic understanding: a sense that there is a hidden force operating through and beneath us that makes life not only sensible and just but, more importantly, reveals compassion at the heart of creation" (*Holy Clues* 199). Now this "craving" for cosmic understanding is something to which Doyle could relate and which was of great influence to him when he wrote his stories.

All in all, detective fiction lends itself perfectly as a case study for the theory of Karma. Perhaps this is what subconsciously drew Doyle to writing detective fiction in the first place. It could serve as an experimental playground for this philosophical framework that intrigued him so much because of how it depends upon and simultaneously explores the concepts of justice and reciprocity. As Haliburton notes, detective fiction "is a literary form that asks readers to consider large questions of good and evil, justice and injustice, guilt and innocence, virtue and vice" (xiv). Philosophers like Martha Nussbaum already demonstrated that fictional narratives play a crucial role in philosophical debates. Other scholars have shown how imaginative literature represents moral judgements, the collection of

essays in Christopher Clausen's *The Moral Imagination* (1986) being a good example of this critical turn. Doyle's work, therefore, offers a unique opportunity to demonstrate how detective fiction can serve as a case study for philosophical discussions of ethics and moral knowledge. I shall act upon this opportunity by applying to those works the notion of karmic causation, or Karma theory. It is time, therefore, to delve deeper into the core work of Doyle.

CHAPTER 3 THE THEORY OF KARMA

Buddhist teaching can perhaps best be summed up by The Four Noble Truths which were said to have been preached by the Buddha in his First Sermon. According to John Strong, the Four Noble Truths can be described as follows: Life is characterised by *dukkha*, 'suffering' caused by desire or craving. By eliminating our inherent craving ("thirst"), it is possible to end this suffering. The best way of accomplishing this is to follow The Noble Path, which will eventually lead to Enlightenment (Strong 287).

The idea of 'Karma' permeates Eastern philosophical thought and can be found in most Eastern religious traditions like Hinduism, Jainism and Buddhism (Keown 329; Reichenbach 399; Watanabe 89). The term originates from Sanskrit, in which it has a multiplicity of meanings, among which we find: 'action', 'labour', 'act', 'work' and 'fate'. Karma has appeared as a loanword in the English language since the early nineteenth century, and over time, it has found its way into everyday conversation and popular culture (Bronkhorst xix).

Scholars are still undecided as to whether Karma is "a theory, a model a paradigm, a metaphor or a metaphysical stance" (O'Flaherty xii). Some scholars refer to Karma as a doctrine or law while others prefer less absolute terms such as theory, idea, concept or philosophy. Most of them, however, use these terms interchangeably.

The meaning of specific aspects of Karma can only be constructed by placing them within specific religious traditions. For this reason, it is impossible to speak of such a thing as *the* theory of Karma. Silvestre offers the following insights concerning the matter:

> From a strict point of view, we cannot talk about *the* theory of Karma … Aspects such as the possibility of Karma transfer, divine intervention in the karmic process, nullification of Karma, the way Karma is fructified, the role of samskaras in the karmic process, just to mention the most prominent ones, are interpreted quite differently in different traditions. We have Buddhist views on Karma, which are considerably different from Jain ones, which differ from Advaita Vedanta ones, which are different from the view of theist versions of

> Vedanta, and so on and so forth … This might lead one to argue that it is simply misleading to speak of something like the theory of Karma … You have to pick up one tradition or a specific set of texts and see what it says about the doctrine; this will give you the only thing you can have: a theory of Karma. (Silvestre, "Karma Theory, Determinism, Fatalism and Freedom of Will" 38)

On the other hand, immediately after this passage, he adds: "that one cannot speak about the theory of Karma does not imply that there are not principles and presuppositions common to all different theories of Karma" (38). In line with this observation, there are several scholars like Wendy O'Flaherty and Bruce Reichenbach who have indeed successfully attempted to construct an outline of the essential constituents that together form *a* theory of Karma, one that can be applied to the majority of religious traditions that accept the notion as well as to Victorian Karma.

Of course, several Western concepts entertain notions similar to the concept of Karma. Certain ethical theories like consequentialism and virtue ethics bare a resemblance to the theory and scholars like Damien Keown and Reichenbach have demonstrated how Karma can be successfully analysed using Western ethical concepts (Keown 329). However, for all the resemblances, there are also many differences, and despite some apparent overlap with other theories, the concept of Karma remains unique. Reichenbach, for example, explains how the law of Karma is "a special application of the principle of causality" but by no means identical to the universal law of causation (408). As opposed to the universal law of causation and Newton's Third Law of Motion, the causal feature that lies at the heart of Karma is a moral one (400). This means that Karma is not merely a depiction of a chain of events, of mere actions followed by reactions, as opposed to the Western law of cause and effect. In other words, Karma equals *moral* causality. What this implies is that karmic consequences teach us something about the moral value of our actions.

The origins of the doctrine of Karma lie "shrouded" in the history of India (Reichenbach 10). Reichenbach states that "by the time of the flowering of the heterodox systems, the doctrine was fully developed and widely accepted in both Indian thought and Indian culture" (13). However, its exact origins are difficult to

pinpoint. The reason for this is that by the time that the belief in Karma started to be properly documented, it was already firmly entrenched into various religious doctrines. As a result of this, it is difficult to say precisely when and how the principle came into being. Whatever the specific origins of the concept of Karma, the notion was eventually applied to "the moral sphere of human action" (Reichenbach 13). In other words, the term was ethicized. Major Eastern religions like Buddhism ethicize Karma in such that it is moral and immoral actions that have consequences (Gombrich 14). Whereas the term might initially have had a more general meaning referring simply to "actions" and "the chain of causes and effects that connect deeds to each other", it soon started to be applied primarily to "the consequences of human acts" (Becker 943). Karma thus provides us with "a defence of universal or cosmic justice by showing us how justice is implemented in human moral experience" (Reichenbach 135-136). The theory of Karma was later linked to the doctrines of rebirth and reincarnation of the soul (13).

Müller refers to Karma as 'Karman', and defines it as "the continuous working of deeds". He explains that "all that seemed wrong in the world must have been the effect of causes, or deeds done, if not in this, then in a former life", and that "[n]o deed (Karman) good or bad, small or great, could ever be without its effect, its reward or punishment. This was the fundamental principle of their ethics, and an excellent principle it was" (*The Six Systems of Indian Philosophy 362*). Sinnett, whose work was likely the most detailed source of Buddhism and Karma to Doyle, also praises the principle of Karma by referring to it as "the most interesting features of Buddhist philosophies" (Sinnett, *Esoteric Buddhism* Chapter V).

The law of Karma rewards good deeds and punishes bad deeds. Karmic consequences, thus, inevitably touch upon the questions of guilt and responsibility. Analysing how Karma plays out in a fictional narrative that upholds karmic justice, such as the Sherlock Holmes stories, should, therefore, help in the discussion of these matters.

As mentioned before, it is important to bear in mind that Victorian writers such as Doyle would have treated ideas of Karma and reincarnation based on the array of sources that were available to them at that time. This thesis, therefore, deals both with what Johannes Bronkhorst describes as "orthodox Karma", which is "the kind of Karma that is most often written and thought about in the surviving literature

of India" as well as with Victorian Karma, the Victorian construction of the doctrine. After all, as Franklin points out, "what most non-Buddhist Westerners think they know about Buddhism consists largely of cultural stereotypes, many of which originated with the Victorians" (x).

The predominant idea that lies at the heart of the theory of Karma, however, is not so far removed from generally accepted Western thought at all. It can be likened to Newton's Third Law of Motion, which states that for every action, there is an equal and opposite reaction (Long 94). The karmic doctrine has to it a natural order that "contains within its structure a pervasive sort of *justice,* and in particular a built-in strand of retribution" (Neufeldt 340). According to the theory of Karma, the structure of the universe has, as it were, a "built-in moral dimension" and "all those who accept this belief in one form or another are convinced that good deeds will be rewarded and bad deeds punished" (Bronkhorst 118). Now, this is the kind of universe that the reader of the Holmes stories should be familiar with. Doyle's stories and the law of Karma are, as I shall demonstrate in this chapter, indissoluble.

3.1 A Morally Balanced Universe: The Principle of Causality

Causality is the key concept within the theory of Karma.[12] Or to use Holmes's own words: "all life is a great chain, the nature of which is known whenever we are shown a single link of it" (Doyle, *Complete* 13). It is a fundamental law of causality, a universal law of justice. This implies that natural consequences flow from every series of actions.[13] We see this law of karmic causation reflected in the universe of Sherlock Holmes. It influences the victims as well as the villains, resulting in the fact that it can sometimes be difficult to discover much sympathy for the victims, as in the end it often turns out that they 'had it coming'. In Sherlockian detective fiction, crimes are never left unpunished. Watson highlights the invisibleness of Karma when he says that "justice must be done, and the depravity of the victim [is] no condonement in the eyes of the law" (Doyle, *Complete* 28). In the end, no one escapes his or her karmic consequences.

[12] For a detailed discussion of the principle of causality in Karma theory see Reichenbach, O'Flaherty, Wantanabe, and Sinnett.
[13] Wantanabe 5 and Dennis Porter 39.

J. Jeffery Franklin notes that Karma "naturally and automatically links every action or choice to its consequences" and therefore, "it indicates an inescapable mutual responsibility linking each being to all other beings". The system of Karma, then, describes an inherently moral universe (Franklin 79). The implicit consequence of this suffuses the universe of Sherlock Holmes. When discussing Karma, we refer to the results of those actions as 'fruits', and similarly, we can speak of 'karmic fruition' (Long 94). Holmes resonates the idea of karmic fruition in "The Adventure of the Three Orange Pips" when he states that "[t]he ideal reasoner … would, when he has once been shown a single fact in all its bearings, deduce from it not only all the chains of events which lead up to it, but also all the results which would follow from it" (Doyle, *Complete* 229). He also echoes the idea of Karmic retribution and suffering to Mrs Ronder in "The Adventure of the Veiled Lodger" when he tells her that "[t]he ways of fate are indeed hard to understand. If there is not some compensation hereafter, then the world is just a cruel jest". A little later, he comments: "Your life is not your own. Keep your hands off of it … The example of patient suffering is in itself the most precious of all lessons to an impatient world" (Doyle, *Complete* 1147).

Karma ensures that there is justice in the world, and as Becker states, it is "the causal principle that ensures that there will be a just compensation for our actions" (944). A regularly heard argument against the existence of such a system is that people who live honourable lives may still suffer and are not always rewarded and on the other hand that people who do evil deeds often seem to get away with it. A key point to remember is, however, that, as opposed to the popular idea of 'instant Karma' passed on by the Victorians to the modern world, the conclusive outcome of Karma is seldom instantaneous. This means that the effects of Karma do not always become visible immediately and therefore one does not always get one's due straight after performing the action that set the karmic wheel into motion in the first place. The effect of karmic actions can even "be accumulated" (Reichenbach, 14). Keown says "the time between justice and its fruit is unpredictable" (19). Causal justice can occur immediately, but more often, it takes place later in someone's lifetime or even in subsequent lives. In agreement with this, Long explains that "today's joy or suffering may be the fruit of Karma from a previous life. And the actions one takes today will inevitably bear fruit, if not in this life, then in a future one" (1).

Doyle's stories reflect these ideas through characters like Lucy Ferrier, whose death comes to her as a liberation; not a punishment. It is Lucy's death that delivers her from a much more heart-breaking fate, namely a long and miserable life in the harem of Enoch Drebber. We learn from the book that she was stuck in a "hateful marriage", that people saw "death in her face" and that she was "more like a ghost than a woman" (Doyle, *Complete* 71). For the Buddhist, however, death is not solely a negative thing; it is a transition into a next, possibly better, life. Perhaps for Lucy, finally meeting death after having escaped it in the desert all these years ago, after having experienced what it is like to love and be loved not just by her adoptive father but also her lover, is a much kinder fate.

The idea that causal justice does not always occur instantly offers insight into the seemingly unfair world that we live in. David Burton illustrates this point quite clearly when he says that teachings of Karma and rebirth are "reassuring" as "they function as a natural cosmic law that ensures moral justice, which so often seems to be lacking in this life" and that sooner or later "justice will be served". Furthermore, "the all too common experience that virtue is unrewarded and vice unpunished in this life is corrected in the long term; the moral balance will be readdressed over the course of lifetimes" (33). Therefore, in Buddhism, Karma offers a "moral justification for apparently unwarranted social inequality and individual hardships" (49).

Be that as it may, Doyle, while writing his stories, was limited by one of the fundamental rules of detective fiction — namely the requirement of a complete, definitive and absolute ending. It is one of the requirements of the genre that the mystery cannot be left unsolved and the criminal uncaught. Doyle was, therefore forced to adapt the doctrine for his purpose. As a result of this, in his stories, Karma practically always comes to fruition within the story.

3.2 Instruments of Karma

In Doyle's stories, several vehicles of Karma can be distinguished, and they come in many shapes and sizes. Holmes himself stands as probably the most obvious instrument of Karma. As the epitome of moral justice, Holmes ensures karmic fruition throughout the stories, often functioning as the instrument of that justice. Meeting the demands of police and legal procedure seems to be subordinate to this

function. The dénouement of Doyle's stories is the moment when poetic, or karmic justice takes place. Watson often highlights this by stating, for example, that neither Holmes nor he will be able to sleep "until justice is done" (Doyle, *Complete* 28). However, the solution is not always necessarily accompanied by legal punishment, as Holmes often works outside the law.

"The Speckled Band" provides a strong example of a story in which Holmes functions as Karma's instrument. Even though Holmes claims that he is "indirectly responsible for Dr Grimesby Roylott's death" (Doyle, *Complete* 281), we quickly learn that the incident does not weigh upon Holmes' conscience, indicating that Holmes is well aware of the fact that Dr Roylott deserves his fate. "I am not the law, but I represent justice so far as my feeble powers go" (1076), is what Holmes says in "The Three Gables". It proves unclear which law Holmes is referring to here. Is he talking about Scotland Yard, or perhaps something much bigger?

The agent of Karma does not necessarily need to be human as karmic retribution can also happen through natural disaster. In "The Adventure of the Five Orange Pips", Holmes plans on having the murderers arrested upon their arrival in America. However, Karma has other plans for them. The ship with the murderers sinks on its journey across the Atlantic Ocean before the police can arrest them.

Other characters can also take on the role of the instrument of Karma. In *A Study in Scarl*et, we meet Jefferson Hope, who functions as a true advocate for the law of Karma in his quest to avenge John Ferrier and his daughter. We read that Jefferson sets out "upon the track of the avenging angels" to revenge the deaths of the Ferriers and that in his heart, he nursed "the fierce desire for vengeance which possessed him". In fact, "he was careless what became of his own life, as long as he obtained what he knew to be justice" (72). When Jefferson finally confronts Strangerson in his hotel room, he tells him that "the hour has come when he was to answer for the life he had taken so long before" (79). When Jefferson gives Drebber the pills, he says: "Let us see if there is justice upon the earth or if we are ruled by chance" (79), at this moment proving himself a firm believer in the law of Karma. This idea returns a few paragraphs later when Jefferson shares how he had to stab Strangerson in the heart because he attacked him. He claims that even had he chosen to take the pills, "[i]t would have been the same in any case, for Providence would never have allowed his guilty hand to pick out anything but the poison" (80). Jefferson is not the only one who alludes to the law of Karma. In response to

Jefferson dying of an aneurysm before he can be tried, Watson writes that "[a] higher Judge had taken the matter in hand" (81). Since the law of Karma is inviolable, Jefferson, as well as Watson and Holmes, so it seems, understand that the wrongdoer's suffering is inevitable.

3.3 Karmic Consequences: Picking the Fruits

In the closing words of "The Adventure of the Cardboard Box," Holmes reflects on the circularity of the law of Karma: "What is the meaning of it, Watson?" he asks, "What object is served by this circle of misery and violence and fear? It must tend to some end, or else our universe is ruled by chance, which is unthinkable" (Doyle, *Complete* 941). What Holmes describes here are the fruits of Karma, of *phalas* and *saṃskāras*, the endless circle which can only be broken by the annihilation of craving and ignorance. It is what Buddhists call The Wheel of Life, which is used to teach the concept of Karma (Epstein 23). In the Wheel of Life, the individual is condemned to suffer, to a greater or less degree, through a series of reincarnations in varied forms. He can escape the Round only by acquiring Enlightenment, which elevates him to Buddha-hood (Baring-Gould).

Reichenbach describes the general relation between cause and effect as *phalas.* It includes "the immediate effects, visible and invisible, which actions produce or bring about" (25). Geshe Rabten, a Tibetan author, writes that "[j]ust as a seed cannot grow into a plant of a different type", therefore, "so our actions can only produce actions of their own type. An unvirtuous action can only give rise to suffering, and a positive action can only give rise to happiness. This order can never be mixed up" (Wilson 114). Burton states that Buddhism recognises that actions "can be good, bad or morally neutral" (35). Good Karma can also be referred to as 'white', and bad Karma is often labelled 'black'.

Our discussion consequently leads us to the question of what exactly qualifies as a good deed and what, for that matter, makes an action bad. In other words, which actions bring about black Karma and which lead to virtue? In general, it seems that selfishness, ignorance and craving are wicked and therefore lead to black Karma and suffering (Burton 62). Holmes acknowledges this in for example "The Adventure of the Blue Carbuncle", where he elaborately discusses how the valuable gemstones can only lead to murder and misery (Doyle, *Complete* 256).

Jeffery Long declares that the universe responds unkindly to actions that are "violent, or motivated by hatred, selfishness, or egotism" (1). Additionally, Reichenbach states that "perhaps the most miserable people are those who seek only their own happiness. That is, making oneself happy, if the sole motivating factor, is almost certainly doomed to fail" (141). These statements again emphasise that selfless deeds lead to merit and selfish deeds to failure and suffering. Doyle's tales reflect this sentiment, as in them, fate punishes the characters that act out of selfish reasons.

In the universe in which Holmes operates, craving — especially for money — always leads to misery. In *A Sign of Four*, Major Sholto is guilty of avarice. He has kept the Agra treasure to himself even though it did not rightfully belong to him. As a result of this, we read that "he was very fearful of going out alone" (Doyle, *Complete* 101). He starts to receive threatening letters; his health starts to decline and eventually, he dies. Similarly, Jonathan Small makes it very clear that the craving for wealth can only lead to misery. He says: "It was an evil day for me when I first clapped eyes upon the merchant Achmet and had to do with the Agra treasure, which never brought anything but a curse yet upon the man who owned it. To him it brought murder, to Major Sholto it brought fear and guilt, to me it has meant slavery for life" (142).

In "The Speckled Band", Dr Roylott is a selfish man with a bad character. He physically mistreats his stepdaughter, Miss Stoner. We learn fairly early on in the story that Dr Roylott was a murderer even before he killed his stepdaughter. While working in his practice in Calcutta, India, he beat his native butler to death and narrowly escaped a capital sentence. Dr Roylott suffers the karmic consequences of his colonial crime pretty much instantaneously, for we learn that "he suffered a long term of imprisonment and afterwards returned to England a morose and disappointed man" (Doyle, *Complete* 267). We read that "his conduct had long been notorious in the country", he is extremely lonely and has no friends (270). He becomes "the terror of the village" by constantly starting brawls and picking fights. The Indian animals which he has brought home from his trip to the colonies were "feared by the villagers almost as much as their master" (268). Dr Roylott eventually dies by the agent he had planned to use against his stepdaughter, an Indian swamp adder, supposedly the deadliest snake in India.

On the other hand, the universe responds benevolently to pure, kind and selfless actions (Long 1). Reichenbach writes that "our actions become truly moral when they grow out of love for other persons, seeking their welfare and not simply our own" (141). Doyle reflects this idea through, for example, the character of John Ferrier in *A Study in Scarlet*. Throughout the novel, Doyle portrays him as a most admirable man. He is as a kind, hard-working warm-hearted, decent man. He adopts the little girl Lucy after she loses her family in the desert and loves and treats her as his own daughter. In accordance with the law of Karma, the story repays Ferrier's good deeds kindly as he gains great respect, land and good fortune. We read that "his farm and all that belonged to him prospered exceedingly" and that "[i]n three years he was better off than his neighbours, in six he was well-to-do, in nine he was rich and in twelve there were not half a dozen men in the whole of Salt-Lake-City who could compare with him" (54). Even though John Ferrier eventually loses his life at the hand of Strangerson, he dies at an old age after having lived a life in luxury together with his beloved daughter, who has grown up to become a young woman by then.

There are plenty of other examples to be found. In "The Copper Beeches", Mr Fowler, a "very kind-spoken and free-handed gentleman" (341), longs to be with the love of his life for all the right reasons. He eventually gets to marry her and together they lead a prosperous life. In *The Sign of Four*, Watson deems it unlikely that he and Mary will end up together because he cannot possibly fathom she would be interested in him. However, both Mary and Watson show their good character and good intentions by making it abundantly clear that neither of them has any interest in the Agra treasure. When it turns out that the box is empty, Watson exclaims: "Thank God!" Mary seems more interested in the box than in the treasure, which, very meaningfully, has a "broad hasp, wrought in the image of a sitting Buddha" (144). It is the teachings offered by the Buddha, and not the gems and jewels, that hold the most value, according to Doyle. Mary enforces this by commenting on how beautiful the box is and subsequently asking whether it is Indian work (143). Before the end of the novel, Watson and Mary declare their love for each other.

A further implication of these laws is that there is no such thing as an innocent victim. Consequently, suffering is the result of one's actions. After all, if all suffering has a cause, then human beings should always be held accountable for

their previous behaviour (Wantanabe 3-4). As Knight rightly notes, the Sherlock Holmes stories "present the crime as being largely justified punishment for past immorality" and therefore, the murder victims are very rarely completely innocent. (69). The victims are thus no ordinary victims, but victims of bad Karma. This is yet another example of how the influence of Eastern doctrines affected Doyle's writing.

Of course, there are a few rare occasions in which a character dies without there being an obvious cause. Dr Roylott's stepdaughter is one of those seemingly innocent victims. The short story "Being the Doctrine of Karma" (1895) by Edwin Arnold, presents its reader with a similar problem. In the story, which Arnold translated from Sanskrit and which was published in a Victorian newspaper called *The Graphic*, a young boy gets bitten by a poisonous snake and dies. The rest of the story revolves around a familiar question: Who is guilty? Eventually, one of the characters in the story explains who is responsible for the boy's death:

> Not Death, nor this vile reptile, nor Myself
> Stand guilty anywhere at any time
> Of any creature's dying …
> The Karma of this child;
> No other cause was there that brought its end;
> Of Karma did he die. That which he wrought,
> In many lives ere this, led hereunto.
> Implicitly. What he had wrought before
> Made this and nothing else the outcoming
> Of what was wrought
> (*Arnold*, "Being the Doctrine of Karma")

We can replace the boy in this story by Miss Stoner. The rest, including the agent of death, could remain the same. According to the theory of Karma, a possible explanation would thus be that Miss Stoner accumulated black Karma in a previous life. Of course, it could also be the case that Doyle simply chose not to follow the presented framework in the case of Miss Stoner.

Watson's description of Enoch J. Drebber at the beginning of *A Study in Scarlet* foreshadows the idea that Drebber is anything but an innocent victim. "Sinister was the impression which that face had produced upon me that I found it difficult to feel anything but gratitude for him who had produced removed its owner

from the world", says Watson. He follows this up by saying that "[i]f ever human features bespoke vice of the most malignant type, they were certainly those of Enoch J. Drebber, of Cleveland" (Doyle, *Complete* 28). Doyle describes him as an unmannered drunk with a violent temper who had "disgustingly free and familiar manners" towards women (36). And indeed, we soon learn that both murder victims very much have it coming. Doyle portrays them as greedy, selfish, loathsome people who are only after Lucy because of her father's property and who have very little respect for the well-being of other human beings. In line with the different religious doctrines that entertain the notion of Karma, Doyle punishes greed, arrogance and selfishness in his stories. The deaths of these two men are thus simply a matter of time. Karma eventually finds them through Jefferson, who becomes "a human bloodhound", and not just because he eventually murders them for their sins (73). Drebber and Strangerson spend the rest of their lives on the run, constantly looking over their shoulder living in fear, until that fateful day that Jefferson finally finds them.

So what about the ones that got away? There are, after all, some very rare occasions at which the culprit manages to get away at the end of the story. However, even in these cases, Doyle suggests that the certitude of Karma will catch up with the villains in the end. Holmes is forced to let Mr Windibank go at the end of "A Case of Identity", for, as he explains to Watson: "there is no law, I fear, that can touch the scoundrel". However, he does make clear that "there never was a man who deserved punishment more". He then predicts with absolute certitude: "That fellow will rise from crime to crime until he does something very bad, and ends on the gallows" (204). Hereby Holmes insinuates that the effects of Karma will catch up with Mr Windibank sooner or later and thus Doyle again represents the law of Karma as inviolable.

Furthermore, karmic consequences are not always external. It is, for example, also possible to simply feel extreme guilt for taking someone's property. This is what we would call an internal karmic consequence (Reichenbach 16). It is the reason why Holmes chooses to let the gem thief off the hook in "The Blue Carbuncle". Holmes knows that the internal karmic consequences will haunt the thief for the rest of his life and explains to Watson that "[t]his fellow will not go wrong again; he is too terribly frightened" (Doyle, *Complete* 264).

3.4 Intention Matters; or, Matters of Intention

Richard F. Gombrich writes that morality and immorality are "mental properties of individuals" and therefore differ from person to person (13). This statement highlights the importance of the intention of the doer. Whether an action leads to black or white Karma and the intensity thereof then depends on what that individual considers to be moral or immoral and the attitude from which we act (Burton 34). Even intention without action still matters for *phalas* and *saṃskāras*. In other words, as Gombrich puts it, "every bad intention … makes you worse, every good intention, makes you better" (197). An implication of this is that it is possible to "sin in one's heart" without actually carrying out the intended action (Keown 336). In the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*, documented in the seventh Century BCE and translated into English by F. Max Müller, we read: "And here they say that a person consists of desires, and as is his desire, so is his will; and as is his will, so is his deed; and whatever deed he does, that he will reap" (*The Upanishads* 416).[14] From this we can take away that one's desire and that what one eventually reaps is directly linked.

A consequence of this is that the kind of Karma an action produces is determined "by the intentions, dispositions, desires, character and moral virtue of the agent" (Reichenbach 27). Also, unintentional actions do not have the same karmic effects as intentional actions. In "The Blue Carbuncle", Henry Baker is rewarded with a new hat and a goose at the end of the story even though he technically has stolen a precious stone. Of course, as Henry did not have any knowledge of the stone being in the goose in the first place, he does not suffer any negative karmic consequences.

Similarly, Gombrich explains that "all thoughts, words and deeds derive their moral value, positive and negative, from the intention behind them" (13). This would mean that two persons committing the same crime might suffer slightly different karmic consequences based on how immoral that specific deed was according to their judgement. Subsequently, one man's Karma and another man's Karma are not the same thing. In *A Study in Scarlet*, for example, Jefferson Hope

[14] As it is possible that Müller is weighing his translation with Biblical echoes. I compared Müller's translation to Henry C. Warren's *Buddhism in Translations* (1896) who quite similarly writes that "the reward a man reaps accords with his deeds".

and Strangerson are both guilty of the same crime. Their karmic consequences, however, clearly have a different outcome for each of them because of their differing intentions for committing the crime in the first place. This becomes evident from their completely divergent attitudes towards their deaths. Jefferson, who is suffering from an aortic aneurysm, tells the police: “If I die tomorrow, as is likely enough, I die knowing that my work in this world is done, and well done”. When Jefferson eventually does die and is found on the floor of his cell, he is reported to be found “with a placid smile upon his face; as though he had been able in his dying moments to look back upon a useful life, and on work well done”. Drebber, on the other hand, is found with “an agitated expression upon his face” (Doyle, *Complete* 81), an expression which juxtaposes Jefferson’s blissful facial expression mentioned earlier and highlights how not just the actions, but the intention behind these actions determine karmic retribution. Perhaps it is as Saint Paul says: “Except I had known the law, I had not known sin” (*New International Version*, Rom. 7.7).

All in all, Doyle infuses his narratives with the laws of Karma. Good deeds lead to virtue; bad deeds lead to vice. Nobody escapes their karmic consequences, and there are no innocent victims, only victims of bad Karma. Through Holmes’s rhetoric, it becomes clear that even the culprits who seem to get away in the first place will eventually reap what they sow. The characters in the stories resonate elements of what Karma theory stands for, and Doyle distinguishes between several agents of Karma throughout his work. There is, however, still one last, very important factor which demonstrates how Buddhism and the law of Karma influenced Doyle, and that is the character of Holmes and his spiritual journey, which I shall now examine.

CHAPTER 4 THE DETECTIVE

At the heart of Buddhism lies the idea that ignorance and craving cause suffering. This suffering can be ended by overcoming attachment to material reality and through wisdom and concentration. As I have written earlier, one can do this by following The Noble Path, which leads to Enlightenment (Strong 287). Buddhism states that there are seven Factors of Awakening which lead to Enlightenment. They are:

1. *sati*, 'mindfulness' or 'awareness'
2. *dhamma vicaya*, 'investigation of the nature of reality' or 'searching of truth'
3. *viriya*, 'effort', 'energy', 'determination'
4. *pīti*, 'joy' or 'rapture'
5. *passaddhi*, 'tranquillity'
6. *samādhi*, 'concentration'
7. *upekkha*, 'equanimity'

In this chapter, I shall demonstrate that Doyle reflects these seven Factors of Awakening in the characteristics that he attributes to Holmes. As I have pointed out before, within the character of Holmes lie two different natures. We have Holmes the "sleuth hound" which we see when "the game is afoot" one the one hand; this Holmes mainly displays *dhamma vicaya*, *viriya* and *pīti*. On the other hand, we have dreamy, meditative Holmes, who shows us the factors of *passaddhi*, *samādhi* and *upekkha*. *Sati* functions as the balancing factor in this equation.

The aim of this analysis is to argue that we might consider Holmes as a spiritual teacher who is well on his way on The Noble Path towards Enlightenment. This becomes evident through Holmes's reliance on the Eastern teachings in developing and using his deductive powers in his pursuit of justice.

4.1 The Great Hiatus; or, The Missing Years

The previous chapters have mainly dealt with *phalas*, or, the immediate effects of Karma. Holmes's spiritual journey, however, can be demonstrated through

saṃskāras. They are "the invisible dispositions or tendencies to act, think, experience, or interpret experiences in ways which are conducive to one's happiness or unhappiness, produced in the agent as a result of the action". Above all, "they constitute, in effect, special modifications of the agent" (Reichenbach 25). Gombrich explains it as "a term which refers both to the process of constructing (our lives seen in prospect) and the result of that process (our lives seen in retrospect)" (198). This type of effect calls for a more thorough examination. One of the earliest examples of karmic causation comes from the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*. It tells us: "Now as a man is like this or like that, according as he acts and according as he behaves, so will he be; a man of good acts will become good, a man of bad acts, bad; he becomes pure by pure deeds, bad by bad deeds. (Müller, *The Upanishads* 416). What this extract shows is that that a person who does good eventually becomes good or at least a better person, just as a man who does evil deeds eventually becomes evil, or less virtuous. After all, "[d]eeds divide beings into lower and higher ones" (Almond 1). One's previous actions mould not only a person's moral character but also their intellectual capacities (Burton 45).

The transformative effect of *saṃskāras* on one's character naturally shines through in a person's deeds, and so it goes with Holmes. Gombrich explains that "every good deed makes a person purer and thus makes it slightly easier to repeat such a deed" (14). For example, the first time a person gives away money might feel like a wrench, but each time they do so, the generosity will come more effortlessly. On the other hand, if a person is in the habit of treating their money parsimoniously, it will become more and more challenging to act with a free hand. The character of Holmes reflects the positive transformative effect of *saṃskāras*.

Holmes's "missing years" are crucial in demonstrating his spiritual transformation. After being "resurrected" by Doyle from his tumble over Reichenbach Falls with Moriarty in "The Adventure of the Empty House," Holmes appears to Watson in the street disguised as a bookseller carrying a strange book called "The Origin of Tree Worship". To understand the significance of this, it is of importance to be familiar with the story of the Bodhi Tree, which I shall now briefly describe. Siddharta, a Nepalese prince, gave up his worldly possessions to live a life of meditative contemplation. His goal was to reach a state of perfect knowledge and compassion. After meditating beneath a fig tree for 49 days, he eventually became the first person ever to reach enlightenment. Siddharta became the Buddha,

and the big tree, the 'Bodhi Tree' is now a symbol to the path of enlightenment. Buddhists today still worship the Bodhi Tree. That Doyle would have Holmes carry a book with a clear reference to the Bodhi Tree of Enlightenment after basically reincarnating Holmes cannot be a coincidence.[15]

Of course, other religious cults also worship trees. Take the pre-Christian Anglo-Saxon pagans, for instance. However, during his encounter with Watson, Holmes explains to him that he spent his missing years in Tibet. Holmes says to him: "I travelled for two years in Tibet, therefore, and amused myself by visiting Lhassa and spending some days with the head Llama" (610). As Kendrick quite rightly points out, "Holmes is never more Britishly understated than when he uses the term amused", especially as few individual Westerners had to that time been able to penetrate the harsh climes and the inhospitable ways of mysterious Tibet (Kendrick 257-8). The British Invasion of Lhasa in 1904 had caused extreme anti-British sentiment among Tibetan Buddhists (McKay 5-22). This would explain why Holmes chooses to use his pseudonym, 'the Norwegian explorer Sigerson', to gain access to the holy city (Doyle, *Complete* 610).

Furthermore, as William S. Baring-Gould acknowledges: "We may be sure that Holmes" while talking to the head Lama, "asked him for instruction in Lamaistic Buddhism" (5011). As I have explained, Buddhists are encouraged to get rid of all desires that are manifestations of selfish craving in order to reach enlightenment (Burton 14). Interestingly, after Holmes's missing years, he gives up cocaine and severely limits his alcohol intake. In fact, there is no instance of Holmes taking cocaine or any other narcotic after his visit to the Lamas. And why would he? For the knowledge which he gathered from the lamas of Tibet would enable him to attain tranquillity of mind without the aid of a Lethean drug. Finally, Holmes only once kills a living thing afterwards in "The Adventure of the Lion's Mane". But even in this case, he regarded himself as the executioner of an evil, destructive creature. "It has done mischief enough … let us end this murderer forever", is what he exclaims before pushing the animal into the water (1139). Holmes's hiatus thus seems to have positively transformed him, as he comes back as a changed person and a better man. However, it is not the only evidence that points in the direction of Holmes being on a spiritual journey.

[15] For the story of Siddharta see Franklin 30-1 or Steif 281.

4.2 Sherlock Holmes, Buddhist Master

Sherlock Holmes is not only the master of deduction; he is also the guru of awareness and observation. “My name is Sherlock Holmes. It is my business to know what other people don’t know”, is how he chooses to introduce himself in “The Adventure of the Red-Headed League” (260). If we would ask Holmes to compose a six-word memoir, “knowing what other people do not”, would sum up his life pretty nicely. As Kendrick states, “Holmes teaches us to *see*, to truly observe the world” (263). He is devoted to the truth. Holmes’s most well-known maxim in the stories is the legendary phrase: “when you have excluded the impossible, whatever remains, however improbable, must be the truth” (324). The phrase is so well recognised that many fictional characters echo it even up to this present day, such as Spock in *Star Trek VI: The Undiscovered Country* (1991) and more recently in the 2009 reboot *Star Trek*. It is reminiscent of what a master of Zen Buddhism said a long time ago: “The foolish reject what they see, not what they think. The wise reject what they think, not what they see.”[16] Combine Holmes’s inspiring one-liners with his expertise on “the Buddhism of Ceylon” and his frequent meditative state, and Holmes truly becomes a spiritual teacher.

Of course, as Kendrick points out, “Holmes cannot be a teacher without a dutiful student” (336). Watson, who has a degree in medicine, is by no means a stupid man. His intelligence is probably well above average. However, even Watson’s intellectual abilities pale in comparison to Holmes’s astonishing deductive skills. As Watson himself comments: “I trust that I am not more dense than my neighbours, but I was always oppressed with a sense of my own stupidity in my dealings with Sherlock Holmes” (Doyle, *Complete* 189), thereby emphasising that the level of awareness that Holmes has is almost impossible to achieve. “My dear Watson”, Holmes often sighs, “[y]ou know my methods. Apply them” (110). In one of his adventures, Holmes states that “it is better to learn wisdom late than never to learn it at all” (127). Watson echoes this idea at the end of “The Final Problem,” which Doyle intended to be Holmes’s final adventure. Here Watson states that Holmes is “[t]he best and wisest man I have ever known”. By carefully choosing to refer to Holmes not simply as ‘intelligent’, but ‘wise’,

[16] These are the words of Huángbò Xīyùn, an influential Chinese master of Zen Buddhism during the Tang Dynasty.

Watson acknowledges Holmes's status as a spiritual teacher. It is through the dialogues with his "student," Watson, "that Holmes attempts to awaken in his friend the skills and the willingness to see things as they are" and not "as one wishes, believes, projects, or fantasises they are" (Kendrick 128). Here is a clear recognition of one of the overriding principles of Lamaistic Buddhism— "that true understanding is impossible by one's own unaided reasoning; the guidance of a teacher is necessary" (Baring-Gould 5061).

There is one particular unique attentional posture that Holmes continually tries to teach Watson. It is what the Buddhists call the principle of bare attention. This is how Holmes displays *sati*; or his mindfulness and awareness. Bare attention is the exact registering of an object or the clear and single-minded awareness of what actually happens to us and around us (Nayanaponika 30). How often does Holmes not instruct Watson: "you see, but you do not observe!" (Doyle, *Complete* 278). In the first few pages of "A Scandal in Bohemia", Holmes demonstrates his skills by making a couple of clever deductions, as is his custom. As always, Watson marvels at Holmes's cunning observations and declares to him: "the thing always appears to me to be so ridiculously simple that I could easily do it myself, though at each successive instance of your reasoning I am baffled, until you explain your process. And yet I believe that my eyes are as good as yours" (164). Homes subsequently explains to Watson the principle of bare attention by asking him how frequently he has seen the steps which lead up from the hall to the sitting-room. The conversation continues as follows:

> "Frequently."
>
> "How often?"
>
> "Well, some hundreds of times."
>
> "Then how many are there?"
>
> "How many? I don't know!"
>
> "Quite so! You have not observed. And yet you have seen. That is just my point."
>
> (164-5)

We can tie the principle of bare attention to the seventh state of Awakening: *upekkha*, or 'equanimity', which means accepting things for what they are with neither attachment nor aversion. Sherlock Holmes sees the world for what it is, not for what others would like him to believe.

Holmes's relationship with Watson is not the only way through which Holmes demonstrates his endeavours to reach Enlightenment, or: the state of perfect wisdom and compassion. People often claim that Holmes is not compassionate, but if we read carefully, we see that Holmes often expresses his compassion towards others. The insensitive, machine-like Holmes we meet in some modern remakes like BBC's *Sherlock* (2010-2017) is not the man we meet in Doyle's stories. Holmes seems to care for some of the victims genuinely. In "The Speckled Band" we read how Holmes kindly consoles Miss Stoner when she comes to see Holmes in his apartment and in "The Veiled Lodger" Holmes manages to talk a suicidal woman out of taking her own life (Doyle, *Complete* 226*;* 1147). Also, Holmes tries to practise non-violence for as much as possible, which is important on the path to enlightenment (Strong 228). This becomes evident from the way he treats the culprits. He often sets up elaborate traps to catch the culprits in surprise, such as he does in "The Red-Headed League", and always ensures the police force is up to speed and present so that resistance is useless and violence unnecessary.

Holmes is also altruistic, as he is not in the game for money or fame. He shows little interest in worldly possessions or money, which becomes clear from the fact that he often lets Lestrade or Gregson take credit for his work. Also, we learn that Holmes lives "for his art's sake", and Watson "[has] seldom known him claim any large reward for his inestimable services … So unworldly was he — that he frequently refused his help to the powerful and wealthy where the problem made no appeal to his sympathies" (684). Holmes considers his work to be a higher calling and therefore, often displays a negative reaction to earning money.

Furthermore, we often find Holmes in a "meditative mood" (326). It is through these moments of meditation that Holmes demonstrates *passaddhi*; 'tranquillity' and *samādhi*; 'concentration'. We regularly read that he meditates on a solution by sitting enclosed for a long period, usually sustained by strong tobacco. In "The Man with the Twisted Lip" we read that he has "constructed a sort of Eastern divan, upon which he perched himself cross-legged, with an ounce of shag tobacco" (245). Similarly, in "The Veiled Lodger" Watson describes Holmes sitting upon the floor "like some strange Buddha" (1142). In *A Study in Scarlet,* Stanford describes Holmes as a man who often "does not open his mouth for days on end", which is reminiscent of a Buddhist monk in a cloister (9). When confronted with a difficult case in "The Adventure of the Red-Headed League", Holmes suddenly

dashes off, and Watson asks him where he is going. “To smoke,” he replies. He continues: “It is quite a three pipe problem, and I beg that you won’t speak to me for fifty minutes.” He curled himself up in his chair, with his thin knees drawn up to his hawk-like nose, and there he sat eyes closed and his black clay pipe thrusting out like the bill of some strange bird (186).

As mentioned, Holmes often reaches his trance-like states through the use of stimulants such as tobacco and cocaine. Doyle’s choice for a drug like cocaine as an aid in meditation seems odd to a twenty-first-century mind. However, Doyle, in his time, misunderstands the drug. He thinks it has a relaxing effect on Holmes. To Doyle, cocaine was a way for Holmes to reach a relaxed, tranquil, Zen-like state of mind as he has Holmes explain that he finds cocaine “transcendently stimulating and clarifying to the mind” (87).

In *The Hound of the Baskervilles* (1902), we come across a passage in which Holmes uses Buddhist meditation in an interesting way. In this dialogue between Holmes and Watson, we read:

> “Where do you think I've been?”
>
> “A fixture also.”
>
> “On the contrary, I have been to Devonshire.”
>
> “In spirit?”
>
> “Exactly. My body remained in this armchair and has, I regret to observe, consumed in my absence two large pots of coffee and an incredible amount of tobacco. After you left I sent down to Stamford’s for the Ordnance map of this portion of the moor, and my spirit has hovered over it all day.” (512)

The word “it” in the last sentence is ambiguous as it can refer to the map or Devonshire or both. The passage insinuates that Holmes’s mind, in a state of meditative trance, has left his body to examine the moors. This is similar to Buddhist monks who meditate over mandalas. Mandalas are “spiritual maps that serve as guides on the journey to enlightenment” (Taylor-Ide 60). We find an example of this in Rudyard Kipling’s *Kim*, in which the lama is the only living person who can still reproduce a particular mandala called “The Wheel of Life” (181). Doyle, in his own way, adopts the principal and applies it to Holmes’s studying of a British map: “Yes, the setting is a worthy one. If the devil did desire to have a hand in the affairs of men—” Holmes pauses in the middle of his sentence

and suddenly asks Watson: “The thing takes shape, Watson. It becomes coherent. Might I ask you to hand me my violin, and we will postpone all further thought on this business” (Doyle, *Complete* 512).

Holmes’s remark shows his ability to detach his mind from cases at will through his hypnotic violin playing. As Taylor-Ide points out: “Holmes’s solitary, tobacco-filled vigils may often provide the solutions to his cases; these periods of musical self-hypnosis provide the tranquillity to allow him to recognise understanding when it comes to him” (Taylor-Ide, “Ritual and the Liminality of Sherlock Holmes” 61). This conclusion is reminiscent of passages in the *Bhagavad-Gita* and the *Upanishads* which state that knowledge is not something external, but something already present inside of you. All you need to do is discover it. (Müller, *The Upanishads* 476).

CONCLUSION

The Victorian crisis of faith led many people to explore other religious and philosophical frameworks, and Doyle took his quest for the truth further than many of them. Even though he came from a Catholic family background, the religious framework that structures his stories can be argued to be not a Western one. Due to imperial expansion and cultural appropriation in Doyle's time, it was possible for him to come into contact with Buddhism. He thoroughly studied the work of Alfred P. Sinnett, a recognised late-nineteenth-century authority on the subject of Karma and reincarnation, and was impressed by it.

Based on the findings in this research, I believe that it is possible that Doyle felt so inspired by aspects of Buddhism and its theory of Karma that traces of it suffuse and structure his stories about the legendary Sherlock Holmes. We can trace many Buddhist principles such as *phalas*, *saṃskāras* and the seven Factors of Awakening in the stories. As I have demonstrated, detective fiction operates as a profoundly ethical genre and its narrative shape, which analyses the causal network of human interactions, allowed Doyle to experiment with the effects of Karma. Key to this is the backward reconstruction of a hidden plot, a process of disentanglement which eventually leads to the solving of the mystery around a crime. Likewise, a person's guilt, innocence and intentions can also be traced back by analysing karmic fruition in the stories. The villains and victims in Doyle's stories are not black and white, and how Karma plays out in the stories teaches us something about the intentions of the characters. All in all, there are practically no completely innocent characters to be found in Doyle's work.

What the stories do teach us, however, is that altruistic deeds lead to virtue and selfish deeds lead to vice, as we would expect from a narrative which upholds the law of Karma. In the universe of Sherlock Holmes, every action or choice links naturally to its consequence. We see that Karma often takes the shape of a person, and more than once it is Holmes who wears the cloak of karmic retribution. Those that seek only their own happiness end up meeting misfortune, and fate rewards those that are truly altruistic. Due to the required dénouement of the detective story, karmic fruition must happen before the end of the story. It is one of the ways in which Doyle shaped the doctrine to suit his own purpose.

Holmes relies on Eastern teachings in his work and continually tries to awaken his friend and student, Watson. Holmes's spiritual journey symbolises Doyle's own spiritual journey. The difference is that Doyle, at the time, has not made a definitive decision as to his destination yet, whereas Holmes is well on his way on the Noble Path to Enlightenment and Buddha-hood. Doyle demonstrates Holmes's spiritual journey through meditation, his application of the principle of bare attention, his practise of non-violence, his pursuit for perfect wisdom and all these aspects are reflected in his dialogues with Watson. Doyle endows Holmes's great hiatus with spiritual significance, further demonstrating the detective's reliance on the Eastern teachings in developing and using his deductive powers while defending justice.

Doyle himself failed to see the ideological function of the Sherlock Holmes stories for a particular audience, including himself. He felt that Holmes took his mind off writing more serious literature. And who can blame him? He was, after all, a man of his time. Doyle's point of view, therefore likely flowed from contemporary moral ideas of what makes 'great art'. Little did he know that to this present day, there is an abundance of people who continue not only to read but re-read the Sherlock Holmes stories over and over again, insinuating that there might be more to them than meets the eye. Perhaps Doyle was not aware at all of the fact that he was projecting his search for the truth on the stories he wrote so easily.

What drew my attention while carrying out my research was the apparent lack of consideration for religion in the Sherlock Holmes stories in general. As I am convinced that the Sherlock Holmes stories are more than simply a collection of secular stories, I believe that this is an area worth exploring in more detail. Also, whereas I have chosen to focus on one particular element of Buddhism, I believe that it would be interesting to conduct wider and more thorough research as to the presence of the doctrine in the stories of Holmes. Finally, it would also be interesting to examine whether Doyle's implementation of the law of Karma has been adopted into modern adaptations of the stories, and subsequently, see what secrets those stories might reveal. After all, it is as Holmes says: "Education never ends, Watson. It is a series of lessons with the greatest for the last" (Doyle, *Complete* 947). These words would come back to Doyle only a few days before his death when he wrote in his biography: "I have had many adventures, the greatest and most glorious awaits me now" (*Doyle, Memories* XVI).

Holmes's tireless quest for the truth is indeed not over. For he lives on, even to this day, through the hundreds of adaptations that are presently on his name. Writers, directors and game developers have reincarnated the character of Holmes, time after time, decade after decade, and he still manages to capture the imagination of his audience now as much as he did then. The game is indeed, still very much afoot, and the detective's struggle to break free from the Wheel of Suffering continues. Let us hope, for our sakes, that he will never succeed.

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