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AN ANOMALY IN THE HOLMESIAN CANON: "THE ADVENTURE OF THE ENGINEER'S THUMB"

HOLMES KANONUNDA BİR ANOMALİ: "MÜHENDİSİN BAŞPARMAĞI"

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Abstract

This article investigates the cryptic narrative of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's "The Adventure of the Engineer's Thumb" (1892) and argues that this particular tale is a striking anomaly within the broader Holmesian canon. Unlike the quintessential Sherlock Holmes stories where justice often prevails in the end, this anomaly unfolds as Holmes fails to capture the criminals, thus deviating from the established and satisfactory resolution seen in the famous detective's other investigations. The study claims that the atypical narrative of "The Adventure of the Engineer's Thumb" serves as a reflection of the prevailing collective anxieties during the time of its creation. By dissecting the narrative elements of this particular story, especially Sherlock Holmes' failure to re-establish order, and the principles of Victorian detective fiction at large, the article aims to shed light on the underlying tensions and anxieties regarding the perceived threats to the British Empire and English masculinity during the late Victorian era.

Öz

Bu makale, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle'un "Mühendisin Başparmağı" adlı eserinin gizemli anlatısını derinlemesine incelemekte ve bu hikâyenin Holmesian kanonu içinde önemli bir anormallik teşkil ettiğini savunmaktadır. Hikâyenin sonunda adaletin yerine getirildiği tipik Sherlock Holmes anlatılarının aksine bu hikâye, Holmes'un suçluları yakalayamaması ile öne çıkmakta ve ünlü dedektifin soruşturmalarında görülen alışılagelmiş ve tatmin edici sonlardan sapmaktadır. Bu çalışma, "Mühendisin Başparmağı" hikâyesinin alışılmadık anlatısının, yazıldığı döneme ait kaygıların bir yansıması olarak işlev gördüğünü ileri sürmektedir. Bu sebeple, bu makale Viktorya dönemi dedektif kurgusunun prensiplerini ve başta Sherlock Holmes'un adaleti sağlamadaki başarısızlığı olmak üzere bu tuhaf hikâyede kullanılan anlatı bileşenlerini derinlemesine inceleyerek Viktorya döneminin sonlarına doğru hem Britanya İmparatorluğu'na hem de İngiliz erkekliğine yönelik olduğu hissedilen tehditlerin sebep olduğu derin kaygıları aydınlatmayı amaçlamaktadır.

1. INTRODUCTION

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's creation Sherlock Holmes is one of the most recognized and unforgettable characters in the history of literature. His adventures, although remarkably diverse and entertaining in their contents, typically follow the quite simple and repetitive formula of a crime being committed and the criminals being caught by the detective owing to his astonishing deduction skills. One way or another, Sherlock Holmes often restores order, which is why "The Adventure of the Engineer's Thumb," published in 1892, is considered to be one of the anomalies in the Sherlock Holmes canon. As Dr. Watson reveals in the story, it is one of the only two cases that he brought to Holmes' attention, but more importantly, it is one of the few stories where the great detective Sherlock Holmes fails to bring the criminals to justice. Some of these other stories include "A Scandal in Bohemia," in which the culprit manages to evade Holmes; however, his client is satisfied with the outcome; "The Five Orange Pips" where the criminals also escape but eventually die; "The Adventure of Charles Augustus Milverton," where the criminal is killed by one of his victims; "The Adventure of Abbey Grange," and "The Adventure of the Devil's Foot," in which Holmes finds the culprits but does not turn them in since he believes their crimes were justified. "The Adventure of the Engineer's Thumb" differs from these stories because the criminals remain mostly anonymous, manage to evade him, do not meet any form of justice in the end, death or otherwise, and it is heavily implied that they will continue their criminal activities. Thus, the story warrants a closer reading and analysis to make sense of its unique nature.

Like other Sherlock Holmes adventures, this often-forgotten and peculiar story reflects the social and political attitudes of its time, perhaps even to a greater degree than the other stories precisely because it is an anomaly. The partially unsolved and unsatisfying ending of the story emphasizes the anxieties caused by the weakened condition of the British Empire in the latter half of the nineteenth century, which was one of the results of the rivalry with the newly-formed and powerful Germany and the fragile status of British masculinity. In the story, these two anxieties manifest themselves through the figure of the German villain, the crimes he commits, his English accomplices, the metaphorical castration and consequent "feminization" of a British gentleman, and Sherlock Holmes's surprising inability to completely solve the case and bring the perpetrators to justice.

2. DISCUSSION

At the end of the nineteenth century, Sherlock Holmes' fame had approached such a degree that Sir Arthur Conan Doyle was feeling frustrated by being overshadowed by his creation. He believed Sherlock Holmes took his "mind from better things" and decided to kill him off in the story "The Final Problem" in 1893 (Clarke, 2019, p. 83). However, the legendary character's death caused significant public outrage and disappointment. Twenty thousand subscribers to *The Strand Magazine*, where all the Sherlock Holmes stories were serialized, canceled their subscriptions in protest. Newspapers and magazines ran editorials and stories lamenting the death of the famous detective. Public protests and marches were held where the participants carried posters that expressed their unhappiness and called for Sherlock Holmes's return while wearing black armbands to display their grief. After all the outrage, Doyle felt like he had to bring the character back, and Sherlock Holmes stories continued to be published until 1927 (Clarke, 2019, p. 38). One of the reasons why Holmes attracted an adoration and following to such a degree has to do with the very nature of detective stories and the complex and ever-changing nature of nineteenth-century society. In the late Victorian era, an irrational fear of crime was steadily increasing because of rapid industrialization, globalization, and sensationalism in the media. Detective stories, therefore, offered a solution to the public's ever-growing anxiety. In a detective story, a crime, which is a breach in the social order, is committed and "the job of the detective is to restore the state of grace in which the aesthetic and the ethical are as one" (Auden, 1948, The Detective section, para. 1). When the detective solves the crime, they also dispel the chaos that inevitably follows that crime and restore order, which is most comforting for the readership; and W.H. Auden considered Sherlock Holmes to be one of the few "[c]ompletely satisfactory detectives," as he was able to comfort a worried public that even the most horrific and enigmatic crimes could be solved (1948, The Detective section, para. 1).

The increasing fear of crime was the direct result of the changes the world was fraught with in the late Victorian era. As a result of rapid scientific, social, and political advances and changes, stability was a thing of the past. As the century progressed, the Industrial Revolution and the mission of imperialism started to change European society, especially British society. Britain came to be an imperial power; it transformed from a rural and agrarian society into an urban and industrial nation. People moved from the countryside to the cities, which caused unprecedented issues of overpopulation, unemployment, and poverty. As Victorian society swiftly became a mosaic comprised of different classes, cultures, and nationalities with waves of immigrants coming into the cities, criminal organizations started popping up throughout the

cities, and the public became overly concerned about the crime rates. According to Christopher Pittard (2003), the Victorian need for social order is what made detective fiction extremely appealing to its readership (p. 1). The public was constantly bombarded with dramatic articles and reports about horrifying crimes by newspapers and journals, which, according to Michael Gillespie and John Harpham (2011), was the primary cause of the rising anxiety in the late Victorian era (pp. 463-464). Although the newly formed police forces were able to calm the public to an extent, their resources and capabilities were limited, and they were unable to completely assuage the public's growing fear. People needed an agent of justice who could detect and defeat even the most cunning and horrifying culprits. These culprits were mostly believed to be foreigners because the public thought that a growing immigrant and criminal class of people were posing a threat to the nation's peace and prosperity. Consequently, there was a growing resentment of the rapidly increasing immigrant population. If there was no concrete evidence to the contrary, "unsolved crimes were often attributed to foreigners: Jack the Ripper, for example, was widely suspected to be a Russian Jew" (Pittard, 2003, p. 453). Similarly, the then-widely read genre of invasion literature, which involved tales of Britain's imaginary invasion by malicious foreign powers, frequently portrayed foreigners as cunning villains. Moreover, the incredibly popular writing of Cesare Lombroso, the author of *L'uomo delinquente*, who is now deemed to be the father of criminology, suggested that criminality was linked to a person's racial background and that their "inferior position" on the evolutionary scale could be detected by their physical features. Consequently, "in all of this writing political tracts, scientific discourse, and fictional narratives alike, foreigners were eyed with suspicion and unfavorably distinguished from the English norm" (Berberich, 2019, p. 58). As Arthur Conan Doyle was an avid supporter of the British Empire and its ideology, he frequently "inserted his concerns about the Empire, and particularly the influence of foreigners into the Holmes adventures; these fears largely circled around ideas of degeneracy, villainy, and challenges to English superiority" (Foss, 2012, p. 2). Accordingly, his influential creation, Sherlock Holmes, became a kind of guardian angel. He became "not only the quintessential detective but the quintessential Englishman, the seemingly perfect representative of a stable and permanent Englishness" (Berberich, 2019, p. 55). When Sherlock Holmes solved a crime, he not only restored order and balance in society, but he also saved Englishness, which was under threat from foreign invaders. Therefore, it is quite significant that the unbeatable defender of Englishness and the status quo is not able to solve the crime in "The Adventure of the Engineer's Thumb" in which the culprit is the European Other, a German.

At this point, it is important to investigate how Germany and Germans were perceived by the British public in the Victorian era. At that time, there were certain negative stereotypes about Germans that actually "defined what it meant to be British, rather than German, through biased comparisons which, taken as a whole, present a classic example of psychological rivalry aggravated by a threatened sense of self versus other" (Bertolette, 2004, p. 179). Germans were usually portrayed as uncivilized, backward, cruel, and secretive as opposed to the civilized, logical, compassionate, and honest British. The main reason for this distinction was the imperial rivalry between the two nations. In the early nineteenth century, Britain had become the most important imperial power in the world; however, it slowly began to lose its advantages over the course of the century. After Germany was unified in 1871, it quickly developed as a new economic and military power, becoming Britain's primary rival, leaving France and Russia behind. After 1871, Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli declared that there were "new influences at work, new and unknown objects and dangers which to cope . . . balance of power has been entirely destroyed, and the country which suffers most, and feels the effects of this great change the most is England" (cited in Vogler, 2022, p. 31). Between these two nations, there was a "clash of imperial aims: Britain wishing to preserve the status quo and her own imperial ascendency, Germany wanting to achieve a 'place in the sun' at the expense of it" (Bertolette, 2004, p. 27). These imperial anxieties eventually found their way into the literature of the time in the form of invasion literature.

Invasion literature works featured imaginary war and invasion scenarios by foreign forces, usually German, French or Russian, that could happen in the near future, and they were meant to make the audience aware of the potential dangers of the political climate and make them "emotionally involved in a game where the existence of the British Empire was at stake" (Laurie-Fletcher, 2019, p. 5). In 1871, immediately after the German military success in the Franco-Prussian War, Colonel George Tomkyns Chesney published "The Battle of Dorking," one of the very first and most important examples of this literary genre, in which Britain is successfully invaded by foreign troops that speak German. The novella was highly influential; it generated numerous other works of similar nature, sold thousands of copies, was reprinted eight times, and was hailed as the strongest "argument in favour of being always prepared against the enemy" by *Morning Post*, an imperialist newspaper (1871, May 4, p. 3). *The Lincoln Chronicle* also claimed that the premise of the novella was not too far off since there were "Germans in the Royal household, Germans in the cabinet, Germans in Parliament . . . German merchants, German shopkeepers, German labourers . . . Spies, all of them" (1871, May 5, p. 3).

Taking these factors into consideration, "The Adventure of the Engineer's Thumb" could be seen as a Holmesian example of invasion literature with its German villain, the nature of his crimes and Sherlock Holmes' failure to bring him to justice.

"The Adventure of the Engineer's Thumb" is about a young engineer by the name of Victor Hatherley, who asks Sherlock Holmes for help following a strange and dangerous incident. According to his narration, he was hired to inspect a hydraulic press by a mysterious German gentleman and his strange assistant, and when he realizes that he has walked into a nefarious scheme, his employer attempts to murder him and manages to sever his thumb. Hatherley is able to escape and asks Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson for assistance in the hope that they might shed light on the incident and catch the culprits. The man who hires Hatherley, the villain of the story, is the German Colonel Lysander Stark. From the very first moment he sees the Colonel, his physical "flaws" seem glaringly obvious to the engineer. He is described as a man "of an exceeding thinness" and "his whole face sharpened away into nose and chin, and the skin of his cheeks was drawn quite tense over his outstanding bones" (Doyle, 1970, p. 277). He has a strong German accent and the very first thing he utters in the story hints at something foreboding as he demands absolute secrecy from Hatherley in the matter he wishes to hire him for. When looking at the "fleshless" stranger, the young engineer is seized by "[a] feeling of repulsion" and "something akin to fear" (Doyle, 1970, p. 277). The foreign man, with his repulsive physical appearance and the feelings he awakens in the engineer, is almost grotesque, which is a common pattern in both Sherlock Holmes stories and Victorian literature at large. Although it was largely discredited in the 20th century, the pseudoscience of physiognomy was an important component of Victorian culture. Victorians believed that "the body—in its unaltered, natural state—functioned as a legible text, with physical features spelling out the story of a person's identity" (Lennox, 2016, p.10). They believed the internal flaws of people were almost always reflected in their unappealing appearance, and Doyle often made use of this belief in his stories; the twisted morality of foreign villains in the Sherlock Holmes canon is shown to be "inappropriate to the ways of the English and are thus out of place within English society, and this separation shows up on their bodies. Twisted and deformed, the savage villain is a harsh reminder of what could happen to the English body if the foreign is allowed to penetrate English society" (Foss, 2012, p. 5). This becomes quite literal in the case of the engineer. Despite his suspicions about the man and the job, Hatherley goes against ethical codes of behaviour and accepts the grotesque Colonel's offer of fifty guineas for a night's work and request for secrecy. He effectively allows this penetration of the English body and society

by the foreign agent, which later causes him to acquire an actual physical injury and go through a metaphorical castration. In the morning after the incident, his "strong, masculine face" is "exceedingly pale," almost as if he is infected with some disease, and he seems as if he is "suffering from some strong agitation" (Doyle, 1970, p. 274). Furthermore, as it is revealed later in the story, Hatherley is not alone in his error. The German is responsible for the murder of another English engineer, the twenty-six-year-old Jeremiah Hayling, who was hired by the Colonel a year prior with the same pretence. In several Sherlock Holmes stories, men forego "their jobs and succumb to ill-advised activities which promise an opportunity to earn money quickly and easily, but which ultimately turn out to be shameful, harmful or criminal" (Clarke, 2011, p. 77). Since the "gospel of work," which is a set of values that uphold both the moral and spiritual importance of honest work, was an important aspect of the Victorian notion of ethical and moral behaviour, the compulsion to forego "work was defined as a moral issue and a question of character" (Clarke, 2011, p. 78). Therefore, the terrible fates of these young middle-class men, one murdered and the other maimed, who are roped into unethical behaviours because of their desire to gain easy money, status, or respectability can be seen as Doyle's warning to his audience, who were typically middle-class men. Since the Englishmen Hayling and Hatherley are tempted by a German villain to abandon their middle-class Victorian morality, Doyle's warning to young men about the risks of failing to govern one's behaviour becomes intertwined with his anxieties about the Empire and foreign dangers.

After Hatherley accepts his offer, the Colonel invites him to Berkshire where he and his accomplices run a counterfeiting operation in a country house, which is especially significant as it can be seen as the invasion and defilement of the idyllic, rural England, which was an integral part of the English identity. In some of his stories, Doyle "utilizes homely spaces his readers would have instantly recognized and associated with traditional Englishness but then turns them into unheimlich (uncanny) spaces that threaten to destabilize a normative national identity" (Berberich, 2019, p. 57). He portrays these English spaces as having been contaminated either by the actions of Englishmen who have learned and adopted devious foreign knowledge or customs during the time they have spent abroad, or by the direct infestation of these spaces by the foreign Others, who have "settled in the heartland of Englishness with the aim to undermine and deconstruct it from within" through their morally dubious and often criminal activities (Berberich, 2019, p. 61). In "The Adventure of the Engineer's Thumb," the exact location of the house is not revealed until the very end of the story, making it a site of mystery and disorientation. The house itself seems unwelcoming, even

sinister, from the moment Hatherley steps foot in it. Its windows are barred, making it impossible to see the countryside, and it is shrouded in stillness and darkness, filled with German books. Hatherley describes it as "a labyrinth of an old house, with corridors, passages, narrow winding staircases, and little low doors," with the plasters peeling off and the damp "breaking through in green, unhealthy blotches" (Doyle, 1970, p. 281). It is as if the house is contaminated with a disease that is slowly killing it; however, there is no cure for it. Although it almost becomes the gravesite of the young Englishman, it is the oil lamp Hatherley accidentally drops that causes the house to burn down at the end of the story. While the annihilation of the house, especially by fire, can be read as a purging of the evil and the infestation, it is more appropriate to read it as the destruction of the English stability and Englishness at the hands of the foreign enemy, their sinister influences and the abettor Englishmen considering the conclusion of the story. This contamination and the destruction of the English country house, a symbol of national identity, stability, and tradition by foreign agents was a manifestation of the contemporary fears of the public. The fact that the German villain and his accomplices use that space for counterfeiting and murder turns a traditional haven into a site of horror, corruption and an epicentre of a danger that threatens not only the lives of Englishmen but also the very stability of the nation's economy.

Up until the 1830s, counterfeiting and forgery were punishable by death just as murder, which may now seem extreme for the gravity of the crime. Sara Malton (2009), however, explains that forgery was "increasingly envisioned as an attack on the life-blood of a nation dependent on expanding commerce and trade" (p. 20). Moreover, the culprits of these crimes "revealed the vulnerability of the 'arteries and veins' of the nation's economic system" (Malton, 2019, p. 20). This description of the British economic system as a body open to corruption harkens back to the worry of the bodily contamination from foreign Others that is prevalent in the Sherlock Holmes canon. In some of his stories, Doyle "suggests that far from being a mere annoyance, the foreign Other has the potential to leave a permanent scar on the physical body of the English" (Foss, 2012, p. 2). Thus, the German villain and his accomplices not only contaminate and invade the symbolic English country house but also the very heart of the Empire through counterfeiting: its economy.

This contamination also extends to Englishmen as Colonel Lysander Stark does not operate alone. The house they use is later revealed to belong to Dr. Becher, an Englishman, and Hatherley is introduced to the Colonel's assistant Mr. Ferguson who is, according to the engineer, "at least a fellow-countryman" (Doyle, 1970, p. 281). As mentioned before,

Englishmen becoming corrupt because of some mode of contact with villainous foreign Others is also a recurrent concern for Doyle. In some of his other stories, the Englishmen who have been exposed to the foreign world for some time have the potential to become evil, the most obvious example being Dr. Grimsby Roylott in "The Speckled Band." Roylott spends some time in India and tries to kill his stepdaughters using a deadly snake, which is something only a "clever and ruthless man who had had an Eastern training" could ever come up with, according to Holmes (Doyle, 1970, p. 273). However, in this story, Englishmen do not need to be exposed to a foreign land to become corrupt; the presence of the German villain is enough for them to abandon their morality and work against their countrymen and nation. Thus, it becomes apparent that the foreign agent not only poses a threat to the social and imperial order through his crimes but also to the very foundation of English identity through his influence and contamination of the Englishmen, which is villainy at its worst. Despite all this, however, the Englishman still gets a moment of redemption. Mr. Ferguson, the assistant, drags an unconscious and vulnerable Hatherley away from the house and effectively saves the young engineer from the Colonel despite his previous involvement in the crimes, which shows that even though Mr. Ferguson is undoubtedly dishonest, there is still a line that the Englishman is not willing to cross, unlike the German villain who has no qualms about murdering people.

The involvement of Englishmen in these crimes perpetuated by foreigners is significant not only in terms of what it says about English morality and imperial anxiety regarding foreign invasion and its consequences but also in terms of the anxiety of masculinity that pervaded the late Victorian era. According to Joseph Kestner (1997):

> The 1890s were widely perceived as embodying an acute crisis of masculinity . . . many factors contributed to the male malaise, among them the waning Victorianism, the emergence of the 'New Woman', and continuing impact of industrialization, urbanization. These changes meant that standards of masculinity, like many other dimensions of Victorian culture, were in a state of transition. (p. 11)

In the latter half of the nineteenth century, gender roles and relations became unstable. As Elaine Showalter (1990) stated, "[m]en and women were not as clearly identified and separated as they had been" (p.9). Women began to manoeuvre out of their traditional spaces and assume increasingly prominent positions in society, threatening to destabilize the traditionally dominant role of men, which they gained through their access to the public sphere and domestic authority that women were typically denied. Women progressively gained greater freedoms, both within and outside marriages, such as the Married Women's Property Act of 1882, which granted

women control over their premarital possessions. Being unmarried was slowly recognized to be a preference for some women rather than a sign of social failure; some women were able to live alone, or together in communes. This gradual emancipation of women caused many men to feel threatened regarding their masculine identity and authority, and they started to adhere to a new set of masculine ideals that had begun to develop in the last few decades of the nineteenth century.

The English identity has always been intertwined with certain models of masculinity that have evolved throughout time in response to societal norms, ideologies, beliefs, and other influences. While the ideal English gentleman in the early Victorian era was characterized by qualities like reason, strength, courage, integrity, and self-discipline, this model of masculinity gradually started to change because of shifting social norms, particularly those related to gender roles, and imperial expansion and conflicts. For the late Victorians, masculinity came to represent a "neo-Spartan virility as exemplified by stoicism, hardiness and endurance" (Mangan, 1987, p. 1). The imperial ideology became increasingly intertwined with the English identity as the British Empire expanded during the second half of the nineteenth century. Consequently, the ideals of masculinity also evolved to incorporate imperial ideas and aims. Since the Empire itself was seen as a projection of English masculinity, participating in the imperial ideology became a crucial means of restoring and affirming masculinity, which was being undermined in the home nation. As mentioned before, while the Empire expanded, it faced new challenges from its rivals, especially Germany; it also became harder to control the colonies Britain already had in its possession. The British Empire was compared to Rome or Greece, and even at its height of power, its demise was an ongoing source of concern. Thus, since the Empire was the source of Britain's power and prestige, and it was a reflection of English masculinity, protecting, preserving, and expanding it became a masculine pursuit and responsibility. Both the Empire and masculinity came to revolve around concepts of duty, action, violence, power, and bravery. As a result, these two institutions continuously reaffirmed and reinforced one another. If one was threatened, the other was also considered to be in danger; and for one to succeed, the other had to succeed as well. Since both the Empire and masculinity were deemed to be under threat in the late Victorian era for the aforementioned reasons, the issue, especially the intertwined nature of it, became an important theme that Doyle addressed in his stories.

As a remedy for these anxieties regarding masculinity, Doyle presented his readership with absolute masculine authority, an uncompromising scientific logic, a lack of emotions,

bravery, and intellectual and physical prowess in the figure of Sherlock Holmes, which were all that constituted the ideal, hegemonic notion of English masculinity. Sherlock Holmes faced both internal and external foes and eventually defeated them, ensuring that Englishness, with all its components, remained victorious in the end despite the temporary threats. However, in the absence of Sherlock Holmes in the actual events of this story, this model of masculinity that is supposed to be upheld by the young, middle-class Englishman is turned on its head. Upon being imprisoned in the attic after he foolishly confronts the Colonel about the scheme, Hatherley starts throwing himself around the room, "screaming, against the door, and dragged with [his] nails at the lock," which are decidedly "unmasculine" reactions (Doyle, 1970, p. 282). His extreme reactions harken back to the famous prisoner of another attic, the madwoman in Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre*, Bertha Mason. Bertha is both a patriarchal and colonial prisoner, who also raves, growls, and scratches at the door of the attic of another English country house. Furthermore, just as Bertha Mason burns down the house of her aggressor as an act of rebellion and revenge, the oil lamp Hatherley drops as he escapes the hydraulic press also sets the house on fire, which, as Holmes puts it, becomes Hatherley's revenge against his own aggressors. The curious parallels between the famous madwoman in the attic and Victor Hatherley do not end there. When Hatherley goes to Dr. Watson for treatment at the beginning of the story, he begins laughing "very heartily, with a high, ringing note, leaning back in his chair and shaking his sides" and Watson, with all his "instincts [raising] up against that laugh", recognizes that Hatherley is having a "hysterical outburst" (Doyle, 1970, p. 275). At that time, hysteria was exclusively associated with women; it was seen as a female malady. When considering both the imperial and masculine anxieties of the period, it becomes extremely significant that this young Englishman is described as having a hysterical breakdown after going through a castration at the hands of the German villain. After being saved from being crushed by the hydraulic press with the help of the female accomplice of the Colonel, very much like a damsel in distress, Hatherley tries to escape the house. While he is hanging from a windowsill, the Colonel manages to cut his thumb with a cleaver. This overt symbol of castration and emasculation is the most important emphasis of the feminization Hatherley goes through, and it is undoubtedly a significant manifestation of the anxieties regarding the status of English masculinity and the British Empire. If Hatherley had acted ethically and not tried to earn easy money, he would not have been a victim of the German villain; even after accepting the job, if he had listened to his reason and acted rationally, he would have been able to get out of the house without going through a traumatic experience, and he could have helped bring the Colonel and his accomplices to justice. Unfortunately, he was weak enough to be corrupted by the foreign villain, and not

capable enough to save himself from the situation, both flaws undoubtedly function as Doyle's warning to his male audience.

The most significant aspect of this abnormal Sherlock Holmes story is, of course, the fact that the brilliant detective is not able to bring the criminals to justice despite his best efforts. After Hatherley relays his story to Sherlock Holmes, the detective is able to figure out that the German and his accomplices are counterfeiters. The inspector later reveals that they had been chasing the clever gang for a while, but they were not able to catch them since it was clear that they were very experienced at what they did, which also reveals the anxiety concerning the inadequacy of law enforcement in the face of dangerous foreign agents. What is noteworthy is that when law enforcement came up short, Sherlock Holmes would usually take command and deliver the criminals to justice, which does not happen in this story. In fact, from the day Hatherley escapes the house to the day Watson puts the story in writing, no word about the criminals is ever heard. Although the contaminated house is burned down, the criminals are seen escaping with boxes that presumably contain their counterfeiting devices, indicating that they will continue to hurt the national economy, social order, and, presumably, Englishmen. In the end, "even Holmes' ingenuity fail[s] to discover the least clue as to their whereabouts," which certainly paints a pessimistic picture regarding the anxieties this story addresses (Doyle, 1970, p. 285).

3. CONCLUSION

The very point of detective fiction, therefore the stories of Sherlock Holmes, is undoubtedly the restoration of order achieved through the punishment of the criminals at the end of the narrative. Through his stories, Doyle tried to address the very real anxieties that plagued Britain and its residents in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Thus, when Sherlock Holmes solved a crime, caught the criminals, and destroyed even the tiniest imbalance that threatened to destabilize the British Empire and society, the world appeared to be a less dangerous place, exactly as it was before the invasion of the dangerous intruders. However, "The Adventure of the Engineer's Thumb" turns that reassuring formula on its head; although the mystery surrounding the crime is solved, the criminals are able to get away, and even Sherlock Holmes cannot find and punish them. The multiple dangers these foreign agents pose for the social and imperial order, and the crisis of morality and masculinity are shown to be enduring threats instead of temporary ones, and they are not annihilated by the quintessential Englishman Sherlock Holmes, nor any other Englishmen in the story; on the contrary, they are

shown to be either active or passive accomplices of the whole scheme. Nothing is restored, and the threat remains at large, which makes this story unique because its unsatisfactory conclusion suggests that Doyle might have considered the issues that are underlined throughout the narrative to be far too dangerous and immediate to put to rest by the complete restoration of order at the end.

Information Note

The article has been prepared in accordance with research and publication ethics. This study does not require ethics committee approval.

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's "The Adventure of the Engineer's Thumb" (1892) is a significant anomaly within the Sherlock Holmes canon, diverging from the typical formula of justice and closure that characterizes most of the detective's cases. This article examines the narrative structure and thematic elements of the story, arguing that its ambiguous ending and Sherlock Holmes's failure to capture the criminals underscore the broader anxieties of late Victorian society. Specifically, it explores how the unresolved tensions of the story reflect contemporary fears about the waning power of the British Empire and the crisis of English masculinity. Analysing the story through the lens of Victorian detective fiction, imperialism, and gender anxieties, this article argues that the partially unsolved nature of the case exemplifies the unease of an empire confronting both internal and external threats.

Victorian detective fiction, particularly the Sherlock Holmes stories, was born out of a culture deeply concerned with the rapid social, economic, and technological changes. The Victorian era, marked by urbanization, industrialization, and the expansion of the British Empire, also experienced increasing fears around crime. A growing sense of insecurity was fuelled by the perception of rising criminal activity, often linked to a rapidly expanding immigrant population. As Britain faced challenges on multiple fronts, the character of Sherlock Holmes, with his supreme intellect and ability to resolve seemingly insurmountable crimes, became a symbol of the order, stability, and Englishness that Victorian society desperately needed. However, in this particular story, Doyle introduces a contrast to this formula, presenting a case in which Holmes does not fully resolve the crime, leaving readers with a sense of injustice and disorder.

The villainous character in "The Adventure of the Engineer's Thumb," Colonel Lysander Stark is a German whose criminal activities reflect the anxieties surrounding the rising power of Germany. The unification of Germany in the late nineteenth century created a forceful military and economic rival to Britain, one that threatened both the empire's geopolitical dominance and the stability of its economy. The fear of German encroachment, particularly through espionage and economic sabotage, is palpable in the portrayal of the German villain in the story.

The villain's accomplices in the story also reflect an unsettling narrative of betrayal and corruption within Britain. Several English men become entangled in the crime as victims and accomplices, undermining the traditional ideals of English masculinity. The late Victorian

period was marked by an increasing anxiety over masculinity, particularly linked to the imperial ideology. English masculinity was increasingly intertwined with the idea of imperial power; therefore, the failure of certain English men to resist the lure of the German villain's scheme suggests a broader crisis of national identity and masculinity. These men embody the "feminization" of English masculinity, a theme that was frequently explored in the era's literature, which often depicted men who were seen as weak or corrupted by foreign influence.

The failure of Sherlock Holmes to bring the perpetrators to justice is perhaps the most striking anomaly of the story. Unlike most Holmes stories, where his brilliance ensures the triumph of justice, this narrative leaves readers with a lingering sense of injustice. Holmes's inability to stop the criminals and fully restore order reflects the anxieties surrounding the stability of the British Empire. Just as the empire's control was weakening, so too is Holmes's ability to resolve the case, leaving it unresolved. This lack of resolution mirrors Victorian society's disquiet over the perceived decline of imperial power and the erosion of its masculine ideal.