

Crime Fiction at the Time of the Exhibition: the Case of Sherlock Holmes and Arsène Lupin

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Summary: *In July 1905, the new monthly Je sais tout (I Know Everything) carried the first short story, written by Maurice Leblanc, featuring the gentleman-burglar Arsène Lupin. Lupin's appearance and early adventures coincided with the huge popularity which Sherlock Holmes, already the most popular figure in detective fiction across the Channel, was enjoying in France. This accompanied the publication in French in the early years of the century of many of the Holmes stories. In the tale, 'Sherlock Holmes arrive trop tard' ('Sherlock Holmes Arrives Too Late') published in Je sais tout in June 1906, Leblanc staged an initial encounter between Lupin and Sherlock Holmes. Holmes, now called Herlock Sholmès after threats from Conan Doyle's lawyers, again clashed with Lupin in two tales which appeared in Je sais tout in 1907/1908, and were published in February 1908 as a book entitled Arsène Lupin contre Herlock Sholmès. (Arsène Lupin contre Herlock Sholmès). The two men confronted each other once more in L'Aiguille creuse (The Hollow Needle), serialised in Je sais tout between 1908-1909 and published in book form in June 1909.*

This article analyses the reasons for the huge popularity of the Holmes stories in Britain and shows how Holmes and Conan Doyle were used to promote Lupin and his creator in France. It then argues that the encounters conceived by Leblanc are part of a pre-established tradition of cross-referencing in crime writing. It concludes by suggesting that Holmes, the English consulting detective, and Lupin, the French gentleman-burglar, have more in common than might be thought.

Keywords: *Sherlock Holmes; Arsène Lupin; Arthur Conan Doyle; Maurice Leblanc; Je sais tout; the Strand Magazine.*

Résumé: *En juillet 1905 fut publié dans la nouvelle revue mensuelle Je sais tout la première nouvelle écrite de la main de Maurice Leblanc où figure le gentleman-cambioleur Arsène Lupin. Cette entrée en scène de Lupin ainsi que ses premières aventures apparaissent à un moment où Sherlock Holmes, déjà le personnage du roman policier le plus connu outre-Manche, jouissait d'une grande popularité en France suite à la publication en français au début du siècle des nouvelles du détective privé anglais. Dans la nouvelle 'Sherlock Holmes arrive trop tard', publié dans Je sais tout en juin 1906, Leblanc met en scène une première rencontre entre nos deux hommes. Sherlock Holmes, désormais nommé Herlock Sholmès suite aux protestations de la part des avocats de Conan Doyle, et Lupin devaient s'affronter de nouveau dans deux nouvelles parues dans Je sais tout en 1907/8 et qui seront publiées en février 1908 dans un livre intitulé*

Arsène Lupin contre Herlock Sholmès. Les deux protagonistes se confrontent encore une fois dans L'Aiguille creuse publié en feuilleton dans Je sais tout entre 1908 et 1909, puis intégralement dans un livre en juin 1909. Au cours de cet article, nous examinerons les raisons du succès de Holmes en Angleterre et nous démontrerons comment Holmes et son créateur Conan Doyle ont été utilisés pour promouvoir Lupin et Maurice Leblanc en France. L'article démontre ensuite que les rencontres Lupin-Holmes/Sholmès imaginées par Leblanc font partie d'une pratique de regards croisés déjà utilisée par d'autres auteurs de romans policiers. En conclusion, nous verrons que Holmes le détective privé anglais et Lupin, le gentleman-cambrioleur français, ont plus de points en commun que l'on n'aurait pu penser à première vue.

Mots-clés: Sherlock Holmes; Arsène Lupin; Arthur Conan Doyle; Maurice Leblanc; Je sais tout; the Strand Magazine.

By the time of the Franco-British Exhibition of 1908, crime fiction was well established both in France and in the Anglo-Saxon world. The late 1820s saw the publication of the *Mémoires* of Eugène-François Vidocq, the criminal turned head of the French detective force la *Sûreté*.¹ The next significant development was the publication of three short stories 'Murders in the Rue Morgue', (1841), 'The Mystery of Marie Rogêt' (1842) and 'The Purloined Letter' (1844), written by Edgar Allan Poe, featuring the private detective C. Auguste Dupin, which laid the foundation stones of modern detective fiction. Poe, an American who was educated at Dulwich College in south London, as was Raymond Chandler, the creator of private eye Philip Marlowe a century later, set his tales in Paris; his knowledge of Paris was, however, scant indeed since in 'The Mystery of Marie Rogêt', he has sassafras grass growing on the banks of the Seine. (Poe, 1968 (a): 443) In England in 1868, Wilkie Collins made an important contribution to the genre of crime fiction with *The Moonstone*, while his good friend Charles Dickens was boosting the reputation of the British bobby through his accounts of the time spent out on patrol with London policemen,² which led to his being described as 'the first major publicist for the police detective'.³ It was Dickens who, with Inspector Bucket in *Bleak House*, introduced 'the first significant detective in English literature'. (Steinbrunner & Penzler, 1976: 124) Meanwhile in France from the mid-1860s, the works of Émile Gaboriau, featuring his detective heroes Inspector Lecoq and Père Tabaret, were enjoying huge popularity. Gaboriau, like Collins and Dickens, was fascinated by police work and the translation into English of Gaboriau's tales brought the detective story to a wider audience than ever before in the period between *The Moonstone* and the first appearance of Sherlock Holmes and Dr John Watson in *A Study in Scarlet* in 1887.⁴ Given Holmes' huge popularity in both France and Britain at the time of the Exhibition and the hope in France that Lupin would emulate Holmes, a brief examination of the Holmes phenomenon at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century is called for.

Although *A Study in Scarlet* was published in 1887, fame eluded Holmes' author, Arthur Conan Doyle, until the publication of six short stories in the *Strand Magazine* between July and December 1891. Although Conan Doyle

considered himself to be a serious historical novelist, he nevertheless agreed to write another six stories, which the *Strand Magazine* published in the first six months of 1892. All twelve appeared later in the year in book form as *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*.⁵ The success of the Holmes short stories was overwhelming; each month queues formed at the news-stands on the day that the *Strand Magazine* was due to appear, and, as one biographer of Conan Doyle has noted, 'No fictional character had ever become so universally known in such a short space of time.' (Booth, 1998: 145) It is beyond the compass of this article to explore in detail the reasons for Holmes' extraordinary popularity but we can note Conan Doyle's ability as a storyteller⁶ and his decision to make each of the stories one of a series of self-contained tales featuring the same two main characters. Thus readers buying a copy of the magazine were sure that they would have access to a complete story, unlike a serial where if they missed an issue they were likely to lose the thread of the plot. Another factor was the relationship between Holmes and Watson. This was clearly inspired by Poe's Dupin and his nameless narrator companion, but fleshed out by Conan Doyle to give it a deeper human resonance. If Holmes, described by Watson in the first short story as 'the most perfect reasoning machine the world has ever seen' (Conan Doyle, 1999:5), offered readers a tantalising taste of genius combined with bohemian independence, the sensible, generous, kind and above all loyal and decent Watson displayed qualities to which Conan Doyle's mainly middle and lower-middle class readers aspired. Furthermore, Conan Doyle was helped by a convergence of socio-economic factors. The market for newspapers and magazines was booming in the last quarter of the nineteenth century: the cost of paper had fallen thanks to imported wood-pulp from Scandinavia and Canada; printing presses were more sophisticated and ran faster; the 1870 Education Act (Forster's Act) had resulted in a huge increase in literacy while reduced working hours introduced the notion of 'leisure time'. More people could read, more people had time to read. Conan Doyle (and others) gave them material to read. And read they did. Not just at home but also, importantly, travelling to work on the underground and commuter trains.

Despite Holmes' phenomenal popularity, Conan Doyle soon began to tire of Holmes. As early as November 1891 Conan Doyle had written to his mother saying that he was planning to kill him off but initially refrained from doing so in response to her protests. However, in 'The Adventure of the Final Problem', published in December 1893, he *did* dispose of Holmes by having him plunge into the Reichenbach Falls in the clutches (literally) of his deadly enemy Professor Moriarty. Holmes had finally become too much for Conan Doyle who in 1896 wrote of his creation, 'I have had such an overdose of him that I feel towards him as I do towards pâté de foie gras, of which I once ate too much, so the name of it gives me a sickly feeling to this day.' (Booth, 1997:243) People had come to believe that Holmes was a real person and Conan Doyle was receiving more and more mail addressed to Holmes forwarded from Scotland Yard, the *Strand Magazine* and the post office in Baker Street. But crucially Conan Doyle was concerned that the stupendous success of the Holmes stories, which he viewed as mere pot-boilers, were overshadowing his work as a serious historical novelist. Conan Doyle was astounded by the public outcry over Holmes' demise: over 20,000 people cancelled their subscriptions to the *Strand Magazine*,

shareholders expressed their unease, Conan Doyle received thousands of abusive letters, workers in the City wore crêpe armbands and newspapers around the world reported Holmes' death as a news item and many carried obituaries.

After protracted refusals, Conan Doyle finally agreed to write a full-length novel set mainly on Dartmoor, entitled *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, which was serialised in the *Strand Magazine* from August 1901- April 1902 and published in book form later in the year. It was set before Holmes' plunge into the Reichenbach Falls and was an instant success. *Collier's Weekly* in the USA now offered Conan Doyle \$25,000 for six new Holmes stories and the *Strand Magazine* was offering to pay £100 per 1000 words, but the condition was that none of the tales could be retrospective. Holmes had to be "alive". Conan Doyle accepted the money, the highest sums ever paid to an author at that time, and produced a new series of stories featuring a resuscitated Holmes which were set between 1894-1898. They appeared in *Collier's Weekly* from September 1903 and the *Strand Magazine* from October 1903 and were published in book form under the title *The Return of Sherlock Holmes* in 1905.

In 1897 Conan Doyle, after, as he thought, having dispensed with Holmes, had written a Sherlock Holmes play in an attempt to placate the fans of Sherlock Holmes and also to pay for his new house which had gone over budget. An American actor, William Gillette, was cast as Holmes, and when he asked Conan Doyle's permission to undertake a re-write which included Holmes marrying the heroine, Conan Doyle told him, 'You may marry or murder him or do what you like with him'. (Conan Doyle, 1989: 102) The play opened in London in September 1901 and in January 1902 a royal command performance was staged for King Edward VII and Queen Alexandra. The following year a fourteen-year-old child actor named Charles Spencer Chaplin secured his first stage role in the play.

A French version of the five-act play which, like the original, drew heavily on the first Holmes story 'A Scandal in Bohemia' and 'The Adventure of the Final Problem', with scraps from other stories, was staged at the Théâtre Antoine in Paris in December 1907. It became part of the extraordinary Holmes craze that had gripped France as a result of the publication between 1902 and 1907 of the majority of the Holmes stories.⁷ The play was adapted by the writer and playwright Pierre Decourcelle (1856-1926) who, in 1908, became the co-founder of the Société cinématographique des auteurs et gens de lettres (SCAGL), producing films of literary classics. Decourcelle, who had seen the play in London, confirmed Holmes' popularity in France in an interview in December 1907: "The adventures of this famous English amateur detective have been a huge success in France as elsewhere. For two years Sherlock has been all the rage and everywhere sub-Sherlocks and imitation Sherlocks are being born." (Caillot, 1996: 64)

On February 15 1905, as Sherlockmania was hitting France, a new monthly magazine entitled *Je sais tout (I Know Everything)* appeared. It was the brain-child of journalist-publisher Pierre Lafitte who, in 1898, had already launched France's first sporting magazine, *La Vie au grand air (Life in the Open Air)*, followed in 1901 by *Femina*. Lafitte contacted his friend and contributor Marcel Leblanc and urged him to write an adventure story for *Je sais tout* featuring a truly French

hero who would be France's answer to Sherlock Holmes and who, he hoped, would do for the sales of *Je sais tout* what Holmes had done for those of the *Strand Magazine*. Although Leblanc had never written anything of this sort before, he produced a short story featuring a gentleman burglar Arsène Lupin and entitled 'L'Arrestation d'Arsène Lupin' ('The Arrest of Arsène Lupin'), which appeared in the sixth issue of the magazine on 15 July 1905. In this first tale, Arsène Lupin is apparently already well-known. He is referred to as 'the famous Arsène Lupin ... the mysterious burglar whose exploits had been the subject of newspaper stories for months ... the man of a thousand disguises' (Leblanc, 2004(a):12). However, Lupin was by no means the first gentleman-burglar in crime fiction and indeed, an earlier literary creation had direct links with Conan Doyle. In 1899, a gentleman-burglar named Arthur J. Raffles, together with his sidekick Bunny, had made their debut in a collection of short stories entitled *The Amateur Cracksman*. Raffles' creator was Conan Doyle's brother-in-law, E.W. Hornung (1866-1921), and the dedication of the first volume of Raffles stories reads, 'To ACD This Form of Flattery'. Conan Doyle described Raffles as 'a kind of inversion of Sherlock Holmes, Bunny playing Watson' (Haining, 1964: 16), but, strict moralist that he was, Conan Doyle did not approve of making the hero a criminal. Leblanc makes no reference to Hornung or Raffles but Daniel Fondanèche sees Raffles as an inspiration for Lupin (Fondanèche, 2000:29), while Benvenuti, Rizzoni and Lebrun (Benvenuti et al, 1979: 52), describe Lupin as an 'obvious heir' of Raffles. Raffles was also a hit in France and the play *Raffles* enjoyed a successful run at the Théâtre Réjane in Paris in the second half of 1907.

Although Leblanc never admitted to being influenced by Hornung's Raffles, he could not have been unaware of the phenomenon of the "gentleman burglar", to which the French press was drawing the public's attention around the time the first Lupin tale appeared. The notion of the "gentleman burglar" was given a particular focus by the sensational trial of forty or so members of the '*Travailleurs de nuit*' (Night Workers) gang which opened in Amiens in March 1905. The gang was led by gentleman burglar and anarchist Alexandre Jacob who was personally charged with 106 robberies and sentenced to forced labour for life. But the phenomenon of "the gentleman burglar" was not restricted to Jacob. In July 1905, the month in which the first Lupin story appeared, an article was published in *Lectures pour tous* under the title 'Cambriolages dernier cri' ('Burglaries - the latest fashion') in which the author observed, 'Instead of a suspicious-looking miscreant, we have the impeccably attired gentleman burglar who operates in a frock-coat and top hat.'⁸ The article pointed out that the modern criminal took advantage of modern inventions, especially the car, assumed various disguises, was particularly partial to impersonating police officers and did not balk at smashing through walls and ceilings to appropriate his booty. While the extent to which Lupin was modelled on Jacob is a subject of debate, but what is not contested is that 'Arsène Lupin is clearly a literary creation well-rooted in its period, a sort of quintessence of the spirit of a particular time and this is one reason why he was so powerful.' (Ruaud, 2005: 183)

Such was Conan Doyle's fame as the creator of Sherlock Holmes in France that Lafitte used both Conan Doyle's and Holmes' names to boost Leblanc's reputation. For example, in the November 1905 edition of *Je sais tout*, it was announced

that the magazine would be publishing a series of Arsène Lupin adventures, 'each one of which will be among the most famous titles of contemporary literature and will guarantee that their creator legitimately enjoys the glory of being France's answer to Conan Doyle.' (Buard & Bonaccorsi, 2005:227) In October 1908 an announcement trailing *L'Aiguille creuse* (*The Hollow Needle*) asserted that Leblanc was 'nicknamed the French Conan Doyle' (Derouard, 1989: 163). The following month *Femina* carried a family photo of Leblanc, his wife and son, taken in the apartment where readers were informed that the French Conan Doyle had created the one and only Arsène Lupin. In January 1909, coinciding with the 100th performance of the play *Arsène Lupin*, which had opened in Paris on 28 October 1908, Lafitte published a book catalogue where the text alongside a photo of Conan Doyle read, 'Arsène Lupin is now as popular a character as Sherlock Holmes and his adventures have swept the crowds off their feet' ('ont passionné la foule') (Derouard, 1989: 167).

But it was not just a question of using Holmes and Conan Doyle in advertisements and magazine articles to promote Leblanc and Lupin. In June 1906, possibly at the instigation of Lafitte, Leblanc wrote Holmes into a Lupin short story entitled 'Sherlock Holmes arrive trop tard' ('Sherlock Holmes Arrives Too Late') (Leblanc, 2004(b)). Following letters from Conan Doyle's lawyers, Leblanc was obliged to change Holmes' name, and in subsequent publications of the story he appears as Herlock Sholmès. Sherlock Holmes/Herlock Sholmès, now accompanied by his faithful friend, not Watson but Wilson, features in 'La Dame blonde' ('The Blonde Lady') and 'La Lampe juive' (The Jewish Lamp), which were published between November 1906 and October 1907 and appeared in book form as *Arsène Lupin contre Herlock Sholmès* in 1908 (Leblanc, 2004 (c)). Holmes/Sholmès appeared again in the novel *L'Aiguille creuse* (*The Hollow Needle*) (Leblanc, 2004(d)), published in *Je sais tout* between November 1908 and May 1909 and in book form under the same title in June 1909.

However, the Holmes and Watson who feature in 'Sherlock Holmes Arrives too Late' bear little resemblance to the characters created by Conan Doyle, and Leblanc's descriptions of 'his' Holmes/Sholmes and Watson/Wilson are vague in the extreme. In 'Sherlock Holmes Arrives Too Late', Holmes is described as 'a man of perhaps, some fifty summers, pretty powerfully built and clean-shaven, whose dress accentuated his foreign [i.e. non- French appearance]'. (Leblanc, 2004(b): 136) In 'The Blonde Lady' the description is a little fuller but still sketchy and rather nondescript: 'Herlock Sholmes is a man ... such as one meets every day. He is about fifty years old and looks like a good solid bourgeois who's spent his life behind a desk doing accounts. Nothing to distinguish him from any honest citizen of London, neither his rusty-coloured side-boards [sic!], nor his shaven chin nor his rather heavy appearance - nothing unless it is his terribly sharp, bright penetrating eyes.' (Leblanc, 2004(c): 192). And Wilson/Watson does not come off much better. He has 'a fat face with shiny stretched skin like an apple around which his short spiky hair and short beard have been planted like blades of thick tough grass.' (Leblanc, 2004, (c): 191) Not surprisingly, perhaps, Leblanc later admitted with reference to Holmes that "I have not been wholly fair in my descriptions of that character."⁹ But a note of caution needs to be sounded here. Our images of Holmes (and Watson),

be they mental, iconographic or cinematographic, are primarily determined not by Conan Doyle's writing but by Sidney Paget's illustrations in the *Strand Magazine*¹⁰ and by subsequent film and television portrayals. For example, the deerstalker hat with which we associate Holmes made its appearance, together with the Inverness cape, in Sidney Paget's drawing of Holmes and Watson in a railway carriage illustrating 'The Boscombe Valley Mystery'; Conan Doyle's text refers only to a 'long grey travelling coat and close-fitting cap'. As Jack Tracy has pointed out, 'the deerstalker is worn only in the country and the Inverness is essentially a travelling-cloak to protect one from railway soot and road mud. The image of Holmes prowling the gas-lit streets of London in this "traditional" garb is ludicrous'. (Tracy, 1987: xii) Holmes's famous curved meerschaum pipe was an invention of the actor William Gillette who found it hard to speak his lines in the Holmes play with an ordinary pipe in his mouth, but the curved pipe took the bowl below the level of his mouth thus allowing him to articulate much more clearly. And the phrase 'Elementary my dear Watson', may have been frequently uttered by Basil Rathbone in his film portrayal of Holmes, but it never features in Conan Doyle's writing at all. A similar phenomenon can be noted in relation to Lupin. In October 1908, the play *Arsène Lupin* opened at le Théâtre de l'Athénée in Paris where André Brulé played Lupin, a role he was to continue playing until his death in 1953. For generations of theatre and film goers, Brulé with his monocle, top hat, white gloves and cane became the incarnation of Lupin, despite the fact that none of these accoutrements featured in Leblanc's stories.

Leblanc's sketchy character outlines make it clear that he was not attempting to write a Holmes pastiche as others had done both in France and in England. The purpose of introducing Holmes into the Lupin tales was to place Lupin on the same level as Holmes and stage a 'battle of the giants'. But Leblanc does not take Holmes's reputation as a genius for granted: he spells it out. For example, in 'Sherlock Holmes Arrives Too late', Leblanc has Lupin proclaiming, 'Tomorrow at four o'clock in the afternoon, Sherlock Holmes will be my guest. Sherlock Holmes, the great English detective for whom no mystery exists, Sherlock Holmes the most extraordinary solver of riddles that has ever existed' (Leblanc, 2004(b): 126). Lupin's triumph is therefore all the greater when he beats Holmes in solving the mystery of the Château of Thibermesnil, also relieving him of his watch into the bargain. In 'The Blonde Lady', too, Holmes's prowess is again emphasised when he is described as 'a phenomenon of intuition, observation, clairvoyance and ingenuity' (Leblanc, 2004(c): 192).

But it would be wrong to see the Lupin stories featuring Holmes as anti-English polemics. The tone is playful and humorous and Leblanc enjoys exploiting the fact that, as we have seen, it was widely believed that Holmes was a real person. For example, in 'The Blonde Lady' we read, 'You could think that nature has had fun taking the two most extraordinary types of detectives that imagination has produced, Edgar Poe's Dupin and Emile Gaboriau's Lecoq, to create a third, even more extraordinary and unreal. And we have to ask ourselves, when we hear about his exploits which have made him famous the world over, whether this Herlock Sholmès is not a legendary person, a hero of some great novelist's brain, a Conan Doyle for example'. (Leblanc, 2004(c): 192)

The practice of referring in one detective tale to detective characters created by other authors was not new. In Poe's short story 'The Murders in the Rue Morgue', we find Dupin referring dismissively to the methods of the French police and describing Vidoq as 'a good guesser, and a persevering man' (Poe, 1968(b): 392), but adding that he lacked education and, by paying too much attention to detail, was unable to see the broader picture. Conan Doyle was a great admirer of Poe, calling him 'the supreme original short story writer of all time' (Conan Doyle, nd: 108) and 'the originator of the detective story' (Conan Doyle, nd: 109), but when Watson says that Holmes reminds him of Dupin, Holmes dismisses Dupin as 'a very inferior fellow...he had some analytical genius, no doubt; but he was by no means such a phenomenon as Poe appeared to imagine.'¹¹ Whereas Conan Doyle recognised that Gaboriau had rather attracted him by the neat dovetailing of his plots, he had Holmes appear even more dismissive of Gaboriau's Inspector Lecoq than he was of Dupin. Holmes described Lecoq as 'a miserable bungler... he had only one thing to recommend him, and that was his energy.'¹² Thus, by including Sholmès/Holmes in his Lupin tales, Leblanc was following a well established tradition within the detective/crime fiction genre, namely cross-referencing in order to increase the status of one's own hero. There is no reference to Lupin in Conan Doyle's Holmes stories, but it is clear that Conan Doyle was aware of Leblanc's creation. Conan Doyle recalled taking part in an amateur billiard competition and being handed a piece of ordinary green chalk which he placed in his waistcoat pocket. He used it during the competition and in subsequent games. 'Some months later', he later wrote, 'as I rubbed the tip of my cue, the face of the chalk crumbled in, and I found it was hollow. From the recess thus exposed I drew out a small slip of paper with the words "From Arsène Lupin to Sherlock Holmes."'. He was clearly not amused commenting, 'Imagine the state of mind of the joker who took such trouble to accomplish such a result.' (Conan Doyle, 1989: 114).

At first glance we are struck by the differences between Conan Doyle's Holmes and Leblanc's Lupin. The majority of the cases undertaken by Holmes, the gallant, asexual, rational yet bohemian aesthete, take place in England, mostly in London or within easy reach of the capital, and are set between 1886 and 1904. Lupin, on the other hand, is a dashing, flamboyant, raffish Don Juan French bandit-hero of the Belle Epoque. Most of Holmes and Watson's adventures are nostalgic returns to the gas-lit Victorian world of the hansom cab and the steam train; indeed, as Erik Routley has noted, 'we wait until the very end of the short stories for a mention of a telephone and until 'His Last Bow' for a car' (Routley, 1972: 35). Lupin's world is altogether faster moving and imbued with technological progress. For example, the very first tale is set on a transatlantic liner, on the first page there is a reference to the wireless telegraph and a Kodak camera is central to the plot; in 'The Blonde Lady' the eponymous woman is spotted travelling in a 24 CV limousine made by Peugeot [sic].

Yet despite these differences there are a number of striking similarities between Holmes and Lupin and, indeed, their creators. Both Holmes and Lupin had very long literary lives: tales of Lupin were published from 1905 until Leblanc's death in 1941, while the four novels and 56 short stories featuring Holmes were published over a period of some 40 years, with the last Holmes story appearing

in 1927, seven years after the publication of the first Agatha Christie novel. As we have seen, Holmes and Lupin were both featured in stage productions, both have featured in innumerable films and both have been the subject of countless pastiches and imitations. Today they clash again in a popular video game.

Both men have provided prototypes within the genre of crime fiction. Lupin is a forerunner of Simon Templar (*The Saint*) created by Leslie Charteris and of John Creasy's *The Toff*. The Holmes/Watson relationship - the brilliant eccentric detective and his somewhat plodding, slower-witted narrator/companion - may have had its origins with Poe, but Conan Doyle turned it into a literary art form which we can see replicated, for example, in Agatha Christie's stories featuring Hercule Poirot and Captain Hastings and those by Colin Dexter with Inspector Morse and Sergeant Lewis.

Both Lupin and Holmes are patriots. Holmes used his pistol to trace a VR (Victoria Regina) of bullet-pocks in the wall of his rooms in Baker Street and was personally thanked by Queen Victoria after recovering the plans for the Bruce-Partington submarine, one of the government's most precious secret weapons.¹³

Coincidentally, perhaps, a Lupin story, 'Le Sept de coeur', which appeared in May 1907, a year and a half before the Holmes story, also centres on stolen submarine plans. Lupin's French credentials are emphasised throughout the stories. There are frequent references in the stories to 'our national thief' and Lupin even compares himself to Napoleon. "Arsène Lupin I am and Arsène Lupin I remain. I seek in vain in history for a destiny comparable to mine, a fuller life, a more intense life...Napoleon? Yes perhaps". (Leblanc, 2004:188).

For French readers, Lupin's repeated success in outwitting Sholmès/Holmes is not simply one character in a book getting the better of another, it is also France getting the better of England. For example, in 'The Blonde Lady', Lupin admits that as a detective Holmes knows no equal, but continues, 'Arsène Lupin versus Sherlock Holmes...France versus England...At last Trafalgar will be avenged'. (Leblanc, 2004(c): 190) But this is all pretty playful stuff. The main enemy in the Lupin tales is Germany. For example in *813* (1910) Lupin persuades William II to leave Morocco for France in exchange for some compromising letters (Évrard, 1996: 43), and in a later story ridicules Kaiser William II as a way of getting his own back after France's defeat in 1870. Jean-Paul Sartre, although a great fan of Lupin as a child, did not realise the German dimension until later. 'I adored the Cyrano of the Underworld, Arsène Lupin', Sartre wrote in *Les Mots*, 'without realizing that he owed his Herculean strength, his shrewd courage, his typically French intelligence to our being caught with our trousers down in 1870' (Sartre, 1964: 100).

There are other similarities between the two men. Both Lupin and Holmes have a very dismissive opinion of the police. Indeed, part of the fun of the early Lupin tales is the pleasure he takes in outwitting the police, especially Inspector Ganimard who is described in 'The Blonde Lady' (in another example of cross-referencing) as 'lacking the flashes of genius that inspired people like Dupin, Lecoq and Sherlock Holmes' (Leblanc, 2004(c): 174), but who, Lupin says elsewhere, is "almost as good as Sherlock Holmes" (Leblanc, 2004(d): 32). Lupin's superiority to the police in the early stories is used to underscore his

invincibility. "He [Lupin] speaks, writes, warns, orders, threats, delivers as if there was neither a Head of the *Sûreté*, nor police officers, nor police chiefs, in sum nobody who can stop him doing what he wants." (Leblanc, 2004 (c): 157). Holmes's superiority to the police is established mainly through his attitude to Lestrade, an Inspector at Scotland Yard, whom Holmes considered the best of a bad lot: quick and energetic but conventional, lacking in imagination and usually out of his depth.

While Lupin, the gentleman-burglar, consistently operates outside the law, the distinction between him and Holmes is not as clear-cut as might be supposed. Holmes is prepared to break the law; for example, in 'The Adventure of Charles Augustus Milverton'¹⁴, Holmes and Watson break into the house of the eponymous Milverton, a notorious blackmailer, where they witness his murder at the hands of a noblewoman whose life had been ruined. Not only do they deny all knowledge of the incident but before running from the scene of the crime, Holmes burns all Milverton's blackmail material. In 'The Adventure of the Abbey Grange',¹⁵ Holmes refuses to expose Jack Croker who had killed the brutal husband of one Mary Fraser.

What links Holmes and Lupin is that they both operate according to a similar moral code. Both pride themselves on being professionals, and while remuneration is important it is not their main driving force. Holmes often repeated that he worked rather for the love of his art than to acquire wealth and while his charges were on a fixed scale he often waived them. Lupin, is in Leblanc's words 'brave and chivalrous' and describes his victims as 'people inferior to himself, not worthy of sympathy'.¹⁶ In another interview Leblanc stated that Lupin never robbed 'the good guys' ('des gens sympathiques') (Leblanc, 2004(e): III); indeed many of his wealthy 'victims' are people who have been involved in dubious financial activities, thereby giving Lupin a certain moral legitimacy when he relieves them of their ill-gotten gains. But it would seem that the profits generated by Lupin's exploits are far from considerable. After a study of 27 of Lupin's robberies, Marcel Hovenot has calculated that the gentleman-burglar scarcely covered his costs.¹⁷ As Lupin exclaimed to Ganimard, 'My overheads are so high. If you only knew my budget - it's as big as that for a large town'.¹⁸

Both Lupin and Holmes largely eschew violence and rely on their wits to succeed. Both are masters of disguise. Like Vidoq and Lecoq, Lupin was a man of a thousand faces and indeed part of the challenge to the reader of the tales is to "spot" Lupin who appears under various names and in numerous guises - a chauffeur, a bookmaker, an old man, a travelling salesman, a Russian doctor, a Spanish bullfighter, etc. Holmes too was a master of disguise but, unlike Lupin, he assumed roles in order to solve the case on which he was working. But the roles he assumed were every bit as diverse as Lupin's and included an asthmatic old master mariner, an Italian priest, an elderly deformed bibliophile, a French worker, an old woman, a Nonconformist clergyman and a doddering opium smoker.

Finally, a similarity between the creators of Lupin and Holmes. Both Leblanc and Conan Doyle aspired to be recognised as writers of respectable mainstream literature. Indeed, before embarking on writing his Lupin stories, Leblanc

had, in the 1890s, already published novels and collections of short stories. Although they were well-received, they were not great commercial successes, but Leblanc still hankered after recognition as a 'serious' writer. Conan Doyle's historical novels *Micah Clarke* (1889) and *The White Company* (1891) appeared shortly after *A Study in Scarlet*, giving their author hope that he would achieve recognition as a writer of historical fiction. But both Leblanc and Conan Doyle were disappointed. Eventually and reluctantly they realised that they were shackled to their creations. Leblanc commented in 1933, 'Since then [the third Lupin story, published in January 1906] I have been the prisoner of Arsène Lupin. England first translated his adventures, then the United States and now they're known all over the world.' (Leblanc, 2004 (e):II) Elsewhere he declared, 'It's tough. Lupin follows me everywhere. He is not my shadow, I am *his* shadow.'¹⁹ Conan Doyle had a similar experience. Referring to Holmes in a letter to the first biographer of Holmes, he stated, "I feel that he has obscured a good deal of my more serious work,"²⁰ and a cartoon published in *Punch* showing a seated Conan Doyle chained to a diminutive Sherlock Holmes beside his chair captures well Conan Doyle's view of the relationship between him and his creation.

Notes

¹ The four volumes of Vidoq's memoirs had been written by two hack writers Emile Morice and Louis-François L'Heritier de l'Ain. Although published without Vidoq's permission the *Mémoires* were a huge success and were constantly reprinted. Vidoq was the inspiration for Balzac's Vautrin (in *Père Goriot*, *Illusions perdues*) and for Victor Hugo's Javert (*Les Misérables*). An English translation of Vidoq's *Mémoires* was published in 1829, the year in which Sir Robert Peel established Britain's first police force.

² See for example, Haining, 1996.

³ Ian Ousby, *Bloodhounds of Heaven: The Detective in English Fiction from Godwin to Doyle*, quoted in Haining, (1996: 7).

⁴ *A Study in Scarlet* first appeared in *Beetons Christmas Annual* in November 1887 and in a single volume in July 1888, reprinted in 1889.

⁵ *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* was published by George Newnes on 14 October 1892 in an edition of 10,000 copies. The first American edition was published by Harper Brothers, New York, the following day (4,500 copies). See A. Doyle (1999: 297).

⁶ Herbert Greenhough Smith, editor of the *Strand Magazine*, described Doyle as 'the greatest short story teller since Edgar Allan Poe'. Quoted in Booth (1998:142).

⁷ *Les Aventures de Sherlock Holmes* (1902), *Les Nouvelles Aventures de Sherlock Holmes* (1903), *Les Souvenirs de Sherlock Holmes* (1904), *Les Nouveaux Exploits de Sherlock Holmes*, *La Résurrection de Sherlock Holmes* and *Sherlock Holmes Triomphe* (1905). All of these were published by Félix Juven. In 1903, Delegrave had published a translation of *The Study in Scarlet*. It should also be noted that the short stories also appeared in magazines; for example *The Hound of the Baskervilles* (*Le Chien des Baskerville*) was serialised in *L'Humanité* between 9 September and 20 October 1907.

⁸ Anon., 'Cambriolages dernier cri', *Lectures pour tous*, July 1905, pp. 900-907. Quoted in Buard and Bonaccorsi (2005: 237).

⁹ Charles Henry Meltzer, 'Arsène Lupin at Home' in *Cosmopolitan*, Vol. 54, No. 6, May 1913, pp. 770-73, quoted in Di Mauro (1993: 194).

¹⁰ Sidney Paget was employed as illustrator for the Holmes stories by accident. The intention was to employ his brother, Walter, who worked for the *Illustrated London News* and had already done the illustrations for H. Rider Haggard's *King Solomon's Mines* and *She*, as well as Robert Louis Stephenson's *Treasure Island*. By mistake the invitation was sent to Sidney Paget's studio in Kensington. In the event, Sidney Paget provided over 350 illustrations for the Holmes stories using his brother, Walter, as

a model for the detective. As a result, Walter, a tall elegant man, was often accosted in the street as 'Sherlock Holmes' (see Booth, 1997: 162).

¹¹ Conan Doyle, A., *A Study in Scarlet*, in Baring-Gould (1967: 162).

¹² Conan Doyle, A., *A Study in Scarlet*, in Baring-Gould (1967: 163).

¹³ See Conan Doyle, A., 'The Adventure of the Bruce-Partington Plans', published in the *Strand Magazine*, December 1908 and included in the collection of short stories published as *His Last Bow* (1917).

¹⁴ See Conan Doyle, A., 'The Adventure of Charles Augustus Milverton', published in the *Strand Magazine*, April 1904, and included in the collection of short stories published as *The Return of Sherlock Holmes* (1905).

¹⁵ See Conan Doyle, A., 'The Adventure of the Abbey Grange', published in the *Strand Magazine*, September 1904, and included in the collection of short stories published as *The Return of Sherlock Holmes* (1905).

¹⁶ Charles Henry Meltzer, 'Arsène Lupin at Home' in *Cosmopolitan*, Vol. 54, No. 6 May 1913, pp. 770-73, quoted in Di Mauro (1993: 194).

¹⁷ Marcel Hovenot, 'Butin de Lupin', in *Revue d'études des lupiniennes*, No. 4, quoted in Benvenuti et al (1979: 55).

¹⁸ Quoted in Benvenuti et al (1979: 55).

¹⁹ Quoted in Benvenuti et al (1979: 53).

²⁰ Quoted in Booth (2004: 179).

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