# Of Time and the City:
# The Doyles & London Print Culture

Jonathan Cranfield (Liverpool John Moores University)

j.l.cranfield@ljmu.ac.uk

**Abstract:**

**Key Words:**
Arthur Conan Doyle ; Sherlock Holmes ; John Doyle ; London ; Print Culture

**Bio:**

> ‘It must amuse you to see the vast and accurate knowledge of London which I display. I worked it all out from a Post Office map’ (Green 1983 50)

Is Arthur Conan Doyle a ‘London writer’? Tourists to the city will find him well represented in the culture and heritage industries which flourish around Baker Street and its nearby environs. Providers of guided ‘Sherlock Holmes Mystery Walks’ and itemised walking maps allow visitors to identify the landmarks and scenes familiar from his writing. There are two separate books each titled *The London of Sherlock Holmes* which catalogue the stories’ London settings from shopping thoroughfares and the corridors of Whitehall to lurid riverside haunts, quiet suburbs and train termini.[i] Adaptations for television and cinema will ‘remix’ character genders and historical periods. They also frequently tear the stories’ narratives apart and reassemble them for different audiences and different media; generally though, in shows as diverse as the BBC’s *Sherlock* (2010-16) and Netflix’s *Irregulars* (2021), the core London setting is retained. In scholarship, too, Conan Doyle’s London has become entrenched as one of the key psycho-geographical portraits of the city, to rival that of Pierce Egan, Charles Dickens or Virginia Woolf. Conan Doyle’s London has become, according to Franco Moretti, ‘just as legendary in its own way’ (Moretti 134). He conjured a city so immersive and rich that readers around the world who had never set foot in England began to composed letters and send them at their own expense to ‘Sherlock Holmes, London’ (Green *Letters* 91). The *Strand Magazine*, where Conan Doyle made his name, was one of most notable embodiments of Michael Wolff and Celia Fox’s famous observation that late-Victorian illustrated periodicals represented ‘the closest verbal and graphic equivalent which we have of Victorian urbanism’ (Wolff and Fox 589). The magazine’s cover

depicted the junction between the *Strand*'s offices on Southampton Street and the bustling Strand itself filled with carts, cabs, tradesmen, customers and messenger boys.

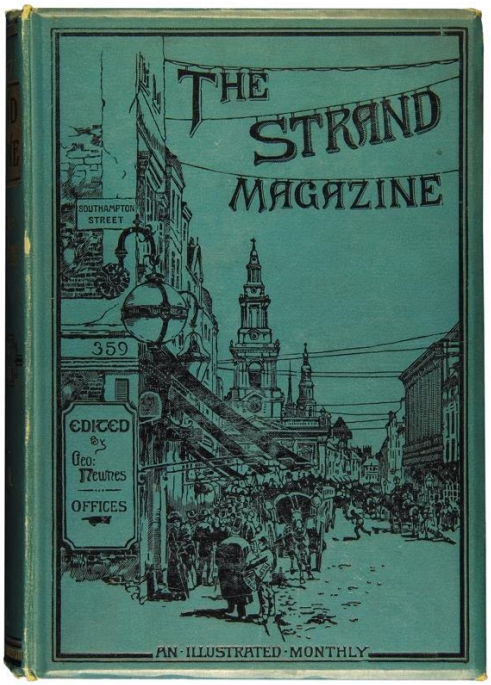


Figure i: Cover of the *Strand Magazine* Volume VII (Jan-June, 1894)

The image reproduced the perspective of an individual lost in the middle of all this hopeful, respectable, ever-onward bustle. In the background, readers could see the spire of St. Mary Le Strand Church and an unfolding landscape of publishing houses, businesses and public buildings: the residuum of private, public and cultural power. The magazine acted as a kind of diorama of the city and the Holmes stories provided crucial scenery for its readers vicarious wandering. When Holmes turns to Watson in 'The Resident Patient' (1893) and observes that 'the stars are out and the wind has fallen. What do you say to a ramble through London' (128), his invitation was extended de facto to the magazine's readers.

Aside from their own autonomous vision, the Holmes stories contributed to a particular vision of *fin-de-siècle* London at the peak of its many contradictions between fatigue and

industry, insularity and empire, new and medieval technologies, horse-drawn carriages and cinemas. This London, contributed to in different ways by authors as diverse as Robert Louis Stevenson, Oscar Wilde, Bram Stoker, Sarah Grand and H. G. Wells reified an uncanny and enticing atmosphere which has become a permanent feature of the modern cross-media culture industry.[ii] Nevertheless, this deep network of associations all rest more squarely upon Sherlock Holmes rather than Arthur Conan Doyle himself. Conan Doyle's own relationship to London was both complex and ambiguous, especially in relation to his early life and family history, which constitute the main focus of this article. Conan Doyle was in many ways a *sui generis* author: an outsider prior to his success and an exceptional case after it. Conan Doyle biographers often linger over the fine details of his social life in middle age: the clubman, the sportsman, the builder of strong masculine ties with publishers, editors and established names such as Andrew Lang, James Payn, Herbert Greenhough Smith and Jerome K. Jerome. His life and career, though, was spent alternately resisting and yielding to the centripetal pull of London. Viewed from afar in Edinburgh and then from a nearer distance in Southsea, London became a metonym for success first in medicine and then in literature for the young Conan Doyle. Years later, another transplanted Scottish doctor-turned-novelist A. J. Cronin channeled the same provincial angst when he imagined the medical establishment as protected by 'battlements' (446) in need of storming; the history of Conan Doyle and his family provide a fascinating historical case study into the promise and perils of such an assault.

## Edinburgh and London

By the time that Conan Doyle became famous in the 1890s, the periodical marketplace had been reshaped by the rise of middlebrow illustrated magazines. Much has been said about the impact of these economic and material developments on the contours of British literature but one of its

epiphenomenal effects was to make London the indisputably pre-eminent centre for periodical publishing. Conan Doyle, born in 1859, grew up in a more bipolar world where epic literary feuds and political debates where conducted on the pages of journals published both in London and in Edinburgh, the city of his birth. Edinburgh was home to the *Edinburgh Review*, *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, *Tait's Edinburgh Magazine* and *Chambers' Edinburgh Journal* as well as numerous other less durable titles which 'established Edinburgh as a potential rival to London' (Finkelstein 198) in the first decades of the nineteenth century. Though Edinburgh would remain a crucial component of British publishing and cultural life, its claim to properly disrupt the London hegemon would be challenged by the refinement of new technologies: mass printing, railway travel, diversified models of distribution and sale alongside an enormous expansion in the literate population. This allowed magazines like the *Strand* to establish a more dominant mass culture which was national rather than regional and demotic rather than confined to elite circles.

Conan Doyle birthplace was not the 'native' home of either of his parents. Both were relatively recent arrivals. His mother, Mary Foley (1837-1920), emigrated from Ireland with her sister and recently-widowed mother in 1847. Mary's mother Catherine had been born into a family, the Packs, which belonged to the 'Anglo-Irish' Protestant establishment in Ireland but had converted to Catholicism at the time of her marriage. After her husband, William, died young in 1841, her change of faith prevented her from reintegrating into her former familial and social groups (Lycett 11-12). She ran a genteel school in Kilkenny until the worsening famine and economic climate forced her to emigrate. Catherine's adopted faith proved essential to her career, however. When teaching in Kilkenny she taught in French, helping young women to acquire the necessary language skills to work as governesses or English teachers abroad in

Catholic-majority France. In Edinburgh she ran an employment agency which helped to place teachers and governesses, some from abroad, into schools and family homes. This work relied upon the sturdy networks of patronage, faith and community that persisted in British Catholicism since the days when the faith was prohibited by law (in the reigns of Elizabeth I and James I) and through many years where they were subject to legal discrimination and political disenfranchisement.[iii] Money was tight and, in 1849, the family took in a young Catholic lodger who had seemingly sought advice on where to stay from the nearby St. Mary's church (Lycett 13).

The lodger, Charles Altamont Doyle (1832-1893), was in Edinburgh to take up a post in the city's department of public works. Arthur Conan Doyle's father was shy, introspective and prone to depression. Charles' father was John Doyle (1797-1868), the celebrated and influential political cartoonist 'HB'. John, the artistic son of an affluent Dublin silk merchant, migrated to London with his wife in 1822 and, through the popularity of his lithograph drawings in the 1830s, established his family in affluent Cambridge Terrace near Hyde Park. His household was at the epicentre of 'a circle of artistic and literary figures, including David Wilkie, Scott, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Dickens, Thackeray, Macauley and the poets Thomas Moore and Samuel Rodgers' (Baker 839). His elder children, James William Edward Doyle, Richard 'Dicky' Doyle and Henry Edward Doyle, grew to maturity in this environment and were all embarking upon sturdy careers in arts and letters when young Charles, morose and less artistically orthodox than his brothers, was dispatched to Edinburgh for a post with far less prestige and scope for literary society.

## John Doyle & Lithographic Celebrity

John Doyle's political caricatures were generally credited by contemporaneous commentators as marking a desirable transition away from the crudity and vulgarity late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth century caricature of the kind popularised by James Gillray. Graham Everitt best embodied this view in 1886.

> The coarseness and suggestiveness of the old caricaturists gradually disappeared, until at length, in 1830, an artist arose who was destined to work a complete revolution in the style and manner of English caricature. This artist was John Doyle,—the celebrated H. B. […] So completely was the style of comic art changed under the auspices of these clever men, that the very name of 'caricature' disappeared, and the modern word 'cartoon' assumed its place. (Everitt 5)

Doyle's cartoons are an instructive starting point for understanding the entwined relationship between the burgeoning careers of the 'Doyle-spora' as they attempted to make careers for themselves within London print culture. They also stand as a stark reminder of how quickly the print and periodical marketplace would be revolutionized in a few short decades after 1830. Print allowed the Doyles a medium through which to find fame and success but it also proved to be a restless medium prey to fluctuating public tastes and constantly evolving material processes. The marketplace would also come to be regulated by publishers and editors who sought to shape and constrain their political expression and would also be quick to remind them of their perpetual status as religious outsiders.

John Doyle's satirical technique was relatively straightforward. Without the temptation to exaggerate his subjects' facial features and deploy lewd or carnivalesque imagery, he sought instead to highlight the forces that determined public policy but which could not be openly discussed. In doing so, he depicted politics and politicians with far greater dignity than many of his peers and immediate predecessors. His satire was, as a result, not viewed as particularly stinging. He exaggerated inherent contradictions in political discourse just enough to suggest a

knowing superiority but left the underlying party edifices and the personal integrity of his subjects unscathed. This absence of vulgarity was gratifying to Victorian sensibilities after the perceived Regency excesses of Gillray and George Cruikshank but the style has failed to endure. This is perhaps, according to Brian Maidment, due to the faint, 'dispersed, crayon-like' effect of lithography in combination Doyle's preference for 'awkward and stiff figure groupings' (63) which appear comparatively bland.

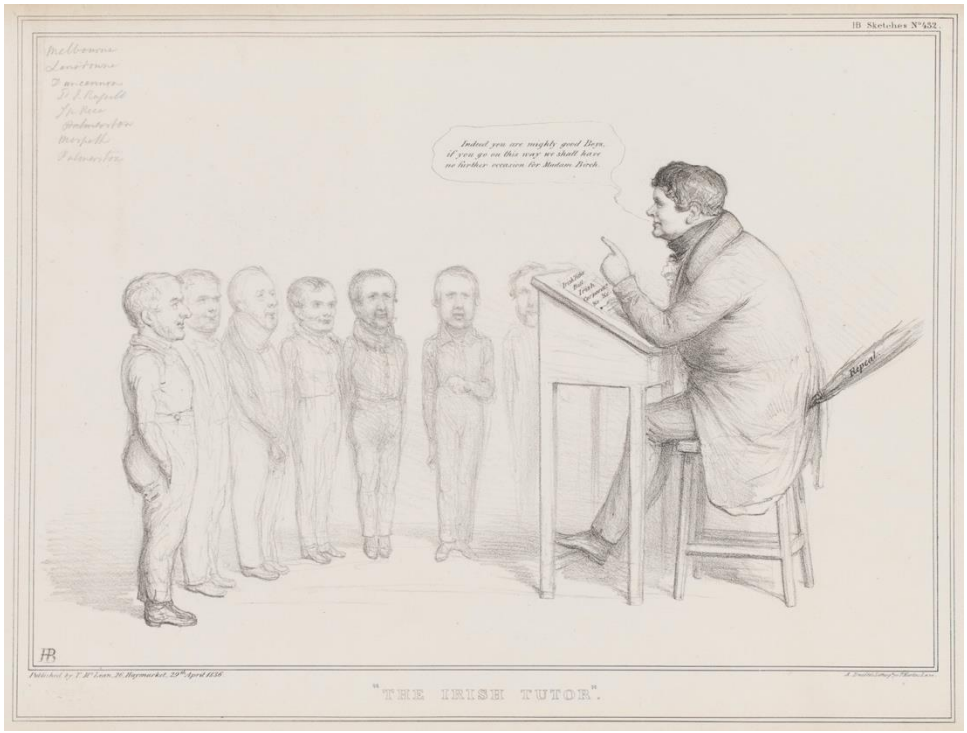


Fig II: 'HB', 'The Irish Tutor', Lithograph, Alfred Ducôte (29 April 1836) (National Portrait Gallery, NPG D41366)

Doyle's lithograph 'The Irish Tutor' is a helpful illustration of some of these issues. It shows Daniel O'Connell, the Irish nationalist MP known as the 'liberator', in the character of a schoolmaster disciplining the likes of Lord Melbourne, Lord Palmerston and Lord John Russell as recalcitrant boys (McLean 47). O'Connell is extracting concessions from Whig elites in relation to the relaxation of tithe payments from Irish citizens to the Church of Ireland by

threatening them with a ‘birch’ labelled ‘repeal’. The implication of the cartoon is that, unless his demand are met, O’Connell will push harder for Irish independence and the repeal of the Act of Union (1800) which brought Ireland into full political union with England and Scotland.[iv] In Doyle’s image, however, ‘repeal’ is just an empty threat used to extort concessions from the political establishment. In fact, because the likes of Palmerston and Melbourne are depicted with a degree of dignity, despite the ‘classroom’ setting, it is O’Connell who appears as the tyrannical school master, abusing his own authority. Doyle, whose family had been disposed of their lands and titles because of their religion thus neutered a potentially radical message into a form of cynical, ‘damn-them-all’ centrism.

This tension was significant in the work of all the London Doyles. They operated within a society, a culture and a political system that would tolerate them, use and promote their work, allow them a decent living but which was also committed to inhibiting the full expression of their civic rights. As such, when they fell, they tended to disappear from public life swiftly, as John did in the 1840s when the economic model of his success became unsustainable and the periodical marketplace began to liberalise. As the pseudonymous ‘HB’, Doyle circulated his images largely as lithographic prints which were produced as standalone pages, usually unencumbered by any writing beyond captioning and speech and enthusiasts would queue to buy them from booksellers. Sometimes readers were left unclear as to who was being depicted in a particular picture and *The Times* would publish a ‘key’ to clarify them (see McLean). This was important to Doyle’s success because at the time that he was working the technology to *include* reproducible images alongside printed text was relatively crude and impracticably expensive for publishers and consumers. The technology did not yet exist to marry the vibrant cultures of illustration and caricatures with the written content of periodicals in a way that was affordable

for the average reader (Everitt 5-6). As a result, HB's productions acquired an auratic and desirable quality which ensured both his family's financial security and their lofty position in London literary society. Later, Conan Doyle remembered his 'embarrassment' at family members or their 'grand London friends', including Thackeray, used to call at their 'little flat' when passing through Edinburgh (*Memories* 12).

This placed the Doyles at the epicentre of London print culture at precisely the point before it would become revolutionised by the repeal of the 'taxes on the knowledge', the fruits of industrialization and the 1833 Education Act. Conan Doyle glossed his grandfather's success with the note that 'there were no comic papers in this days' (*Memories* 7); they would soon arrive and swiftly render the regular purchase of individual lithographs a thing of the past. According to Everitt, 'caricature was destined to meet its final blow at the hands of that useful craftsman the wood-engraver'. The new division of labour in the production of images disrupted the market and consigned John Doyle to 'oblivion' (278) since no-one would willingly 'pay a shilling for a caricature when they may obtain one for a penny' (5).

## Sons & Fathers

These developments in print culture lead to an analogous reformation of literary culture and society. John Doyle's was part of one of the last iterations of the late eighteenth-century ideal of the literary circle which met either as all-male groups in clubs and coffee houses or at mixed literary parties (*conzerzasiones*) where reputations and professional connections could be made by initiates and established names could be fêted. The *beau idéal* of this grouping was the Boswell-Johnson circle in the 1770s and 80s (Parke 25-6). Of course these kinds of gatherings between literary figures would continue long into the twentieth century in different forms but

they were fundamentally altered by the arrival of a mass readership, the periodical explosion of the mid-century and the onset of professional, as opposed to amateur, modes of authorship. John Doyle's eldest son James (1822-1892) established a name for himself elegising the Boswell-Johnson circle in oil paintings which were also successfully mass-produced as line-engraving replicas.


Figure III: James William Edward Doyle, 'A Literary Party of Sir Joshua Reynolds' (1 Oct 1851) (National Portrait Gallery, NPG D14518)

Fig. III captures the evocative potency of the closed, group of literate men who wielded cultural power and shaped the public discussion of ideas. James Doyle would have witnessed many similar gatherings at Cambridge Terrace during his childhood but he abandoned his promising early career to work on bespoke and uncommercial works of illustrated history and his encyclopaedic *Historical Baronage of England* (1886). He never belonged to a literary *coterie* like his father and preferred to work with Catholic collaborators; socially, he withdrew from

public life and retired into ‘aristocratic Catholic circles’ (Mitchell 835). John Doyle’s second son Henry (1827-1892), though he dabbled with providing comic illustrations for the miscelleny *Fun*, was also a painter most famous for his portrait of Cardinal Wiseman in 1858. He became director of the National Gallery of Ireland from 1869 until his death in 1892.

The third Doyle son, Richard (1824-1883), made a more concerted attempt to adapt himself to the brave new world of periodical publishing in the 1850s and his experiences are particularly instructive when thinking about the relationship between the London and Edinburgh Doyles. Richard ‘Dickie’ Doyle demonstrated an early talent through his wildly creative illustrations of myths and fairy tales, some of which were circulated privately amongst family and friends. In his early twenties he was introduced to Mark Lemon, one of the founding editors of the comic weekly *Punch* to which he contributed a huge number of illustrations between 1844 and 1850. His work in established his own fame, and his sharp satirical eye helped to bring *Punch* from a marginal and money-losing paper to the very centre of the new periodical culture by 1850. His association with the magazine brought him into close proximity with its many contributors and admirers which included Thackeray, Douglas Jerrold, Alfred Tennyson, Coventry Patmore and Thomas Hood (Appelbaum ix).

These associations identify ‘Dickie’ as being at home amongst the whiggish left of British politics in the 1840s which would soon cohere around the bombastic and reformist liberalism of Charles Dickens. Nevertheless his other work was considerably more radical than this. His humorous series *Manners and Customs of Ye Englyshe in 1849* (London: Bradbury & Evans, 1849) depicted some of the crazed absurdities of modern city life and the social hypocrisies which underlay the conventions of fashionable life.

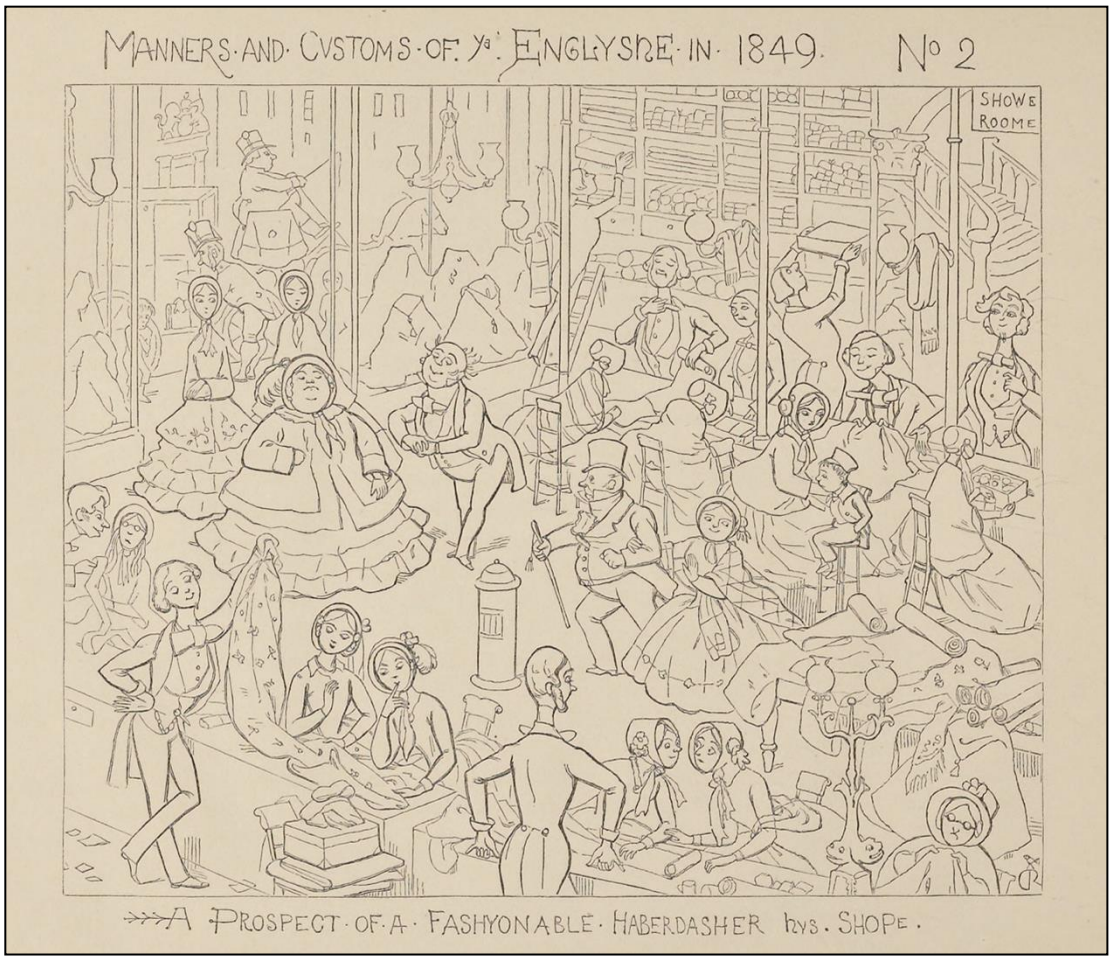


Figure IV: Richard Doyle, 'A Prospect of a Fashyonable Haberdasher' taken from *Manners and Customs of Ye England in 1849* (London: Bradbury & Evans, 1849), 5.

Fig. IV shows a representative image where the froth and bustle of modern consumerism dominates the frame whilst, in the margins, a starving child begs in order to survive. In other images, wounded soldiers of the Napoleonic Wars sit desolate on the margins of a Hyde Park promenade. Dickie's work in *Punch* and elsewhere demonstrates how the work of illustrators and satirists had changed by the late 1840s. The readers of magazines became used to etchings and voltaic electrotyping which could be used to illustrate pages for considerably less expense. This largely destroyed his father's profession but also transformed it into something more resembling a regulated trade, organised around popular newspaper and magazine titles which generally commissioned work from self-employed contractors. Dickie's illustrations made him famous but

he also used them to advocate for political reforms that went far beyond Catholic emancipation or home rule for Ireland. In 1843 he illustrated Hood's 'The Song of the Shirt' (1843) in *Punch*'s Christmas edition. The poem wove tragedy from the economic exploitation of a working-class seamstress and Dickie's illustration showed rich young children riding their servants like animals. The poem was turned into a popular song which became associated with various forms of labour activism, particularly that of female garment workers (Tamboukou 88). The fine glamour of wealthy clothes became stained by the miserable lives of those who stitched them to avoid starvation.

In 1850, at the height of his fame, Dickie resigned from *Punch* when the politics of his colleagues diverged on matters of religion. Pope Pius the Ninth's announcement that he planned to reinstitute the Catholic bishoprics of England stirred up a new wave of anti-Catholic public fervour to which *Punch* gave uncritical voice.

THE THIN END OF THE WEDGE.

DARING ATTEMPT TO BREAK INTO A CHURCH.

Figure V: John Leech, 'The Thin End of the Wedge', taken from *Punch* (16 Nov 1850), 207.

Fig. V shows John Leech's cartoon 'The Thin End of the Wedge'. It depicts the Pope and Cardinal Nicholas Wiseman, family friend and painterly subject of the Doyles, forcibly breaking into Westminster Abbey with a 'wedge' inscribed 'Roman Archbishopric of Westminster'. Another cartoon from the same period by John Tenniel showed Lord John Russell, previously an advocate of Catholic emancipation, as David slaying Wiseman in the character of Goliath on behalf of Anglican Britain. Russell's sword bore the legend 'Act of Parliament' referring to Ecclesiastical Titles Act of 1851 which made it a criminal offence for Catholic individuals to assume such positions. The Act was widely considered an overaction immediately after its passage since it went against the broad trend towards religious liberty that Russell had previously

championed and, moreover, it solidified Irish MPs into an anti-government voting block which made it 'difficult to pass any type of legislation' (Scherer 193).

These cartoons, and Dickie Doyle's objection to them, illustrated another instance of the cultural and religious conflicts that bedevilled the family's participation in English society. They lived trapped between a familiar set of impulses and pressures: to conform, to make a living and to be true to their religious and political principles. Catholics, in both images were represented not just as cultural outsiders but part of a permanent low level threat to its institutions. Dickie took the message seriously and his resignation was met with incredulity by his colleagues for whom satire was very much a non-contact sport. I would argue that part of this pressure came filtered through the new auspices of the periodical press which, though it was segmented and bisected along multiple ideological axes, still worked effectively to marginalise radical voices emerging from, amongst other positions, women's rights activists, the labour movement and from Irish nationalists. There can be no question that Dickie's career suffered from this move which drew attention to his otherness and which exacerbated his natural impulses towards alcohol misuse and lethargy, all of which drove him increasingly from the centre of London print culture to the very margins until his death in 1883 (Heseltine 842).

## 'The days of very small things'

I have dwelt on these issues for a number of reasons because they shaped the experiences of both Charles Altamont Doyle and his son Arthur as they lived their lives in shabby genteel Edinburgh poverty. Biographers like Russell Miller and Charles Higham have characterised their life as a form of exile, a punishment for Charles' lack of artistic discipline. It is easy to imagine acrid feelings of marginalisation, of intellectual and social banishment from the imagined coteries and

*soirees* of London life. From distant Edinburgh, the difficulties of the London Doyle's must have been effaced and flattened, looking like easy success and cultural prestige.

Conan Doyle vividly remembered his childhood visits to the London Doyles and particularly the stark contrast between their respective modes of life. He loved his uncles as child and, when visiting them as an adolescent, they would conduct him on visits to museums, galleries, the theatre and sites of cultural interest, including the grave of his hero and his grandfather's friend Thomas Babbington Macauley (*Letters* 67). To leave all this behind him and return to a dysfunctional home life must have underscored his sense of alienation. When he used metaphors to describe literary success, like 'opening the oyster' (*Letters* 247), he was identifying himself as an outsider, as someone who had no way of accessing the kinds of influence or patronage that seemed necessary to begin his career. He thus experienced a kind of doubled marginalization as someone who came to reject his family's Catholicism (and most forms of organized religion in general) early on in life. This apostasy cut him off even from the limited patronage of the London Doyles who must have seemed like his easiest *entree* into London print culture.

Conan Doyle's father, Charles, was certainly not going to offer such opportunities. His life in Edinburgh and his marriage to his former landlady's daughter, Mary Foley, would prove disastrous. His mental health declined terribly and he succumbed to a form of dipsomania which blighted his growing family's early life until he was permanently institutionalized in 1881. His later artistic work, however, as preserved in Michael Baker's *The Doyle Diary* (New York: Paddington Press, 1978), shows that he possessed a remarkably individual talent. After moving to Edinburgh he did occasionally sell pictures and illustrations to London magazines and take illustrative commissions for book illustrations, though his unreliability prevented him from

making a regular living from such work. Cut off, as he eventually was, from almost all forms of society and unregulated by the demands of the marketplace he experienced an unusual form of artistic freedom denied to his siblings, though they could hardly have envied him. The work that he produced in the Montrose Lunatic Asylum was marked by its uninhibited advocacy for the radical political goals that remained challenging and dangerous for his siblings or father to treat openly. His work attacked anti-Irish and anti-Catholic violence, frankly praised American society in comparison with England, displayed open treatments of love and sexuality and, most strikingly, painfully documented his own mental illness.[v] Some of his nightmarish visions ('more terrible thank Blake' [*Memories* ii]) would not appear out of place in Weimar Germany some decades later. Were Charles Altamont Doyle to have been born a century later and to have benefitted from a more humane treatment of his conditions alongside developing tastes in avant-garde art, he could have lived a completely different life.

Conan Doyle was deeply embarrassed by his father's condition and 'the long sordid strain' of poverty (*Memories* 11). He was sent to the Jesuit school Stonyhurst in Lancashire and his experiences there only deepened his mistrust of Catholicism as a way of understanding the world and of regulating daily life: he later wrote that he 'found that the foundations not only of Roman Catholicism but of the whole Christian faith, as presented to me in nineteenth century theology […] so weak that my mind could not build upon them' (*Memories* 31). On his return from a lengthy 'gap year' stay at a Jesuit school in Feldkirch, Austria, he became anxious about staying with his London family:

> [letter to Mary Doyle] I am sorry to say that I have had to be measured for a suit of clothes, especially as I suppose they can scarcely make very good ones here; I had no option in the matter though, and no doubt I wd need a suit to see uncle Conan and the London people in. I don't think they are particularly dear here. (*Letters* 84)

He later wrote after another frigid visit in 1878 that ‘I fear that I was too Bohemian for them and they too conventional for me’ (*Letters* 101). After completing his medical degree at Edinburgh University in 1881, his early attempts to find employment had proved desultory and unpropitious. In 1882 his aunt Annette, the only surviving daughter of John Doyle, wrote a letter ‘guardedly offering to pull strings for him’ (Miller ???). This offer was in keeping with the ways in which Catholic networks of professional assistance, which included high clergy, gentry and aristocracy, had buoyed each of her brothers into timely employment such as Henry Doyle’s appointment as commissioner for the Papal States’ contributions to the London International Exhibition of 1862 (Bhreathnach-Lynch 833). Conan Doyle replied by stating that he could not in good faith accept their support given his religious convictions. The letter prompted another visit to London and a series of painful interviews with Annette, James and Dickie where he was obliged to outrightly reject their assistance (Miller ???).

Later, after Conan Doyle settled in Southsea in order to establish a general medical practice, he refused a mooted letter of introduction to the Catholic Bishop of Portsmouth. Such a letter could have proved invaluable in the dogged and painful work of attracting patients to his new practice but again the proffered hand was refused. Instead, he was able to occasionally defray serious anxieties about making his rent by sending unsolicited stories to magazines in hopes of having them published. This extra income was necessary as he never earned more than £300 in any of the eight years that he spent in practice between 1882 and his departure from Southsea in 1890. Managing his literary outputs proved challenging, however.

> Fifty little cylinders of manuscript did I send out during eight years, which described irregular orbits among publishers, and usually came back like paper boomerangs to the place that they had started from. (Smith 103-4)

This drudging process of submission, anticipation, anxiety, rejection and resubmission was painstakingly recorded in Conan Doyle's surviving diaries from this period. Along with his letters, they reveal him to possess an increasingly canny understanding of the new periodical marketplace for short, popular fiction. Though his heart was set upon producing the kind of detailed and dramatic historical fiction which he had particularly admired from his youth, he learned to shape his stories to the tastes of particular readers and particular magazines.

Conan Doyle had since childhood reserved a particular reverence for two publications: the stentorian and conservative *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine,* which had played a crucial role in literary and political disputes since its appearance in 1817, and the highbrow London literary journal the *Cornhill* which had thrived under Thackeray's editorship in the 1860s. Both magazines represented different types of cultural bastion that Conan Doyle sought to 'penetrate' (*Memories* 73). As he worked, however, he also began to understand the hierarchical nature of the periodical food chain of whereby material rejected by the expensive monthly journals could be modified and sold to cheaper and increasingly more salacious titles. Magazines like *London Society*, *Belgravia*, *Temple Bar* and *The Argosy* had, since the 1860s, held up the sturdy middlebrow of the market and were associated largely with the long, serialized sensation fiction and short genre fiction of their most famous contributors and editors such as Ellen Wood in *The Argosy* and Mary Elizabeth Braddon in *Belgravia*. The repeal of government levies on printing through the 1850s opened up the marketplace to such magazines and a slight relaxation of strict early Victorian moral sensibilities encouraged fiction which stimulated controversy through the treatment of topics like madness, divorce and bigamy. The 1860s also saw the appearance of *Good Words*, published by Cassell's, which ministered to the tastes of the evangelical middle classes and which included wholesome fiction alongside theological discussions and book

reviews.[vi] Conan published his early work in almost all of these magazines and, when they too would not place his stories, they appeared in bargain basement miscellanies like *Bow Bells* or *The Boy's Own Paper*. Conan Doyle learned to abnegate, though not obliterate, his artistic conscious:

> I was still in the days of very small things—so small that when a paper sent me a woodcut and offered me four guineas if I would write a story to correspond I was not too proud to accept. (*Memories* 74)

His gradual attunement to the needs of the market would prove to be a fine apprenticeship for the rigors of modern authorship. The hard knocks received by his London family had resulted from their misperception of the market or from their unwillingness to compromise with its demands. Conan Doyle, freed as he then was from unbending religious convictions and without the insulatory support of family wealth, was able to adapt. Alongside his less prestigious publications, he was also able to place three stories in the *Cornhill* and even one, 'The Physiologist's Wife' in *Blackwood's*.[vii] This meant that he began to build relationships with the new breed of literary gatekeepers, the editors like James Payn at the *Cornhill* and Andrew Lang who edited *Longman's Magazine* and was a reader at the book publisher Longman's which accepted Conan Doyle's first historical novel *Micah Clarke* in 1889. 'I am pleased that my story should have met with your approval' he wrote to Payne in 1883 upon the *Cornhill's* acceptance of 'J. Habakuk Jephson's Statement', 'there is no one whose literary opinion I value more highly' (*Letters* 204). These relationships had to built carefully, always allowing for the likelihood of future rejection: 'I never had an introduction to any editor or publisher before doing business with them […] [M]y apprenticeship was a long and trying one (Smith 104).

Gradually, though, correspondence were translated into in-person meetings and socializing or 'touch[ing] the edge of literary society' (*Memories* 78). Conan Doyle's letters detail the dizzying experience of travelling up to London from Southsea in order to meet with Lang to discuss edits to *Micah Clarke* over lunch at the Savile Club (*Letters* 257) and, climactically, to attend an event at The Ship in Greenwich where he met Payn, 'the warden of the sacred gate' in person (*Memories* 78).[viii]

## London at a Distance

The apex of Conan Doyle's early success, achieved by placing the first two Sherlock Holmes stories in the *Strand* resulted from lessons learned during his 'long and trying' apprenticeship. He calibrated his material (detective fiction) to the demands of the medium (the six thousand word short story) where it would obtain the best possible price.[ix] These two stories must have been among the very few pieces of his work that were written while he was living in London, in Montague Place. In 1890, Conan Doyle abandoned his Southsea practice and embarked upon a hugely ambitious scheme to study Ophthalmology in Vienna and on that basis establish himself in London as an eye specialist. This plan was inspired by a chance encounter on a train with a man named Malcom Morris:

> We passed most of the night talking and I learned that […] he had been a provincial doctor, but that he had come to London and had made a considerable hit as a skin specialist in Harley Street (*Letters* 278)

The temptation to make a final 'forlorn hope' of his medical career naturally lead him to London, the site of many historical and familial associations with power and success. As Percy Trevelyan observes in 'The Resident Patient' (1893) 'a specialist who aims high is compelled to start in one

of a dozen streets in the Cavendish Square quarter, all of which entail enormous rents and furnishing expenses' (130) and was thus a career choice only open to the wealthy. His Ophthalmological practice was a disaster but the success of the Sherlock Holmes stories obviated his need to work in medicine at all. His first instinct, at this supreme moment of fulfilment was to leave London instantly and establish himself in the quite suburban climes of South Norwood with his young family. From here, and from his future homes in Surrey and Sussex, Conan Doyle's access to the world of London clubland and literary society was always experienced from a distance. His extraordinary financial success and his rather bluff attitude towards the philosophical or artistic components of his own writing (though he admired such qualities in other writers) left him free to build a life away from 'the money market of the vast Babylon' (as he called it in his paean to suburban life, *Beyond the City* (180). Andrew Lang's rather stinging view of Conan Doyle's fiction, written on the publication of his prestigious Author's Collected Edition in 1903 suggested that he (Conan Doyle) had never been able to fully escape the stigma of his periodical beginnings:

> The native pewter of Sherlock Holmes is a sixpenny magazine, with plenty of clever illustrations; he takes better in these conditions than in a sumptuous text with only one or two pictures. Sir Arthur is an unaffected writer. His style is not 'a separate ecstasy,' as in the case of Mr R. L. Stevenson's writings. (???)

In fact, Conan Doyle's sense of being an 'outsider' from the closed literary world of initiates may have simply assumed a different form after his success. Intriguingly, though, his later attempt to proselytise his spiritualist beliefs to the mass market through the serialization of his novel *The Land of Mist* (1926) in the *Strand* resulted in a repulse similar to that experienced by the London Doyles who first entered London print culture some hundred years beforehand.

**Works Cited**

[i] 2 x sherlock holmes london
[ii] See *Sherlock Holmes Multimedia Afterlives*
[iii] Catholic Relief Acts of 1766 and 1829
[iv] This Act dissolved the Irish Parliament and added 50 Irish seats in Westminster. O'Connell occupied several of these seats through the 1830s and 40s, taking advantage of Catholic emancipation to organize a mass political movement behind the idea of Irish independence.
[v] Doyle Diary
[vi]
[vii] White Company etc
[viii]
[ix] Chan, etc…