

THE FIVE BEST ARGUMENTS FOR LOUISE CONAN DOYLE AS THE CREATOR OF SHERLOCK HOLMES

As an introduction to the Sherlock Holmes authorship controversy, I present herein a quick summary of the five best arguments that Louise Conan Doyle is the true creator of Sherlock Holmes. I've labeled them Credibility, Chronology, Style, Racism, and Subtext. I discuss each in that order.

#1 CREDIBILITY

Arthur was a fabulist. In the strictest sense, a fabulist is someone who composes or relates fables. In a more general sense, a fabulist is a liar, particularly one who invents elaborate, dishonest stories to enhance his own image. In *Shadow Woman*, I detail a number of Arthur's more obvious lies, including, but not limited to:

Chugging Poison, in which Arthur claims to have intentionally taken lethal doses of gelsemium, repeatedly, to see if he could develop a tolerance for it;

Arctic Follies, in which Arthur claims to have survived falling into the Arctic Ocean five times in three days;

Looney Tunes, in which Arthur claimed to have witnessed one person strike another with a frying pan, only to have the victim's head burst through the bottom of the pan, rather than the pan burst the victim's skull;

Savior, in which Arthur claimed to have saved the ship *Mayumba* from crashing into the Tuskar rocks during a great storm;

His Unipod, in which Arthur claimed to have invented and fabricated a unipod (essentially a one-legged tripod), one that he used frequently (though he was never seen with it) to take hundreds of photographs (none of which have ever been seen) and that his unipod attracted the interest and attention of professional photographers (none of whom seem to have ever commented on it);

Idol Worship, in which Arthur claimed he dined with Oscar Wilde, received compliments from him regarding Arthur's novel *Micah Clarke*, and received a follow-up letter from Oscar, who once again complimented Arthur in words too glowing for the humble Arthur to repeat; and

Zero Patients, in which Arthur claimed, in his autobiography, to have rapidly turned out the early Holmes short stories while waiting for patients in his newly opened doctor's office in London, claiming (contrary to newspaper interviews of the time) that "not one single patient had ever crossed the threshold of my room."

As a gifted fabulist, Arthur, not surprisingly, claimed credit for the literary work of others. Early in his career, he managed to have multiple essays published in the *British Journal of Photography* under his name, though it is obvious he did not write them, though the essays were more likely written by William Kinnimond Burton. Later in life, Arthur put his name, and his name alone, on the cover of *The Coming of the Fairies* (an absurd book arguing for the reality of fairies), though Edward Gardner probably co-authored the book. Late in his career, he managed to have published his *History of Spiritualism* under his name, and his name only, though it is likely that most of the credit is due to Leslie Curnow.

Arthur's fabulism does not provide direct evidence that Louise created Sherlock Holmes and wrote the early adventures. His fabulism, though, does give us reason to question his presumed authorship of the Holmes adventures. His word is no guarantee of truth. His name is no guarantee of authorship.

#2 CHRONOLOGY

Louise Hawkins married Arthur Conan Doyle on 6 August of 1885. Eight or nine months later, sometime early or late in April of 1886, Sherlock Holmes was born with the completion of the manuscript for the novel *A Study in Scarlet*.

Holmes next appeared in 1889, with the completion of the manuscript for the novel *The Sign of Four*, offered as fulfillment of a recent publishing contract for Arthur to provide a novel, any novel, of at least 40,000 words, within five months. Arthur claims he chose to write the second Sherlock Holmes novel, rather than another of his beloved historical fiction genre, and that he wrote the novel in less than two months, though five were allowed. If he did write *The Sign of Four* in two months, he did so while simultaneously tending a wife and child, maintaining his own medical practice, working extra hours at the Portsmouth Eye Hospital, launching the Hampshire Psychical Society, working on his intended magnum opus *The White Company*, and revising proofs of his earlier historical novel, *The Firm of Girdlestone*. It therefore seems much more likely that *The Sign of Four* was already written and waiting impatiently to be published, finally to go forward after Arthur signed the lucrative publishing contract.

Between July 1891 and December 1893, Holmes appeared in 24 short stories. Arthur claims he wrote the first four of them in quick succession while waiting for a patient, any patient to cross the threshold of his recently rented doctor's office in London. That cannot be true, though, since his agent had earlier made a record of having received the manuscript for *A Scandal in Bohemia*. The stories were more likely written in Vienna, whence Arthur and Louise had just returned. While there, Arthur allegedly attended university classes to learn more about the eye. Louise allegedly waited patiently for him to return home.

In September or October of 1893, Louise was belatedly diagnosed with an advanced case of pulmonary tuberculosis, and, according to Arthur's autobiography, her life was in grave danger. He claimed to do everything possible to save the day, claiming he rushed with her to Davos Platz in Switzerland, in the desperate hope that the cold, high altitude air might save her. Sadly, on this issue, he again lied. Louise traveled to Switzerland alone, at least in the company of her sister rather than her husband. Arthur remained behind to conduct a countrywide lecture tour about famous figures in literature. Louise, fearing that she might not survive, took her creation with her and dropped him down the Reichenbach Falls in *The Final Problem*, using the story as an allegory of her struggle with the disease that would eventually consume her.

A detailed chronology of Arthur's life makes clear that he lied about his authorship of the Holmes adventures. A detailed chronology of Louise's life, on the other hand, is not possible, since Arthur and his second family destroyed most of the family records that mention her. What we can learn of her from secondary sources locates her at the right time and the right place to be the author of each and every one of the early Holmes adventures.

#3 STYLE

Arthur had no fondness for detective stories. They simply didn't fit his taste. He considered them to be "a lower stratum of literary achievement." He had no desire to be known as the next Edgar Allan Poe, or Wilkie Collins, or Emile Gaboriau. Instead, he wanted to write the next great novel about British history. He wanted to be known as the next Sir Walter Scott.

Arthur, in fact, hated Sherlock Holmes, and he was not shy about telling that to his friends. He instructed the children of his second marriage to never even mention Holmes, and screamed at them when they did.

Such anecdotal stylometric evidence provides us subjective cause to question Arthur's authorship of the Holmes adventures. More significantly, a computerized stylometric analysis of the Conan Doyle works provides objective evidence that he wrote but a few of the Sherlock Holmes adventures.

I've detailed my computerized stylometric analysis in my semi-technical paper entitled *Stylometric Analysis of the Sherlock Holmes Canon*, now available for viewing and download on the Authorship page of LouiseConanDoyle.com website. That paper is too dry and detailed for most readers, so I summarized my method and results in *Shadow Woman: The True Creator of Sherlock Holmes*. Even that summary is too long for this essay, so I'll provide a condensed summary here.

My stylometric analysis compares an individual story against several collections of text, deciding which collection is closer in style. If Story #1 is closer in style to Collection A than it is to Collection B, then the program determines that the primary author of Collection A is more likely to be the author of Story #1 than is the primary author of Collection B.

The story-to-collection comparison is based on the relative frequencies of 100 commonly used words, such as *a, and, the, if, when, where, who, what, why, neither, nor*, etc. Such words are called function words, and they work well for stylometric analysis for two reasons. First, they are context free. Their usage is independent of the setting of the story, the genre, the characters, and whether that story is written in the past, present, or future. Function words are also independent of the voice, whether the story is written in the first or third person. It makes no difference how frequently the word *Sherlock* or *Micah* or *detective* or *archer* appears in the story. Function words, by their very definition, are independent of context.

The second reason for using function words for comparisons is that people use function words frequently and without thought. People use them habitually, unwittingly, and in distinctive fashion. Function word usage rates, if properly analyzed, can be the equivalent of literary fingerprints.

By searching for those literary fingerprints in all of the Conan Doyle texts, most of which are not Sherlock Holmes adventures, I detect three distinct authors. The first author wrote almost all of the non-Holmes stories. Based on historical and chronological evidence, I conclude that first author can only be Arthur.

A second author wrote the Sherlock Holmes portion of *A Study in Scarlet* and each of the other early Sherlock Holmes adventures, up to and including *The Hound of the Baskervilles*. Based on historical and chronological evidence, I conclude that the second author can only be Louise, Arthur's first wife.

A third author wrote most of the later Sherlock Holmes adventures. Based on historical and chronological evidence, I conclude that the third author can only be Jean, Arthur's second wife.

#4 RACISM

One of the early Holmes adventures, *The Yellow Face*, is a full-fledged, unabashed argument in favor of interracial marriage and the equality of all races. Two of the later Holmes adventures, *The Three Garridebs* and *The Mazarin Stone*, include racist language and reveal racist thoughts that at considerable odds to *The Yellow Face*. Since Louise died long before those two offensive stories were written, she is not the author of either of them.

The Conan Doyle non-Holmes writings are also littered with racist terminology and thought, indicating that the author of those non-Holmes works is a different person than the author of the early Holmes adventures. Since chronology points only to Arthur as a possible author of the non-Holmes stories, Louise remains as the only one among the three who could have written *The Yellow Face*, an early Holmes adventure.

#5 SUBTEXT

Even on their surface, the early Sherlock Holmes adventures are recognized as masterpieces of a brilliant creator. The early adventures, however, are far more brilliant than most people realize. Not only do they tell of the immortal Sherlock Holmes and his superhuman deductive capabilities, they include a subtext that argues for the equality of all mankind. The subtext is written in allusionary fashion, so expertly and subtly, though, that they went unnoticed for a century. Samuel Rosenberg was the first to notice them, revealing them in his disruptive (and now largely ignored) 1974 book *Naked is the Best Disguise*. Rosenberg focused on the author's tendency to place references to illicit love in proximity to references to violence. So frequent are such occurrences, argued Rosenberg, that they must reflect Arthur's repressed sexual urges.

Following Rosenberg's lead, I have uncovered many score more allusions, almost all of them being in the early adventures, and I have formed a different hypothesis regarding their creator and their significance. I'll leave the details of Louise's numerous allusions for numerous essays to follow. Here I simply argue that there exists a subtext within the early Holmes adventures.

The subtext is not, by itself, an argument that Louise wrote the early adventures. What makes the subtext telling, though, is Arthur's apparent ignorance of it, and his contempt for including such subtext.

In "Sidelights on Sherlock Holmes," included as Chapter XI of his autobiography, Arthur had a perfect opportunity to explain that he had buried allusions in the Holmes adventures, assuming, of course, he was the person who buried them. Such insight would certainly have been an interesting sidelight on Sherlock Holmes, whom Arthur otherwise ignores throughout his autobiography 400 page autobiography. You will not, however, find any such revelation within "Sidelights on Sherlock Holmes," or in any of his other writings, interviews, speeches, and personal correspondence. It is as if Arthur was oblivious to the subtext.

"The first object of a novelist is to tell a tale," Arthur explained during a 1894 interview, "If he has no story to tell, what is he there for? Possibly he has something to say which is worth saying, but he should say it in another form."

“When a man invents he usually gives essentials for his story and no more,” Arthur advised in his book *Our Second American Adventure* (1924). “A novelist, for example, does not give details which have no bearing upon his plot.”

The author of the early Holmes adventures believed otherwise, creating adventures rich with allusions, allegory, irony, incongruities, and mathematical subtleties. Since chronology and biography eliminate everyone other than Arthur and Louise as the author of the early Holmes adventures, and since Arthur eliminates himself, we can safely conclude, based on the subtext issue alone, that Louise Conan Doyle was the person who created Sherlock Holmes and wrote his early adventures.