

ARTS & LETTERS

*The Case of
Sherlock Holmes*

"Sherlock Holmes, Order, and the Late-Victorian Mind" by Christopher Clausen, in *The Georgia Review* (Spring 1984), University of Georgia, Athens, Ga. 30602.

Sherlock Holmes surely would have enjoyed unraveling the mysteries of his own existence.

Starting with *A Study in Scarlet*, in 1887, author Arthur Conan Doyle (1859–1930) made a career for his famous character that spanned three other novels and 56 short stories over 40 years. The Holmes canon covers so much ground, writes Clausen, who teaches at the Virginia Polytechnic Institute, that it offers an "unrivaled and largely overlooked" record of evolving British social attitudes.

Holmes exemplifies the Victorian faith in scientific reason. "I am a brain, Watson," he announces to his faithful companion in "The Mazarin Stone," "The rest of me is a mere appendix." Indeed, writes Clausen, Holmes is "the sort of isolated intellectual who today would be called alienated: introverted, frighteningly analytical, and often cynical." When he is not wrapped up in a case, Holmes indulges in cocaine and morphine to combat his ennui.

Holmes's single-minded devotion to "the science of deduction" allows him to "serve as the guardian of a threatened society that his author means him to be." To the affluent classes of late-Victorian England, the specter of social upheaval loomed most immediately in violent crime. "The butler did it" was no joke to them, says Clausen, it was "a revealing fear."

"When all else has failed—and the police almost always fail in the Holmes stories—the isolated, disclassed genius is the one who saves the day." Holmes's cases reflect the paranoia of well-to-do Victorians: blackmail, illicit attempts to claim inheritances, labor union terrorism. And the Baker Street sleuth's clients are far from ordinary: They include Queen Victoria, a pope, and several prime ministers.

World War I brought an end to such Victorian preoccupations. Domestic crimes paled beside the horrors of war. Britain's real enemies were across the Channel; the Victorian faith in the ability of cool reason to triumph in human affairs lay in ruins.

Even Doyle sensed that Holmes was outmoded: The post-1914 tales are inferior, Clausen believes. Other authors created a new crop of sleuths, but none would take crime quite as seriously as the master did.

Opera's Fate

"Opera 1984: Dead or Alive?" by Samuel Lipman, in *The New Criterion* (Mar. 1984), 850 Seventh Ave., New York, N.Y. 10019.

Operas today are being staged more often, and are attracting larger audiences, than ever before. Yet Lipman, publisher of the *New Criterion*, detects signs of decay amid all the vigor.

"At a time when there is new literature, new poetry, new visual art, new dance, and even (most wanly received, it is true) new music," he