Detecting the Nation

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In 1887, Kipling introduced his fictional detective Strickland in the pages of the Lahore Civil and Military Gazette:

[Strickland] held the extraordinary theory that a Policeman in India should try to know as much about the natives as the natives themselves. Now, in the whole of Upper India, there is only one man who can pass for Hindu or Mahommedan, hide-dresser or priest, as he pleases. He is feared and respected by the natives from the Ghor Kathri to the Jamma Musjib; and he is supposed to have the gift of invisibility and executive control over many Devils. But this has done him no good in the eyes of the Indian government. (1887, 51)

Strickland’s expertise in native life enables him to solve a range of mysteries from “the great Nasiban Murder Case” to a deadly curse (“The Mark of the Beast”) to his own romantic entanglement (“Miss Youghal’s Saiś”). But while Strickland “knew too much,” Kipling tells us that his name “is almost unknown to Englishmen.” And because Kipling wrote only a handful of Strickland stories, his name is almost unknown in literary tradition, as well. This character, however, is widely known under a different name: Sherlock Holmes.

Kipling’s Strickland and Doyle’s detective, who also appeared on the scene in 1887, are strikingly similar figures and not only for the qualities evident in the above passage, such as an encyclopedic knowledge of his environment and a gift for disguise. These characters have a more profound similarity: Their
extraordinary and often misunderstood detective work reimagines national authority and thus the nation itself. I say misunderstood because how these figures serve authority has received much more critical attention than how they have redefined it. Both Strickland and Holmes, for example, chafe against social boundaries as much as they defend them. Kipling explains that Strickland’s exceptional detective work “has done him no good in the eyes of the Indian government,” nor with the Anglo-Indian community: “people did not understand him. So they said he was a doubtful sort of man and passed by on the other side” (1987, 51). Holmes’s “outré” qualities, from his cocaine addiction to his bohemian aestheticism, have been widely documented, as have his periodic departures from the letter of the law. Holmes frequently breaks the law in order to solve a case and seems at times a law unto himself; “I am the last court of appeal” he says on more than one occasion. Both Strickland and Holmes embody an interrogation of the character of English authority in the context of imperialism that shapes them as detectives and had shaped the genre of detective fiction for over a century before their simultaneous arrival on the pages of English fiction.

Why is it important that Doyle and Kipling create such similar characters at precisely the same historical moment? Because traditional criticism has used the work of Doyle and Kipling to partition, at this very same moment, detective fiction from spy fiction. Since Kipling presumably focuses on detection in the colonial world and Doyle on detection in England, it has been easy—indeed, too easy—to separate their work and see them as inaugurating distinct traditions: spy and detective respectively. It is the point of this book to show how difficult it was, throughout the course of the nineteenth century, to maintain the distinction between center and periphery. When literary criticism comes along and does what neither detective fiction nor stories of imperial intrigue were ever quite able to accomplish, it is understandably difficult for us to see how the two in fact collaborated to make understanding the interpenetration of core and periphery essential to the integrity of the nation. It is an interpenetration, I contend, which made the detective so necessary in the first place.

To say that the works and the worlds of Kipling and Doyle can be partitioned from one another seems shockingly inaccurate. Any reader knows that, from the Great Game at the heart of Kim to the Mutiny story at the heart of The Sign of the Four, investigation is as central to Kipling as imperial intrigue is to Doyle. Indeed, it has not gone unnoticed in recent criticism, to say the least, that Kipling’s empire is shaped by a fantasy of surveillance (embodied by Strickland’s successors, Kim’s Kimball O’Hara and Colonel Creighton) and that Doyle’s detective is deeply involved in both the incidents and ideology of
Empire. But this recent critical attention to Kipling and Doyle when they travel across each other’s geo-literary boundaries has not served to question these boundaries. Rather, it reinforces assumptions about what divides them in the first place: that they write from and about fundamentally different places. For example, Jon Thompson, whose *Fiction, Crime, and Empire* importantly challenges “rigid generic categories” as a basis for literary analysis, nevertheless employs these categories in a discussion of Kipling and Doyle. For Thompson and many other critics, Kipling writes about Empire and thus writes adventure or spy fiction, notably *Kim*, the “greatest of all spy novels” (Winks 1). Whereas Doyle, because “the solitary detective’s talents were incongruent with the scale of international relations” (Claussen 123), writes about domestic problems and thus writes detective fiction.

On closer examination, however, the logic for such distinctions becomes vague. Julian Symons, in a standard account of crime fiction, does not know exactly what “the lines of demarcation are” between spy fiction and detective fiction, “but everybody recognizes their existence” (214). Michael Holquist can define the detective story only in terms of what it excludes: “a detective story should be mainly occupied with detecting, which would exclude Gothic romances, psychological studies of criminals, and hard-boiled thrillers” (154). Ian Ousby reads “a decline in quality” in the later Holmes stories because they have stepped outside of his traditional understanding of the boundaries of detective fiction and into the stuff of espionage or adventure fiction. And while he is forced to admit that this is not true across the board—the late story “Thor Bridge” “compares favorably with the best of Doyle’s work”)—on the whole, Ousby argues, these stories demonstrate “a cruder sense of the exotic and macabre” (170). Ignoring that Holmes’s concerns have always concerned the “exotic” and needing to prove his larger thesis that Holmes is the classic Victorian hero, Ousby provocatively concludes that the later Holmes has “outlived his proper era” (170–72).

As I have suggested throughout this book, the generic divisions sketched here overlook and, more to the point, obscure the long history of the detective as a primary agent in the Englishing of imperial authority. In so doing, literary criticism has participated in the fantasy of Victorian nationalism that there are clear distinctions between what is domestic and what is international, what is central and what is peripheral. Gikandi describes how a “strategic forgetfulness” enables such an elision of the colonial from what it means to be English (86). The clearest example of this “strategic forgetfulness” at work in the treatment of detective fiction is the oath of the Detection Club of London, formed in 1930 by Dorothy Sayers and fellow British mystery writers. Showing where critics such as Ousby get their distaste for Holmes’s un-Holmeslike, *unheimlich* devol-
olution into the exotic, members pledged “to observe a seemly moderation in the use of Gangs, conspiracies, Death Rays, Ghosts, Hypnotism, trapdoors, Chinamen.” Here writers are encouraged to emphasize a homegrown rationality that, Dorothy Sayers explains elsewhere, assumes “a knowable universe” (Winks 101).10 While not commenting directly on the Detection Club oath, W. H. Auden shows that the Golden Age of detective fiction is a fantasy in his argument that readers of this era of detective fiction are seeking to “be restored to the Garden of Eden” (Winks 24). Clearly, Golden Age writers and subsequent literary critics want to get back to some Edenic version of prewar England untouched by the “unseemly” and immoderate aspects of imperial rule—the stuff, now, of spy fiction. Golden Age detective writers want to reinvent themselves as the progeny of a prelapsarian Sherlock Holmes.

The group amnesia demonstrated in the Detection Club oath has found support in the strangest of places. One would expect an inattention to imperial matters in those treatments of the genre that see detective fiction as a parlor game or psychological puzzle.11 But in influential accounts of detective fiction from Marxists to Foucauldians, detective fiction is characterized as serving exactly this same purpose of reducing meaning, whether it be exonerating society of crimes, simplifying the operations of power, or narrowing what it means to be English.12 Jon Thompson suggests that it is the spy genre, not detective fiction, which has such broader concerns as “assert[ing] the necessity of covert, essentially undemocratic activities in the name of state security” (94). What such a definition covers up is how the figure of the necessary detective attempts over a long nineteenth century to balance the ideals of democracy with the need for state security. It is a balance that converts the detective from a suspicious turn-of-the-century “spy” to an imperial hero, such as Holmes. As this figure strives to reconcile the very different principles of democracy and national security, he is far less a sure-footed symbol of a knowable universe than a sign of a universe reimagining itself in an unknowable and often violent imperial age. Given the tendency of critics to read the detective genre as essentially conservative, I cannot stress enough the importance of the detective narrative’s relation to a liberal critique of imperialism’s “things as they are,” to recall the original title of Caleb Williams. This is far from arguing that detective fiction is critical of imperial ideology. But detective fiction works toward public acceptance of authority and even solidifies imperial position not because of a wholesale endorsement of power but because it reimagines authority as consistent with, rather than an alternative to, milder liberal principles. The detective acquires cultural credibility precisely because he is seen to take into account common concerns about the abuse of authority at home and abroad.
What both the oath and much detective fiction criticism have done, then, is to dissociate detective fiction from its history. It is a history that contains magistrate Patrick Colquhoun's early-century analysis of the imperial origin of metropolitan crime, Edmund Burke's attempt to prosecute imperial crime in the person of Warren Hastings, and “Thuggee” Sleeman's/Captain Taylor's arguments that detective work is the work of Empire. I have hoped to show how critical tradition has ignored the contentious debates across the political spectrum in which crime and Empire cannot be understood without one another. Such debates make *Caleb Williams* an imperial novel as well as a detective novel and James Mill's *The History of British India* a detective story as well as a history of imperial mismanagement. These debates about the character of English authority in an age of Empire require that Dickens's and Collins's inspectors become colonial explorers and that colonial explorers/administrators, such as *The Moonstone*'s Murthwaite or Thuggee Sleeman, become detectives. In tracing the continuities rather than the distinctions between detection in the work of Kipling and of Doyle, I hope to show here how detective fiction makes imperialism central to what it means to be English rather than casts it from the garden.

**Brothers**

Find the answer to all these questions, and you will have done good service for your country.

—Mycroft Holmes to his brother Sherlock in “The Adventure of The Bruce-Partington Plans”

I begin with this quotation from Doyle’s “The Adventure of The Bruce-Partington Plans” (1908) because that Holmes story, perhaps more than any other, best demonstrates my argument about the perils of generic partition. Not only does this story illustrate that the concerns of detective fiction are those we have retroactively assigned to spy fiction, but the story itself is a critique of the compartmentalization of foreign and domestic knowledge. Doyle gives a preview of the story’s lesson about the necessity of integrating knowledge by beginning with Holmes, fogged in at Baker Street, “cross-indexing his huge book of references” (1994d, 37). The catalyst for the story’s action is the theft of the plans for the Bruce-Partington submarine, technology so superior that “naval warfare becomes impossible within the radius” of its operation (42). Only part of the plans have been found on the discarded body of a junior government clerk, who, it would seem, had been selling state
secrets. “It’s a vital international problem that you have to solve,” Mycroft tells his brother, Sherlock, as he pays a visit to the great detective at his Baker Street home (43).

Here we have it: a spy story in the middle of a collection of detective stories. It would be easy to read this as spy fiction making a house call to the domicile of detective fiction, much as Mycroft, a government agent involved in international intrigue—“he is the British Government” (1994d, 39)—visits Sherlock, a consulting detective focused on the seemingly more narrow world of metropolitan crime. But in this and other stories, Doyle quietly but persistently critiques a distinction between the brothers’ fields of operation. Despite the fact that his intelligence is characterized as being superior to that of Sherlock (“The Greek Interpreter”), elder brother Mycroft lacks the ability to solve the mystery of the missing plans alone. “Why do you not solve it yourself,” Sherlock asks. “You can see as far as I” (43). The problem is that the kind of surveillance enabled by distance is not sufficient here. Accordingly, Mycroft persuades Sherlock that the fate of the nation depends on his inside, on-the-spot local knowledge: “But it is a question of getting details” (43). Mycroft may appear, in making this appeal, to be making an exception to his usual practice—his visits to Baker Street are rare. The successful outcome of this story suggests, however, that no one form of knowledge can exercise authority all by itself. To have power, one must effect a union or, in the words of Doyle, a “cross-indexing” of domestic and foreign knowledge. While Mycroft’s “specialism is omniscience” (39), he lacks the authority of omniscience without Sherlock’s “details.” The mysteries of the modern world, as Doyle implies, can only be penetrated and, even more important, the chinks in the armor of state security can only be fixed if local knowledge and global knowledge are cross-indexed.

To underscore the mutual dependency of the two forms of knowledge personified in the brothers Holmes, Doyle attributes the international crisis that they must resolve in this story to the betrayal of one brother, Sir James Walter, by another, Colonel Valentine. This story begins with the comprehensive activity of “cross-indexing” and emphasizes the importance of two carefully distinguished but (literally) related parts working as one. Doyle drives the point home by ending with Holmes returning to his monograph upon “polyphonic motets,” a type of choral composition in which two or more independent melodies are juxtaposed in harmony.

This story of two brothers provides a road map for my reading of another set of related writers whose work has been wrongly separated: Kipling and Doyle. Rudyard Kipling’s 1901 novel, *Kim*, is arguably the definitive novel about the Great Game of turn-of-the-century imperialism and the novel’s
title character the embodiment of the Game. The Holmes stories, however, are about the Great Game as well, and its rules shape the Great Detective as they do Kimball O’Hara. Kipling’s and Doyle’s detectives play the Game for similar reasons. (I will consider all Kipling’s “detectives,” Strickland, Kim, and Creighton, in the subsequent discussion.) Playing the Game invigorates Kim: “Kim warmed to the game. . . . the sheer excitement and the sense of power. He drew a new breath and went on” (95). Holmes is similarly characterized as literally coming to life when solving a mystery:

See the foxhound with hanging ears and drooping tail as it lolls about the kennels, and compare it with the same hound as, with gleaming eyes and straining muscles, it runs upon a breast-high scent—such was the change in Holmes since the morning. He was a different man to the limp and lounging figure in the mouse-coloured dressing-gown . . . only a few hours before. (1994a, 48)

As these detectives breathe the Game, it is—almost—their whole lives. Kim’s playing of the Game is paralleled in the story by “the Way.” In describing the Way, Kim’s beloved lama also describes the rules of the Game: “But those who follow the Way must permit not the fire of any desire or attachment, for that is all Illusion” (140). And indeed Kim does play the game with increasing professional focus throughout the novel. But he does have an attachment in addition to the game: the lama, who is, Kim says, “one part of my bond.” As with Kim, Holmes lets nothing distract him from the Game:

All emotions . . . were abhorrent to his cold, precise, but admirably balanced mind. . . . They were admirable things for the observer—excellent for drawing the veil from men’s motives and actions. But for the trained reasoner to admit such intrusions in to his own delicate and finely adjusted temperament was to introduce a distracting factor which might throw a doubt upon all his mental results. (1977, 1)

Again, as with Kim, this professional intensity is true of Holmes with one exception: Watson. The good doctor and war veteran is hardly lamaistic—he is the voice of English pragmatism. But Watson and the lama serve as characters through whom the detective figure can himself be investigated and therefore made familiar. Not only is this a crucial move, as I have argued throughout this volume, in order to bring a figure formerly feared as foreign into the fold, it also requires that the detective’s focus be extended to include the experiences of Empire, whether that be the lama’s quest for eternal life or Watson’s experience in the Afghan campaign.
Kim and Holmes are similar in both their stated and more serious reasons for playing the game. What Kim “loved was the game for its own sake” (51). Eight years later, Holmes will tell Mycroft that he is not interested in titles as a reward for solving important matters of state: “I play the game for the game’s own sake” (1994d, 43). While this emphasis on the game, on detection as sport, might seem to make light of their work, it serves another purpose. Knowing, as the reader does, that this Game is of international importance, it shows the English reader what both police and imperial reformers have tried to show for years: that authority and liberty, security and English values, can be reconciled in the figure of the detective at work.

Most important, Doyle represents Holmes’s work, like that of Kim’s, as the investigation of international intrigue. In addition to the aforementioned work in “The Adventure of The Bruce-Partington Plans,” Holmes comes out of retirement to catch German spies in “His Last Bow” and solves crimes stemming from Mormonism in the United States (A Study in Scarlet) to the mutiny in India (The Sign of the Four). In “The Naval Treaty,” when Watson is pestered by an acquaintance as to Holmes’s crime-solving abilities “where such large interests are at stake,” he replies, “To my certain knowledge he has acted on behalf of three of the reigning Houses of Europe in very vital matters” (1994f, 241).

The critical tradition likes to think of these stories as aberrations, with Doyle whimsically wandering into the foreign territory of Kipling, his favorite writer. And if not an aberration, then they represent Doyle’s experimental effort to reduce imperial intrigue to domestic intrigue. For example, a brother’s debts are at the heart of the crime in “The Adventure of The Bruce-Partington Plans” and a wife’s cover-up of a youthful indiscretion begins the events in “The Second Stain.” But considering Doyle’s persistent imbrication of foreign and domestic worlds, it makes better sense to assume that in an age of Empire, the domestic has indeed become international and vice versa. As a result, the difference between the knowledge required of the detective, on the one hand, and of the imperial agent, on the other, becomes similarly impossible to maintain. Failure to understand the importance of cross-indexing knowledge shatters the illusion of omniscience on which the English power of surveillance depends. This is bracingly clear as Doyle’s and Kipling’s detectives attempt to master the heterogeneous British social world. As Holmes explains in “The Second Stain,” “The man’s death is a mere incident—a trivial episode—in comparison with our real task, which is to trace this document and save a European catastrophe” (1994g, 306). Indeed, a characterization of England as insular becomes the downfall of German spies in “His Last Bow.” Baron Von Herling describes “Englanders” as having “their insular conventions
which simply must be observed” (1994d, 156). Ten pages later this famous German agent and his colleague, Von Bork, will be outsmarted by Holmes, who has observed them by infiltrating their global network as Altamont, an American spy: “I started my pilgrimage at Chicago, graduated in an Irish secret society at Buffalo, gave serious trouble to the constabulary at Skibbereen and so eventually caught the eye of a subordinate agent of Von Bork” (1994d, 168).

That domestic police work is international in scope is not Doyle’s point alone. The detective can sit in the center of London and police the world.\(^7\) Andrew Wynter’s article in *The Quarterly Review* describes Scotland Yard as “the brain or central ganglion which directs the system of the Metropolitan Police.” This article captures the international scope of this domestic policing as it shows Scotland Yard containing both constables who are “reading the morning and country papers, to learn what is doing that may require their presence” and “foreign detectives, who watch over the mauvais sujets from abroad. The entire floating foreign population in the metropolis is well known to the police” (1856, 168–69). Like Dickens’s Inspector Field, who policed the Empire while patrolling the British Museum, Holmes personifies this system:

> he loved to lie in the very centre of five millions of people, with his filaments stretching out and running through them, responsive to every little rumour or suspicion of unsolved crime. . . . his only change was when he turned his mind from the evil-doer of the town to track down his brother of the country. (1994b, 30)

But as we know from Holmes’s adventures, Doyle’s “town” is a clearinghouse of mauvais sujets from “all parts of the habitable globe” and his “country” extends past a distinctly foreign English countryside (*The Hound of the Baskervilles*) to India (*The Sign of the Four*) and America (*A Study in Scarlet*).

In a famous passage, Kim, like Holmes, experiences himself at the center of a world united by the Great Game.

> Well is the Game called great! I was four days a scullion at Quetta, waiting on the wife of the man whose book I stole. And that was part of the Great Game! From the South—God knows how far—came up the Mahratta, playing the Great Game in fear of his life. Now I shall go far and far into the North playing the Great Game. Truly, it runs like a shuttle throughout all Hind. . . . and I am Kim—Kim—Kim—alone—one person—in the middle of it all. (273)
In using the same description of the detective at the center of the imperial world in India, rather than in London, Kipling illustrates that the detective now embodies the center while registering both the imperial scope of English power and the indistinguishability of the center from the margin, the detective’s work from that of the spy. It has been tempting for critics to see the two figures as distinct because they have separate jurisdictions: One figure has local authority and one global. But what nineteenth-century detective narratives have shown is that in an age of Empire, strict attention to jurisdictions not only interferes with crime solving but also obscures the international range—indeed potential—of English authority.18

Kipling’s and Doyle’s detectives, at the center of the imperial world “wherever [they] go,” are masters of information about that world.19 Strickland is “perpetually ‘going Fantee’ among natives” (Kipling 1987, 51). Kipling describes the resulting breadth of the detective’s knowledge:

He was initiated into the Sat Bhai at Allahabad once, when he was on leave. He knew the Lizard-Song of the Sansis, and the Halli-Hukk dance, which is a religious can-can of a startling kind. When a man knows who dance the Halli-Hukk, and how, and when, and where, he knows something to be proud of. He has gone deeper than the skin. But Strickland was not proud, though he had helped once, at Jagadhri, at the Painting of the Death Bull, which no Englishman must even look upon; had mastered the thieves’-patter of the changars; had taken a Yusufzai horse-thief alone near Attock; and had stood under the sounding-board of a Border mosque and conducted service in the manner of a Sunni Mullah. (52)

But as Kim learns from Lurgan Sahib, such bits of local knowledge are not for their own sake, but are part of a larger system of information, much as the pieces of a water jug that Kim breaks appear to coalesce magically before his eyes (201–2). And at the end of “Miss Youghal’s Sais,” Kipling notes, however ruefully, that despite his going native, Strickland “fills in his Department returns beautifully” (56). It would be repetitive to illustrate all the examples of Kim’s and Holmes’s respective commands of local knowledge—there is not a page in which these two detectives do not demonstrate such knowledge. But it is significant, as further proof of the indistinguishability of domestic and international detective work, that Holmes and Creighton are so similarly characterized, as well. Holmes is constantly referencing his range of anthropological and ethnographical knowledge, whether he is citing his “two short monographs” on the human ear “in last year’s Anthropological Journal” (1994b, 43) or using the difference between “the skull of a negro from that
of an Esquimau” (1994c, 22) to demonstrate one of his central precepts: how subtle differences are obvious to the trained observer. Creighton, Kim’s boss in the Great Game, is similarly a published expert in anthropology and ethnography. He demonstrates the range of his local knowledge by speaking in the vernacular, as Holmes does when playing the American agent.

Both Kipling and Doyle define detection as the integration of local knowledge.20 So when Holmes tells Watson that they, unlike the police who investigate two crimes separately, “know of both events, and can trace the relation between them” (1994g, 300), he is not so much challenging the authority of the police as representing the ideal of a whole history of policing: from the Fieldings’s police gazette to Colquhoun’s plan for the centralization of information from various jurisdictions; from Sleeman’s use of a network of information to bring down the Thugs to Dickens’s celebration of the New Police’s “incessant system of communication” to Collins’s making Murthwaite’s detailed imperial information central to Cuff’s domestic detection.

Police history becomes imperial history—and vice versa—in the above list because the premise of Victorian policing is the premise of Victorian imperialism: Knowledge is more effective than violence in the acquisition and maintenance of authority. Of course, this is not to say that the actual history of either the police or the Empire is without significant violence. And indeed, Doyle, the author of To Arms!, is no foe of warfare. But violence is inferior to detective work as a way of maintaining authority, as he demonstrates when Holmes shows the mystified Watson how he read the Afghan war veteran’s mind: “Your hand stole towards your own old wound and a smile quivered on your lips, which showed me that the ridiculous side of this method of settling international questions had forced itself upon your mind” (1994b, 33).

Kipling is no pacifist, either. But critics almost always comment on Kim’s lack of violence,21 and Kipling constantly underscores the necessity of local knowledge in running an empire, whether it is in Kim’s argument for the Indian-born English ruler or the disasters that befall the ignorant in his Strickland stories. Creighton tells Kim that he has “known boys newly entered into the service of the Government who feigned not to understand the talk or the customs of black men. Their pay was cut for ignorance. There is no sin so great as ignorance. Remember this” (167). Kim gets a native to take him through Lahore, and he tells “Kim many astounding things where an English guide would have talked of the Mutiny” (168). Kipling emphasizes here that to see the imperial world in terms of violent occasions rather than occasions for knowledge is a crucial mistake, one a promising detective does not make.

The high price of ignorance of native life is the moral of the Strickland stories “The Return of Imray” and “The Mark of the Beast.”22 In the former,
Strickland discovers that a missing civil servant, Imray, has been killed by his native servant, who believed that Imray had put a curse on his young son (in reality he died from fever). Imray met his death “simply and solely through not knowing the nature of the Oriental and the coincidence of a little seasonal fever” (302). In “The Mark of the Beast,” Strickland’s drunken friend Fleete boorishly desecrates a local temple and offends a resident mystic, the “Silver Man,” who then puts a curse on Fleete. Strickland steps in to solve the mystery. Unlike Strickland, “who knows as much of natives of India as is good for any man” (170), the doctor he calls in to diagnose Fleete’s condition fails to draw correct inferences from the evidence. “He is dead now,” Kipling states succinctly (170). That both local knowledge and an ability to restore order through this knowledge rather than through violence are distinctly English principles is evident in the one time knowledge fails. Unable to reverse the hex placed on Fleete, Strickland and his Watsonian sidekick have to beat cooperation out of the Silver Man. Kipling, who does not describe the torture—“this part is not to be printed” (183)—simply writes that “we had fought for Fleete’s soul with the Silver Man in that room and had disgraced ourselves as Englishmen forever” (190).

It is tempting to see this emphasis on the power of knowledge, as not a few critics have, as evidence of a sure-footed imperial panopticism at work in both Kipling and Doyle. While I do not want to suggest that either Kipling or Doyle are opposed to authority at home or abroad, I think an emphasis on them as the bards of a confident and effortless jingoism has overlooked the dialogue about what both comprises and compromises imperial authority—and English identity itself—at the heart of their fiction and the detective genre as a whole. While their detective figures certainly “have the state at [their] back[s]” (1994a, 56), they are, like their detective predecessors, critics of the state, as well. It is a leitmotif of Holmes criticism to point out the places where he shows up officialdom, whether in the form of the public police or in dastardly noblemen. Doyle writes in “The Naval Treaty” of “that not too common type, a nobleman who is in truth noble” (1994f, 233). Holmes often makes the point to Watson that the law is often as much an obstacle to truth as crime: “It is a case, my dear Watson, where the law is as dangerous to us as the criminals are” (1994g, 306). Strickland’s excellence has, we recall, “done him no good in the Indian Government” (1987, 51). And for every “friend of all the world” like Kim, Kipling has a rebarbative Fleete. A contempt, albeit lighthearted, for the official police runs through Kim, as well: “What fools are these Police Sahibs,” Kim exclaims “genially” (256).
The criticism of official authority here and throughout the tradition of detective and imperial narratives is not a renunciation of authority, but an argument for the necessity of better authority through a centralized system of local knowledge. The systematization of knowledge requires constant forays into the domain of the local and peripheral, not an insulated surveillance from the center. Far from pushing that which is un-English to the margins, Kipling and Doyle show that being an English detective means needing to know native life from the uncanny alleys of London to the grim moors of Devonshire, from the backstreets of Lahore to the Grand Trunk Road. The effect of this emphasis on expanding the range of local knowledge is to make the colonial world, the “outré,” part of what it means to be English.

This reading of Kipling’s and Doyle’s representation of a center defined by constant traffic with the peripheral explains an aspect of their fiction for which the critical tradition has failed to provide a satisfactory explanation: the presence of the supernatural. So far as magic illustrates the limits of rational knowledge, its presence would necessarily pose a problem for narratives that sought only to insist on the power of modern knowledge. Brantlinger’s category of the “imperial Gothic” importantly shows a connection between imperialism and the fin-de-siècle interest in magic. But in a perfect example of the will to separate domestic from exotic narratives, Brantlinger overlooks Doyle’s detective fiction and includes only his The Lost World and “supernatural” stories among his examples of the imperial gothic.

In these stories, he contends, the occult returns home from the colonial periphery to the metropolitan center. In assuming that Doyle’s detection stories obey the literary critical distinction between domestic and foreign, Brantlinger consequently joins those readers who consider Doyle’s turn to spiritualism an embarrassing or at least irreconcilable move for the Poet Laureate of English empiricism, as uncharacteristic of Sir Arthur as it is of Sherlock Holmes to enter into espionage.23 The critical tradition’s abiding predisposition to consign Holmes to a rigid category of rational modernity allows us to forget that the appearance of the occult, as the “hell-hound” of the Devonshire moors, shapes Doyle’s most acclaimed Holmes novel, The Hound of the Baskervilles. Dr. Mortimer, “a trained man of science,” brings the case to Holmes and suggests that he thinks there might be something to a supernatural explanation of events. He says this in private because “a man of science shrinks from placing himself in the public position of seeming to indorse a popular superstition” (11). In solving the mystery, let us not forget, Holmes refuses to discredit the supernatural:

Of course, if Dr. Mortimer’s surmise should be correct, and we are dealing with forces outside the ordinary laws of Nature, there is an end of our inves-
tigation. But we are bound to exhaust all other hypotheses before falling back upon this one. (19)

On this note, he leaves the interpenetration of modern core and primitive periphery perfectly intact, suggesting that the distinction is little more than a comforting fiction. To no one’s surprise, the presence of the supernatural pervades Kipling’s imperial adventure stories. It should nevertheless surprise us to find that “forces outside the ordinary laws of Nature” are no less present in his detective stories. While Strickland saves his friend Fleete from turning into a werewolf, he can no more rationalize the supernatural mysteries of the curse than do the vampire hunters in Bram Stoker’s novel. Strickland simply has to force the Silver Man to undo the curse.

In showing the detective taking seriously that which is beyond the bounds of his own vast expertise, Kipling and Doyle rather illustrate that the English detective’s beat is not limited to the limiting timetables and charts of Sayers’s “knowable universe.” Strickland’s sidekick, attempting to provide closure to the supernatural mystery in “The Mark of the Beast,” begins to quote Hamlet: “There are more things. . . .” Strickland, the consummate detective, cuts him off: “Strickland hates that quotation. He says that I have worn it threadbare” (190). While Strickland attempts to know everything, he cannot. “Strickland hates being mystified by natives,” Kipling writes, “because his business in life is to overmatch them with their own weapons. He has not yet succeeded in doing this, but in 15 or 20 years he will have made some small progress” (175).

In a passage in the middle of Kim, the detective master Lurgan Sahib explains to Kim those men who excel at the Game:

From time to time, God causes men to be born—and thou are one of them—who have a lust to go abroad at the risk of their lives and discover news—today it may be of far-off things, tomorrow of some hidden mountain, and the next day of some near-by men who have done a foolishness against the State. (209)

Here in the middle of “the greatest of all spy novels,” Kipling sums up the achievement of one hundred years of detective fiction. In this one sentence, he links the detective and the explorer, the discovery of information and State security, and the connection between knowledge of “far-off things” and those “near-by.” Most important, he emphasizes to a receptive audience (in both Kim and the English reader) that these men are heroes. It took a long time for detective narratives to reimagine the un-English paramilitary figure of the
late-eighteenth century as the heroic imperial detective represented here. But in reimagining this figure over the course of a long nineteenth century, writers from Godwin and Mill to Kipling and Doyle did no less than reimagine English identity in an age of Empire.