

*If Sherlock Holmes is immortal, then his incarnations
must be many—including models for the Age of
Space. . . .*

THE ARCHETYPAL HOLMES

by POUL ANDERSON

THE WORK of Carl Gustav Jung does not seem to belong in our era. Some would make it a relic, albeit a fascinating and suggestive one, of an earlier and more credulous stage in human development. Others maintain that our culture has not yet advanced to the right point where we can fully comprehend and use the insights of the late great Swiss psychiatrist.

For whatever it may be worth, which isn't much, I take a middle position. On the one hand, it is difficult for a hard-boiled, physical-science-oriented, show-me positivist to swallow such Jungian notions as the racial unconscious. They don't seem to refer to anything observable. I prefer incontrovertible, understandable realities, such as particles that have no mass, stars which are too big to shine, and, of course, Sherlock Holmes.

On the other hand, no one can deny that Jung performed a great service. He broke free of the rigid Freudian mold, he made a fresh and still valuable classification of personality types, he founded a school of psychoanalysis that helped many people, and on and on. The Jungian concept that should be of special interest to Sherlockians is the archetype.

Webster defines "archetype" as "the original pattern of which all things of the same species are representations or copies; original idea, model, or type." Jung gave it a less strictly Platonic meaning. In his researches he found that certain images recur again and again in the mind, in many different forms but always identifiably the same. He found them not merely in his European patients, but in healthy people of every race and background, in dreams, reveries, fantasies, myths, religions, and mystical experiences. Among these figures he identified the earth mother, the persona, the anima, and the shadow. We have only to think about them to see how fundamental and universal they are.

For instance, the earth mother occurs as a thousand different goddesses, from Kwan-Yin in the East to Juno in the West and on to similar figures in the Americas, Africa, and Oceania. She is also a type of woman, the big, strong, patient but indomitable heroine of innumerable novels. Now and then you meet her in some real person. Probably your own mother was the first one who gave you this impression. If you are at all introspective, you will quickly realize how the earth mother likewise pervades your dreams and your day-dreams.

I think we can accept Jung's archetypes without needing his collective unconscious to explain them. They arise out of human experience, the long pilgrimage of mankind as a whole, the subtle interaction of societies and individuals, and the ordinary lives of each one of us—these lives being, after all, very much alike.

In other words, an archetype doesn't spring out fullblown, it evolves. Many influences converge to form it. At last it takes a definite shape. Then the archetype has gained full power. It goes on through the centuries in countless different forms, all of which are traceable back to the first fully developed one. Some of these new forms are mythical, literary, or what have you. Others are real. That is to say, whenever a real person comes along who more or less fits an archetype, we will inevitably think about him in terms of that archetype.

No doubt this sounds abstract. To wit: Sherlock Holmes is an archetype.

That is, the general idea of a Holmesian figure had been slowly evolving for a long time. Its time was ripe in the late nineteenth century, and the elements crystallized in Sherlock Holmes, who gave them their essential eternal shape. It does not matter that he actually existed; he could just as well have been a character in a story. The point is that he expressed certain vital factors in his culture. As a result, the Holmes figure has reappeared in any number of reincarnations already, and seems likely to go on indefinitely.

It is not easy to define the elements of Holmes. In fact, his complexity, the veil that is never lifted between the world and his ultimate self, is part of the image. But we can point to a few obvious traits. The brilliant deductive mind; the intense concentration on any problem; the occasional furious activity; the

physical courage and competence; the philosophic musings; the idealism and affection nearly always masked by sardonic reserve; the austere habits of life, relieved by certain minor vices and self-indulgences—but I need not remind you further.

Now, the interesting thing for present purposes is that Holmes-like characters are hard to come by in other civilizations and earlier times. We do have ancient detective stories, like those concerning the prophet Daniel. It is said that the Caliph Haroun al-Rashid often wandered around Baghdad in disguise to learn what people really were doing. Robert van Gulick's stories about Judge Dee, who made shrewd deductions, were adapted from the Chinese. But while all these, and others, contain certain aspects of Sherlock Holmes, they do not approach the totality. Nor do we find anything that suggests him among, say, the Olympian gods. Zeus is wise and powerful, Hermes is clever, Hephaestus is inventive, and so on. But the pieces are scattered, and some are missing altogether.

The most Holmesian figure I can think of, real or imaginary, in the ancient world is Archimedes. He lived in the third century B.C. and is best known popularly for his detective work when he proved that alloy had been substituted for gold in a royal crown. The legend that, when the solution hit him, he leaped from his bath and ran down the streets crying, "Eureka! I have found it!" is quite Holmesian. Not that Sherlock would ever do any such thing, but at least he was careless in his dress. Archimedes was a brilliant mathematician (a hint of Moriarty there?) but also a research scientist, an artificer, a helper of his country in its hour of peril. He is said to have been ascetic and brusque. He was killed when he wouldn't leave the diagram he was studying to go away with the conquering Roman soldiers.

Archimedes might thus have become the seminal figure we are after. But he was too isolated. The decaying Hellenistic world, its intellectually unenterprising Roman successor, had small use for his kind of man. So, if anything, he is especially clear in our minds today because he fits an archetype that has evolved after his death.

It does seem to be one which belongs peculiarly to Western civilization. Our Celtic and Nordic predecessors already show the germ of it. Is Merlin, the magician confidant of King Arthur, not Holmesian in several ways? We think of him as gaunt, enig-

matic, possessed of knowledge and intelligence such as are granted no one else. Incidentally, for him too there was just one woman, of dubious associations and dangerous ambitions.

Still more Holmesian is the Northern god Odin, or Wotan if you prefer the operative name. He is described as both wise and shrewd, benevolent and terrible; he fights the powers of evil with cunning rather than with spear, yet he can wield that well if he desires; he is tall and lean and dignified, though a few comic stories are told about him; he presides over the riotous feasting in Valhalla but does not otherwise join in; he is an inventor of magical techniques, and a linguist who first read the runes; he is the brooding foreknower of the inevitable future.

As European history proceeds, we find men appearing oftener and oftener, in fact and fiction, who look increasingly Holmesian. To name just a few, consider Roger Bacon in the Middle Ages and Francis Bacon in the Elizabethan era. Down south we get personages such as Machiavelli, a much-maligned thinker who was simply a frank realist, and Leonardo da Vinci, who I once suggested might be a collateral ancestor of Sherlock Holmes. The type becomes rare again during the upheavals of the Reformation, but in the Enlightenment it flourishes more luxuriantly than before. Newton and Leibniz are obviously proto-Holmes, as well as Locke, Hume, and above all Voltaire.

The Napoleonic era did not produce many. Those who were around at the time were leftovers from the Enlightenment. Apparently Holmes figures belong to relatively settled and civilized milieus. Hence they are scarce in the earlier nineteenth century, which was dominated by Romanticism. But presently a long, stable peace brought forth this sort of man afresh, and plentifully. Again making a brief random selection, consider Disraeli, T. H. Huxley, Clerk Maxwell, John Stuart Mill, and, inevitably, Dr. Joseph Bell.

Meanwhile, on the literary side, Holmes had been foreshadowed by such as Reynard the Fox in the folk tales, Shakespeare's Hamlet, Voltaire's own Zadig, Mark Twain's Pudd'n-head Wilson and Connecticut Yankee, Poe's Dupin, Stevenson's Prince Florizel, and others. And now we are well into the age of Victoria.

The hour had arrived. The Master came into being. We will pause for a moment in honor.

It would take far more scholarship and patience than are mine to explore the immediate effects of the coalescence of the archetype. Clearly, almost every detective of the classic period is essentially Holmes. Some are good expressions of the basic form, like Hercule Poirot; some are not so good, like Philo Vance. But I need not elaborate for this readership.

It would be interesting to trace the archetype elsewhere. Curiously enough, I don't think you find it in H. G. Wells. He claimed to be a rationalist, but in fact he was too passionate, too much a believer, too little strengthened by Holmes's streak of healthy cynicism. By contrast, in his life even more than in his writings, George Bernard Shaw strikes me as very Holmesian. Kipling employed the archetype several times, notably when he created Strickland and Lurgan Sahib in his stories of India. The Head of the school in *Stalky and Co.* is rather a Sherlockian figure, and so on occasion is the chaplain, whom you will remember as getting the boys to do things that needed doing but were impossible for an adult. To some extent *Stalky* is a Holmesian book told from the viewpoint of The Baker Street Irregulars.

Unfortunately, the Victorian-Edwardian environment did not last, but went out in the catastrophe of the First World War. That was when Western civilization cut its own throat. It has been bleeding to death ever since. We have already remarked that the Holmes archetype feels most at home in a free but essentially orderly society.

An enclave of this remains, to a degree, in the sciences. Hence it is not surprising that many scientists and engineers have much in common with the Master. Their work depends on both intellect and physique; they are devoted, clean-living, but comparatively aloof and eccentric men. To name just one, I might observe that the oceanographer and deep-sea explorer Jacques-Yves Cousteau goes so far as to look like Sherlock Holmes!

On the whole, though, few Victorian adventurers are left. This is yet more obvious in literature than in life. The protagonist—I won't say hero—of the average "serious" novel is a snivelling little neurotic that Lestrade himself wouldn't wipe his feet on. The protagonist of the mystery and suspense story is apt to be a drab organization man, a psychopathic brute, or a grubby and fearful espionage agent. I don't say this is good or

bad. No doubt it reflects the reality of our times. But there are those among us who wish the reality were a bit different.

Therefore we turn to sheer fantasy for escape, including that branch of fantasy known as science fiction. And here we find the Holmes archetype enjoying very good health, thank you. Indeed, it dominates the field so thoroughly that other kinds of hero are in danger of becoming extinct.

Take, for instance, J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*. Are not Strider and, especially, Gandalf Holmes personalities? For that matter, is Sauron not another Moriarty, and are the hobbits not a multiple John H. Watson? The popularity of this epic, particularly among younger readers, is encouraging. It suggests that man has not altogether abandoned the wish for a sane and decent order of things.

Science fiction in the strict sense is positively loaded with Holmes types. Among so many, I might arbitrarily mention Sir Austin Cardynge, the "lean gray tomcat" of E. E. Smith's Lensman series; or Jay Score, the gentle robot created by Eric Frank Russell; or Susan Calvin, a female version by Isaac Asimov. But mainly, I wish to point out that one science fiction personality, who has seized the mass imagination as no other has ever done, is pure Holmes. I refer to Mr. Spock on the television show "Star Trek."

Tune it in sometime, if you haven't already. Mr. Spock is only second in command of the space-ship *Enterprise*, but it is plain that Captain Kirk depends on him every bit as much as a certain gracious lady did on the Master. Spock exalts the intellect and derides the emotions in the strictest tradition; but, also in that tradition, he obviously has intense feelings that he never ordinarily reveals. He is courteous but distant where women are concerned, except on one or two occasions when he can no longer help himself. He has the cat-like neatness and curiosity of a Holmes (and, incidentally, the super-cats in Clarence Day's little essay, *This Simian World*, are rather Holmesian).

Spock exasperates his less intellectual companions, but usually meets their sarcasms with a ready and biting wit. At the same time, he is athletic, cool, and capable in danger. He is withdrawn, austere, philosophical and, as played by Leonard Nimoy, allowing for the uniform and the pointed ears, presents an excellent physical image of Sherlock Holmes.



One thing he does lack on the show, and that is a Watson. But in real life he has thousands, as devout as any Baker Street Irregular. Some of them publish magazines about him. Though they include both sexes and every age, he has a special attraction for young girls.

When "Star Trek" finally goes off the air, which I hope will not be for a long while, Leonard Nimoy will be looking for a new role. I suggest that he is the perfect successor to Basil Rathbone, and that you write to the networks and movie companies saying so. I further suggest that his popularity is another hopeful sign. The girls who today adore this nearly 200-proof Holmesian archetype will be the mothers of tomorrow. They, their husbands, and their children may well create a new age of Victoria.

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