**The Hound of the Baskervilles as a Detective Novel**

**The Character of Sherlock Holmes**

**The Hound of the Baskervilles**, one of the best known of the Sherlock Holmes novels, was written by Arthur Conan Doyle in 1901. One of the all-time classic mysteries, the novel was hugely popular as readers rejoiced at the return of Sherlock Holmes. His death in “The Final Problem” had enraged fans, causing thousands to cancel their subscriptions to The Strand. Although the fictional detective had been anticipated by [Edgar Allan Poe](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Edgar-Allan-Poe)’s [C. Auguste Dupin](https://www.britannica.com/topic/C-Auguste-Dupin) and [Émile Gaboriau](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Emile-Gaboriau)’s Monsieur Lecoq, Holmes’s Sherlock Holmes remains unparalleled in the genre of detective fiction. Doyle’s Holmes remains a globetrotter in his search for the truth. As the world’s first and only “consulting detective,” he pursued criminals throughout Victorian and Edwardian London, the south of England, and continental Europe. Holmes remained a popular figure into the twentieth first century. Watson, another character in this fiction has beautifully and aptly portrayed Holmes: “Through the haze I had a vague vision ofHolmes in his dressing gown coiled up in an armchair with his black clay pipe between his lips” (38).

Conan Doyle modelled Holmes’s methods and mannerisms on those of Dr. Joseph Bell, who had been his professor at the University of Edinburgh Medical School. In particular, Holmes’s [uncanny](https://www.britannica.com/dictionary/uncanny) ability to gather evidence based upon his honed skills of observation and [deductive reasoning](https://www.britannica.com/topic/deduction-reason) paralleled Bell’s method of diagnosing a patient’s disease. He advises Watson during before the latter’s journey to the destination of Baskerville Hall: “I will not bias your mind by suggesting theories or suspicions, Watson, I wish you simply report facts in the fullest possible manner to me, and you can leave me to do the theorizing” (74). Perhaps no character in the history of literature is so endowed with pure reason as is [Sherlock Holmes](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-hound-of-the-baskervilles/characters/sherlock-holmes). His fictional prowess is such that both his first and last name have been turned into adjectives (Sherlockian, Holmesian) used to describe people of unusual perceptiveness and reasoning. For instance, when Watson and Holmes discover they’ve missed a caller at Baker Street, Holmes is able to deduce the name of the caller ([Dr. Mortimer](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-hound-of-the-baskervilles/characters/dr-james-mortimer)), his age, his occupation, where he lives, and even what pets he owns from the [walking stick](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-hound-of-the-baskervilles/symbols/the-walking-stick) that Mortimer left behind.

The detective’s rationality, fearlessness and sound logic enable Holmes to unravel the hound’s mystery.The inhabitants of Baskerville Hall and Dr. Mortimer feel about a hellhound stalking them. They believe the dog leaves very real footprints, and its demonstrably real howl—that of a regular, and not otherworldly, dog—is heard throughout the moor. An eminently rational man, Holmes knows that such physical traces must come from a physical animal. Indeed, when the animal finally makes its attempt on [Sir Henry Baskerville](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-hound-of-the-baskervilles/characters/sir-henry-baskerville), Holmes is the first to shoot it, because he knows that—rationally—an animal that has the physical body needed to leave footprints in the moor also has a physical body that can be brought down by bullets. The others simply stand in terror. Similarly, Holmes is the first to recognize that the beast does not really have glowing eyes, and does not breathe fire, but rather has been painted with phosphorous. He is able to do this because his extreme rationality has overridden the natural emotion of fear affecting the reasoning skills of Watson and Mortimer.

One of the remarkable traits of a good detective is conceal or suppress the plans. Watson says: “One of Sherlock Holmes’s defects- if, indeed, one may call it a defect – was that he was exceedingly loath to communicate his full plans to any other person until the instant of their fulfilment” (198). Holmes is a surprise to others. On the one hand, he loves to dominate and control the situation. One the other, he concealed things from his professional caution which urged him never to take any chances. Watson confesses: “The great ordeal was in front of us; at last we were about to make our final effort, and yet Holmes had said nothing, and I could only surmise what his course of action would be” (198). In Dartmoor the caring and concerned Holmes appeared suddenly to save Watson : “My dear fellow, you have been invaluable to me in this as in many other cases. . . it was my appreciation of the danger which you ran which led me to come down.”

Based on a local [legend](https://www.britannica.com/art/legend-literature) of a spectral hound that haunted [Dartmoor](https://www.britannica.com/place/Dartmoor-region-England) in [Devonshire](https://www.britannica.com/place/Devon), England, the story is set in the moors at Baskerville Hall and the nearby Grimpen Mire, and the action **takes** place mostly at night, when the terrifying hound howls for blood. After Sir Charles Baskerville is found dead with his face twisted in stark terror, Holmes is called upon to protect his heir, Sir Henry Baskerville. Narrating the story is Holmes’s assistant, [Dr. Watson](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Dr-Watson), who is sent to Dartmoor while the busy Holmes remains in [London](https://www.britannica.com/place/London). Upon his arrival, Watson learns that an escaped convict is on the loose. More unsettling events occur, including the appearance of an unknown figure on the moor. Watson later discovers that the mysterious person is Holmes, who has been conducting his own investigation. Holmes deduces that the killer is Jack Stapleton, a neighbour who is actually Rodger Baskerville. Hoping to inherit the family estate, he has plotted to kill his relatives using a vicious hound that he has painted with phosphorous to appear [sinister](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/sinister). The superstitious Charles suffered a [heart attack](https://www.britannica.com/science/heart-attack) after being frightened by the animal. Stapleton also hopes to kill Henry Baskerville but is thwarted by Holmes. Afterward Stapleton flees and is believed to have died, swallowed by Grimpen Mire.

The detective story captures the tussle between the natural and the supernatural throughout this novel’s gothic canvas. Holmes finds out that Neither of the hound’s victims, [Sir Charles Baskerville](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-hound-of-the-baskervilles/characters/sir-charles-baskerville) and the escaped convict [Selden](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-hound-of-the-baskervilles/characters/selden), are killed by the hound itself or even by Stapleton. Instead, they are killed out of their own fear of the hound. Sir Charles dies as a result of a heart attack while running in fear. Selden also dies as a result of a fall, which occurred as a result of running in fear. While it is natural that both men would fear a large dog chasing them. They were brought to this level of fear through Jack Stapleton’s artifice. Holmes says:  “dealing with forces outside the ordinary laws of Nature, there is an end to our investigation. But we are bound to exhaust all other hypotheses before falling back on this one.”