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## Doyle's Diogenes Club: a Delightful Oddity Screening a Metatextual Clue

*Le Diogenes Club de Conan Doyle : délicateuse bizarrerie ou indice métatextuel ?*

NATHALIE JAËCK

### Résumés

Français English

Dans cet article, il s'agit de proposer une étude du « Diogenes Club » que fréquente Mycroft Holmes dans les Aventures de Sherlock Holmes – un club *a priori* proche de l'oxymore puisque la règle fondamentale stipule que les membres du Club ne sont en aucun cas autorisés à s'adresser la parole. Nous montrerons comment cet élément de détail, ce délicieux paradoxe éminemment doyenien, peut se lire d'une part comme une parodie assez fine de l'ambivalence des clubs victoriens, où l'idéal de sociabilité affichée cohabite avec un goût plus dissident pour le secret et le retrait, et d'autre part comme un véritable indice métatextuel de l'importance stratégique du silence dans le texte de Conan Doyle. Ce texte inquisiteur, cette célébration positiviste des pouvoirs du *logos*, abrite également un véritable éloge du silence, et aménage la possibilité paradoxale d'échapper par le silence aux paradigmes qu'il impose.

In this paper I propose to study Mycroft Holmes's club in the Sherlock Holmes stories: the Diogenes Club is rather close to an oxymoron as the golden rule is that the members are not allowed to speak to one another. I will show how this textual detail, that eminently Doylian delicious paradox, can read as a rather elaborate parody of the ambivalence of Victorian clubs, where the ideal of sociability cohabits with a more dissident taste for secrecy and seclusion. It can also read as a metatextual clue to the strategic importance of silence in Conan Doyle's text. That famous inquisitive text, a positivist celebration of the powers of *logos*, also makes room for a crucial vindication of silence, and creates the paradoxical possibility for the text to escape the very paradigms it powerfully establishes.

### Entrées d'index

**Mots-clés :** clubs, Doyle (Arthur Conan), Sherlock, silence, victorien

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### Texte intégral

- 1 On the first page of 'The Greek Interpreter', the twenty-third Sherlock Holmes story published in *The Strand Magazine* in 1893, that is to say seven years after *A Study in Scarlet* launched the adventures of the detective in 1886, typically bemused Watson learns at last two flabbergasting pieces of news: not only has Sherlock Holmes got an elder brother, Mycroft, of whom Sherlock asserts that he possesses the faculty of detection to an even larger degree of perfection than himself, but also Mycroft frequents a club he cofounded which Watson has never heard of, the Diogenes Club, 'the queerest club in London and Mycroft one of the queerest men' (435) according to Sherlock. A short palatable description follows:

There are many men in London, you know, who, some from shyness, some from misanthropy, have no wish for the company of their fellows. Yet they are not averse to comfortable chairs and the latest periodicals. It is for the convenience of these that the Diogenes Club was started, and it now contains the most unsocial and unclubbable men in town. No member is permitted to take the least notice of any other one. Save in the Stranger's Room, no talking is, under any circumstances, allowed, and three offenses, if brought to the notice of the committee, render the talker liable to expulsion. My brother was one of the founders, and I have myself found it a very soothing atmosphere. (Doyle 436)

- 2 Not much more is said, either in 'The Greek Interpreter' or elsewhere in the Canon about the Diogenes Club, where the main rule is thus that talkers are offenders: the reader is given some topographical details in this story, he learns that it is situated right into Clubland, in Pall Mall, 'some little distance from the Carlton' (Doyle 436), and that Watson merely catches 'a glimpse of a large and luxurious room in which a considerable number of men were sitting about and reading papers, each in his own little nook' (Doyle 436); the club will be mentioned only once more, in passing and nineteen years later, in 1912 in 'The Adventure of the Bruce-Partington Plans'. So the Diogenes Club could be considered a mere detail in the stories, a pleasing 'curiosity' as Sherlock puts it. And yet the least one can say is that the Diogenes Club has captured the imagination of scholars and artists alike, to become a highly prolific ellipsis, a ferment of fiction.
- 3 Granted, 'devotees of Sherlock Holmes are a famously obsessive bunch';<sup>2</sup> and one of the favourite pleasures of the aficionados is to decode the most minute clues Doyle might have dispersed in the text, and to come up with the most meticulous and convincing versions of what might happen in between the moments that are actually told by Watson, in the numerous textual blanks that are read as so many tell-tale omissions. Still even in this context, the Diogenes Club has triggered a comparatively impressive mass of speculation as to which real club it might best correspond to, and above all what it might be the façade for.<sup>3</sup>
- 4 What I would like to prove in this paper is indeed that there might be more than meets the eye in this obtrusive though tenuous textual detail:<sup>4</sup> I will try to show that the sort of delightful Wildean paradox of a bunch of men deciding to get together for the single reason that they want to be left alone, is not so random as it seems and reads like a metatextual clue, in two ways. First the Diogenes is not so much an improbable oxymoron as a rather alert parody of what can be considered as the central ambivalence of nineteenth-century gentlemen's clubs, where the open intention of socialisation went along with a more dissident desire for privacy. Second, that embedded celebration of silence highlights an essential aspect of Doyle's text, a fundamental textual ambivalence. Though the Holmes stories obviously read as a positivist celebration of the power of words to control reality, and nothing seems to escape the close logics Holmes's panoptic *logos*, yet Doyle definitely develops a minor mode to resist that dominant structure. Silence first comes as a formal inner contradiction to almighty *logos*: omissions, ellipses and never-solved secrets are allowed to proliferate and to call for a radically different text from the accurate copy of reality Holmes proclaims to produce, fiction competing with mimesis. Finally, though Doyle's text is highly inquisitive, and aims at fully deciphering reality and people, it also concedes for an alternative claim that the Diogenes highlights: the possibility to escape paradigms and cultivate privacy, the neutral right to remain silent.
- 5 On the face of it, the Diogenes Club reads like another of Doyle's typical good jokes indeed, a glib way to treat one of the pillars of the English Establishment, quite in line then with his general taste for paradoxical and baroque situations and people, probably starting with the improbable detective himself, a figure of ambivalence—both an indefatigable positivist thinker and staunch defender of Victorian ideology and Establishment, and an idle dilettante injecting himself with cocaine and spending days on end lingering on his sofa and scraping on his violin. Doyle was clearly attracted to curiosities and paradoxes, and many stories stage such oddities—a man receiving orange pips in the mail, an average businessman spending part of the day begging on the street in the disguise of a twisted-lipped tramp, a man coming across a blue carbuncle in the gullet of a goose in 'The Blue Carbuncle', a story which features another unusual club, the modest goose-club: 'There are a few of us who frequent the Alpha Inn, near the Museum—we are to be found in the Museum itself during the day, you understand. This year our good host, Windigate by name, instituted a goose club, by which, on consideration of some few pence every week, we were each to receive a bird at Christmas' (Doyle 251).
- 6 Furthermore, it is not surprising that clubs should have been quite prominent in Doyle's mind when he wrote 'The Greek Interpreter' in 1893 as his membership to the prestigious Reform Club had recently been confirmed after he had applied in October 1891—but just as the characters in his fiction, he belonged to quite a few both serious and highly anecdotal clubs, and critics noted 'the constant clubbability' of Conan Doyle, who was 'a life-long compulsive joiner of societies and clubs and teams and committees in a compulsively associative age (especially for men)' (Kerr 7).<sup>5</sup>
- 7 More generally, clubs were a real phenomenon at the end of the nineteenth century, and it is no surprise that they should have fuelled Doyle's imagination, and satisfied his taste for eccentric combinations, since virtually every type of society had their clubs then, even the most eccentric ones. As Amy Milne-Smith notes: 'The most marked trend of the late nineteenth century was the sheer volume of clubs in London. By the mid-Victorian era, there were nearly two hundred gentlemen's clubs and their imitators, some with waiting lists as long as sixteen years. By the turn of the century, this trend had only increased, with another wave of clubs created after 1870' (Milne-Smith 2006, 799). Authors agree that one of the major, conservative, functions of these clubs was for gentlemen to socialize and thus to reinforce the powerful symbolic network of the Establishment: as Barbara Black put it, 'clubland can cement social position, provide social cohesiveness in the urban chaos, and erect standards for conduct' (Black 33). Crucially, these gentlemen were encouraged to develop the central social skill of conversation, both a notable mark of education and an eminently political tool, deemed to be 'the diplomacy of the spirit' to take up Marc Fumaroli's book title: from the eighteenth century, the art of conversation was progressively defined as the perfect relation cultivating respectable distance and sensible proximity, an ideal of sociability irrigating the social fabric of the elite. Amy Milne-Smith explains how 'at Boodle's Club one could seek out companions at the central round dining table, where newspapers and books were banned and members were explicitly encouraged to socialize' (Milne-Smith 2006, 805). Conversation was thus a serious matter and gentlemen could rely on manuals that would provide them with rules to master that crucial accomplishment. Cecil B. Hartley for example listed in 1875 no fewer than thirty seven conversation rules for gentlemen, among which, for instance: 'It is ill-bred to put on an air of weariness during a long speech from another person, and quite as rude to look at a watch, read a letter, flirt the leaves of a book, or in any other action show that you are tired of the speaker or his subject' (Hartley, n. pag.). So in 'The Greek Interpreter' Doyle undoubtedly treated in a very flippant way that essential mission of clubs by making conversation an offense altogether, thus turning the Club into a preserve of ill-bred dissenters to that collective political ideal.
- 8 And yet one can also argue that the Diogenes highlights a central ambivalence of Clubs, and so that it is not so much an oxymoron as a farcical parody: indeed, concomitantly to that desire to reinforce social bonds through codified conversation, clubs also satisfied a more dissident desire for privacy and withdrawal from the solicitations of society. In many small particulars, the Diogenes is indeed only an exaggerated version of actual clubs, and silence only a superlative kind of retreat.

At first glance, clubs that accepted hundreds of members would not seem a space for a man to seek privacy. And yet, by the nineteenth century, the open conviviality of the early clubs had been trumped by the desire for quiet and solitude. While men certainly met friends at their clubs, and enjoyed some high spirits at the bohemian clubs, for the most part men enjoyed their clubs for the luxury of not being disturbed. The desire to belong to a prestigious club and be conspicuous as one of its members did not exclude the desire to enjoy a very private space. (Milne-Smith 2006, 809)

9 The desire to enjoy privacy among a group of men is demonstrated indeed by the 'Silence Rooms' that were set up in several clubs, most notably at the Devonshire Club, where a member was guaranteed an undisturbed space, at the Travellers' where 'the chief tradition is that members do not speak to each other' (Doughan & Gordon 16) or even at the stately Athenaeum in Pall Mall: 'It was *de rigueur* at this club that members were not disturbed. It was rumoured when Michael Faraday died in his chair at the Athenaeum, he has lain there unnoticed under a newspaper for three days' (Doughan & Gordon 15). Amy Milne-Smith concludes with a sentence that could indeed describe the Diogenes quite adequately, that 'many clubrooms thus would have presented a rather somber feeling to an outside observer, with each man in his own private world. In such instances members tolerated one another's presence because of their shared desire for privacy' (Milne-Smith 2006, 810). The ambivalence of clubs leads Valérie Capdeville to call them 'a third space', both a public space of sociability and expression and a private place of seduction and secrecy, both a reinforcement of the Establishment, and a way to escape its most pressing commands. Both Capdeville and Milne-Smith insist that such ambivalence is decisively linked to two things, the suspicion that the off-record rule might serve to hide secrets (either shameful illicit behaviours or state secrets) and the questioning and dissident redefinition of the ideology of domesticity. As for secrets, 'The Greek Interpreter' definitely reads like a very tempting white page, and omission triggers interpretation, the more so since Sherlock confesses to Watson nineteen years later that he was not totally honest as regards his brother's real role with the British Government: 'I did not know you quite so well in those days. One has to be discreet when one talks of high matters of state. You are right in thinking that he is under the British government. You would also be right in a sense if you said that occasionally he is the British Government' (Doyle 914).<sup>9</sup> As for domesticity, the club seems to compete with the home as 'the place of Peace; the shelter, not only from all injury, but from all terror, doubt, and division, . . . a sacred place, a vestal temple' (Ruskin, n. pag.)—Milne-Smith actually titles a chapter of her book 'The Club as Home', and Ruskin's famous quote is parodied and inverted by that claim from Lord Bayswater's wife: 'A man's house is his Club, Sir; a woman's house is her boudoir. The castle idea is exploded.'<sup>7</sup> The idea has been quite extensively explored elsewhere,<sup>8</sup> but the Sherlock Holmes stories are definitely privileged ground to illustrate that fact, as they stage two bachelors living together, doing away with the euphemisms 'struggles and strife' of typical domestic life with Mrs Hudson as only female *persona grata*, in a flat that Barbara Black describes as a club of sorts: 'the alternative domesticity that Holmes enjoys at 221b Baker Street [is] more club than home—the most intimate of clubs' (Black 188). As for Mycroft, he is a bachelor as well, and though his rooms are just across the street from the Diogenes, it is there that he feels at home, and he spends all his free time in this alternative all-male den: 'Mycroft lodges in Pall Mall, and he walks round the corner into Whitehall every morning and back every evening. From year's end to year's end he takes no other exercise, and is seen nowhere else, except only in the Diogenes Club, which is just opposite his rooms' (Doyle 436).

10 So as far as clubs are concerned, it seems that the Diogenes is after all, behind the guise of pure jubilatory farce, a rather perceptive parody, an intensification of the major dissident characteristics of that established institution.

11 But it is in its relation to the form of the text itself that the Diogenes strikes me as a most remarkable clue: the claim it makes for the right to be silent echoes a distinct textual undertone, both a literary and a political claim that constitutes a dissenting inner difference within the explicit major intention of the text.

12 To start with, I would like to make it apparent that the joke, if it is one indeed, is very elaborate, and the celebration of silence certainly not a random theme. The Diogenes Club is created in a story that is centrally *about* language and silence, and that establishes two things beyond the rather trite plot: that silence is usually a sign of criminality in Doyle's detective stories, and that Sherlock Holmes is a blatant exception to that rule as being the only one who is allowed to remain silent.

13 First 'The Greek Interpreter' is the story of Mr Melas, Mycroft's neighbour and an interpreter then, 'a remarkable linguist', who interprets 'all languages—or nearly all' and has been for many years 'the chief interpreter in London', a man then for whom language is transparent, and who uses in an official way to solve problems—a little bit like Holmes himself: 'he earns his living partly as interpreter in the law courts' (Doyle 438). He comes to Mycroft because, to assist a woman in danger and at the peril of his own life, he disobeys the order of villains who have abducted him and ordered him to remain silent as to what he saw—namely a Greek prisoner whom they want to sign papers to hand over his property to them. Typically then in this story, silence and concealment are on the side of criminals, while complete disclosure is a sign of morality and good citizenship: 'Remember . . . if you speak to a human soul about this—one human soul mind—well, may God have mercy upon your soul . . . We shall know if you speak of this' (Doyle 441). This is totally in line with the orthodox position of the stories: everything must be out, and language is what Ricoeur called '*le secours du monde*', a way to understand, order and control reality.

14 Yet and as a contradiction, 'The Greek Interpreter' also opens on a remarkable event, the unique breach of Sherlock's habit of silence, of his typical withholding of everything that is of a private nature. Watson comments on Sherlock's 'reticence': 'During my long and intimate acquaintance with Mr Sherlock Holmes, I had never heard him refer to his relations, and hardly ever to his own early life' (Doyle 435). Indeed, though Sherlock and Watson share rooms, though Sherlock is able to probe into Watson's most intimate secrets, and for instance to deduce as early as the second story, *The Sign of Four*, and from observing the watch Watson inherited from his brother that the latter 'was a man of untidy habits—very untidy and careless. He was left with good prospects but threw away his chances, lived for sometime in poverty with occasional short intervals of prosperity and finally, taking to drink he died' (Doyle 92). Sherlock on the contrary remains a totally opaque surface for Watson, and thus a unique, but quite material, resistance to the regime of textual transparency he himself ensures, a kind of self-exception to the Victorian duty of plainness he enforces: indeed, the few inklings as to Holmes's occupations when he is left alone by Watson's text, when he escapes the control of narration, are telling as to their often dissident nature, as for example when it transpires in 'The Man with the Twisted Lip' that he is the regular patron of an opium den. In the dominant regime of textual transparency and logocentric control, Holmes resists as a furtive exception, as a clandestine personal blank: more often than not, he is left alone in his armchair by Watson who knows better than to speak to him, very much like the members of the Diogenes indeed—and it suddenly transpires that Sherlock was or still is, a member himself, without Watson having the slightest clue, and the information lying incomplete, an intense suspension, a teaser for more that is not going to come: 'I have myself found it a very soothing atmosphere' (Doyle 436).

15 So Sherlock obviously resists the necessity of absolute clarification he is himself the warrant of, and celebrates, a dutiful member of the Diogenes, the dissident validity of silence. There are two major ways in which Doyle's text reads as a defence of silence, an ontological one and a literary one. We have seen that Sherlock resists interpretation and stands in the text as its unique persistent enigma: apart from him, everyone and everything is caught in the process of radical clarification owing to Sherlock's final narration of the case that leaves absolutely no blank. He trusts that the combination of knowledge, logics and the *logos* makes him able to reduce the multiplicity of reality to a few recurring types: reality is fully eloquent to him, literally an open book. Everything about his clients is *telling*, every object *speaks out* the man it belongs to, just as Watson's watch becomes the very fluent sign of his brother's character. 'The Greek Interpreter' provides the reader with one of the best illustrations of that inflation of language in order to contain reality: perched at the window of the Diogenes' Stranger's Room, thus enjoying a panoramic view of the street below, omniscient Mycroft and Sherlock engage in a kind of verbal fight to fully interpret the people. Mycroft opens the battle: 'Look at the magnificent types!' (Doyle 437), and both men engage in a cross-examination, one line each, piling from above defining discourse onto a random man, whom Watson, totally in character, only sees as 'a very small, dark fellow, with his hat pushed back and several packages under his arm' (Doyle 437):

'An old soldier, I perceive,' said Sherlock.  
'And very recently discharged,' remarked the brother.  
'Served in India, I see.'  
'And a non-commissioned officer.'  
'Royal Artillery, I fancy,' said Sherlock.  
'And a widower.'  
'But with a child.'  
'Children, my dear boy, children.'  
'Come,' said I, laughing, 'this is a little too much.' (Doyle 437)

16 Mycroft has got the final cue, he wins by one child and a verbal knock-out, and both brothers are satisfied that reason can substitute the categories of discourse for the diversity of reality. As Gusdorf put it: '*La raison triomphante se donne pour tâche de substituer au monde vécu, dans son incohérence, dans son opacité sensible, dans sa coloration passionnelle, le monde intelligible d'un univers du discours*' (Gusdorf 240). In order to speak them out, Mycroft and Sherlock can actually dispense with the men themselves, and a mere hat may become a metonymic and metaphoric chatterbox. In 'The Blue Carbuncle', the hat forgotten by the client is a mere undetermined 'old battered felt, . . . a tattered object' to Watson ('I can see nothing' [Doyle 246]), it enables Sherlock to come up with the whole narration:

'That the man was highly intellectual is of course obvious upon the face of it, and also that he was fairly well-to-do within the last three years, although he has now fallen upon evil days. He had foresight, but has less now than formerly, pointing to a moral regression, which, when taken with the decline of his fortunes, seems to indicate some evil influence, probably drink, at work upon him. This may account also for the obvious fact that his wife has ceased to love him.' (Doyle 247)

17 Sherlock takes the whole man out of his hat, expressed to the most intimate details. This is obviously the rule in the text, the clue to Sherlock's success: he believes men are *specimens*, reducible to a limited number of paradigms or 'types' as Mycroft says. Detection here works like a linguistic panopticon, like what Barthes calls '*une idéosphère*', '*le système langagier d'une idéologie*' (Barthes 122), a disciplinary language fitting everyone into the categories of reason. Within this context, the members of the Diogenes Club, and among them their most famous one, Sherlock himself, oppose a contradiction, they stand 'each in his own little nook' (Doyle 436), totally opaque, embodying a silent resistance to the tyranny of language, remaining 'neutral' in the sense that Barthes gave to the word, that is to say 'escaping paradigms'.<sup>9</sup> For Barthes, '*la mise en paradigme coïncide avec l'apparition du langage*' (Barthes 121) and so silence is a figure of neutrality, it is a way to dodge the oppressions, the intimidations and the dangers of language. As such, and as opposed to the consensual 'right to speak', the right to remain silent, the right not to speak and not to listen, and to escape the disciplinary demands of language is probably a highly dissenting but very valid claim. In the Diogenes and within the disciplinary system both of the text and of the transparency-obsessed Victorian society, the seemingly impolite and uncouth obligation of silence amounts to a collective claim, nearly political, or at least threatened by political instances, to silence and privacy. The members of the club reassess the importance of the implicit, they oppose the idea that '*l'implicite est un crime, car l'implicite c'est la pensée qui échappe au pouvoir*' (Barthes 134). Silence is thus what Deleuze would call '*une ligne de fuite*' (Deleuze 47), a way to escape the dominant mode, to introduce a difference, a lack of coincidence, a necessary tension.

18 This, and to conclude, is nowhere so obvious as in the abundant textual use Conan Doyle makes of silence. In a private letter, Stevenson exclaimed about Zola and Naturalism: 'He [Zola] would leave nothing undeveloped, and thus drowned out of sight of land amid the multitude of crying and incongruous details. Jesus, there is but one art: to omit'.<sup>10</sup> In the Sherlock Holmes stories, there is a fundamental tension between that realist mission to capture everything, and another impulse, a desire to escape the logocentric net. Sherlock's final narrations, at the end of each case, are spectacular illustrations of the challenge to cover and transcribe reality as closely as possible, leaving absolutely no blank, in a collective reassuring celebration of the capacity for reason to control and rectify reality. And yet, the text also makes room for numberless ellipses, for glaring provocative omissions that work as so many highly intensive ferments of fiction. The most obvious trick is Watson's way to allude to a great number of cases he has no time to narrate, and that colonise the actual text as so many attractive holes:

From time to time I heard some vague account of his doings: of his summons to Odessa in the case of the Trepoff murder, of his clearing up of the singular tragedy of the Atkinson brothers at Trincomalee, and finally of the mission which he had accomplished so delicately and successfully for the reigning family of Holland. Beyond these signs of his activity, however, which I merely shared with all the readers of the daily press, I knew little of my former friend and companion. (Doyle 161)

19 'Vague' and 'little' indeed are the details of these cases that sound even more spectacular than those actually told by the biographer. Not only does he mention cases, but he is careful to say just enough to tease the curiosity of the reader, to turn an ellipsis into an intensive reservoir of endless possibilities and pending texts-to-be. The process reaches its climax in 'The Adventure of the Sussex Vampire', where Sherlock reveals that the collection of omissions is so abundant that it actually needs an index: 'Victor Lynch, the forger. Venomous lizard or gila. Remarkable case, that! Vittoria, the circus belle. Vanderbilt and the Yeggman. Vipers. Vigor, the Hammersmith wonder.

Hullo! Hullo! Good old index. You can't beat it. Listen to this, Watson. Vampirism in Hungary. And again, Vampires in Transylvania' (Doyle 1034). Virtual cases are swollen, omissions are paradoxically indexed and ubiquitous, constituting a Borgesian 'atlas de l'impossible' (Foucault 9), highly prominent ellipses that generate an inflation of undecided, silent possibilities, holes in the consistent fabric of the text. These obvious missing spaces (these *sommaires* or *ellipses* Genette examined closely [Genette 123]) contradict the dominant mode of the Realist text, as Genette made it clear that *sommaires* are typically devoted to pass quickly over unimportant events in the realist text: 'Le Sommaire est resté, jusqu'à la fin du dix-neuvième siècle, la transition la plus ordinaire entre deux scènes, le fond sur lequel elles se détachent, et donc le tissu conjonctif par excellence du tissu romanesque' (Genette 131). Here on the contrary, Watson intensifies their purely utilitarian function, and turns them into disruptive formal alternatives, searing the text more than patching it up. They are seeds of further fiction, a kind of deafening silence that breaks textual integrity, and intimates that there is always a remainder, that the text is always pending, never stabilized.

20 The least we can say is that these ellipses, the untold cases but also the many barely mentioned yet tantalizing elements, like Mycroft and the Diogenes, have been the occasion for later parodists to write some more: nearly every week, a new Sherlock Holmes story is out, filling in the blanks, thriving upon textual omissions. For Mycroft only, one of the most alluring blanks and a constantly retreating object, one of the latest popular rewritings, the BBC series *Sherlock* is as I write using him once more as a cliff-hanger, leading the viewers in the final episode of the third season, to believe that he might be a more dissident character than he seems to be.

21 So the silences of the text are like the members of the Diogenes: they profess the necessity of silence as a literary alternative to the established dominant mode of the text, they oppose its logics of absolute transparency. Each in their little nooks, they constitute open temptations and celebrate the paradoxical but intimate link between silence and fiction.

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## Notes

- 1 So far, Watson had assumed that Sherlock Holmes 'was an orphan with no relatives living' and 'found [him]self regarding him as an isolated phenomenon', since he 'had never heard him refer to his relations', in a 'complete suppression of every reference to his own people' (Doyle 435). All the references to the story will be from Arthur Conan Doyle's *The Penguin Complete Sherlock Holmes* (London: Penguin, 1981).
- 2 This is how Jennifer Schuessler begins her article in *The New York Times*, 'Suit Says Sherlock Belongs to the Ages', published online March 6th, 2013.
- 3 To quote two famous examples, Ronald Knox has come up with the dissident idea that the Diogenes Club might be a political traitors' den, and Mycroft a much darker figure than is said, while in *The Private Life of Sherlock Holmes*, Billy Wilder makes it a front for the British Secret Services.
- 4 After all Sherlock repeatedly warns the reader that the truth is in details: 'It has long been an axiom of mine that the little things are infinitely the most important' (in Doyle, 'A Case of Identity', 254).
- 5 In a two-page note to his text, Kerr lists an impressive number of all the clubs and associations Doyle belonged to, and was often an office-holder of, ranging from the prominent Athenæum, to more eclectic choices: the Allah-Akbaries (Barrie's Cricket Team Club), The Idlers' Club, the Incogniti, The Union Jack Club, the Undershaw Rifle Club, the New Vagabonds' Club, Our Society (the Crimes Club or Murders Club), etc. A full list can be found in Kerr 7-8.
- 6 Many rewritings constantly expand the character of Mycroft. The series *Elementary* (a CBS series that premiered in September 2012, created by Robert Doherty) goes an unusual way, improbably featuring actor Rhys Ifans, makes him an eccentric womanizer, nicknamed 'fatty' by Sherlock, the weird owner of a chain of restaurants in New-York, and quite recently in the series, a telephone call seemed to indicate that he worked for some unknown person, and that there might be some secret around him.
- 7 R. D. Stordale, 'Clare, Lord Bayswater: A Tale of the Times', *Vanity Fair*, 1 January 1881, 7, quoted in Amy Milne-Smith 2006, 807.
- 8 Milne-Smith's chapter 'The Club as Home' (in her *London Clubland. A Cultural History of Gender and Class in Late-Victorian Britain* (2011) is extremely detailed and documented on the issue, as is Valérie Capdeville's very convincing analysis of 'the third space' in *L'Âge d'or des clubs londoniens (1730-1784)* (2008).
- 9 'J'appelle Neutre tout ce qui déjoue le paradigme', in Roland Barthes, *Le Neutre*, Paris: Seuil, 2002, p. 22.
- 10 In an 1893 letter to Robert Allan Stevenson (Stevenson 234).

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### Articles du même auteur

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