EXTRA! EXTRA! READ ALL ABOUT IT!: NEWSPAPERS AS BAKHTINIAN CHRONOTOPE IN *THE MYSTERIES OF LONDON* AND SHERLOCK HOLMES

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ABSTRACT

Newspapers function as a Bakhtinian chronotope in George W.M. Reynolds’s The Mysteries of London. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle adapted this usage of newspapers in his Sherlock Holms stories. The chronotope has several features and consequences. The features include an inherent emphasis on physicality, creating a concrete object to embody the ideas of information, communication, and technology; forging a link between newspapers and crime or criminality; and linking newspapers to low-brow and popular culture. These features originate in Reynolds’s work, but are carried over into Conan Doyle’s Holmes stories. They also bring with them consequences. The first is the legitimation of information, regardless of its veracity. The second is creating room for metatextual commentary on newspapers and the stories themselves. Asserting this connection not only allows us to gain insight into the Sherlock Holmes stories, but also challenges and revises the traditional narrative of British detective fiction.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Special thanks to Dr. Jamie Horrocks and Dr. Dennis Cutchins, both of whom provided invaluable feedback and insight throughout the lengthy research and writing process. Thanks also to Prof. Liz Christianson, whose course about the rise of British detective fiction laid the groundwork necessary for the thesis to become what it has. Many thanks to my friends and family, particularly my brother Alistair, for listening to ideas, looking at drafts, and otherwise providing support and encouragement throughout this difficult and challenging, but ultimately rewarding process.
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I. Introduction

A remarkable moment occurs early in *The Mysteries of London, Vol. I* by G.W.M. Reynolds, serially published in fifty-two weekly installments beginning in 1844 and collected, bound, and sold as a novel in 1845. Bill, one of the low-class criminal figures, has murdered his wife in a domestic altercation and is hiding from police and others. While in hiding he hears a man selling penny dreadfuls¹ based on the murder he committed: “Here is a full and perfect account of the horrible assassination committed by the miscreant William Bolter, upon the person of his wife; with a portrait of the murderer, and a representation of the room as it appeared when the deed was first discovered by a neighbour. Only one Penny! The fullest and most perfect account—only one Penny!” (201, italics in original). With language like “horrible assassination,” “miscreant,” and an emphasis on the fact that this is “a full and perfect account” this quotation highlights the sensational elements seen as necessary for selling penny dreadfuls. And it provides a wonderfully metatextual moment in which fiction and reality merge, as readers are exposed to a fictional penny dreadful detailing the events in the text while reading *Mysteries*, itself a penny dreadful often sold in a manner similar to what Bill hears in the text.

A similarly metatextual moment takes place in Sir Arthur Conan Doyle’s *The Sign of Four*, first published in 1890. Near the start of *The Sign of Four*, Holmes and Watson are chatting and their previous endeavors together come up. Watson says, “‘I was never so struck by anything in my life [as by Holmes’s method of deduction in an earlier case]. I even embodied it in a small brochure, with the somewhat fantastic title of ‘A Study in Scarlet’’” (100). Watson admits to sensationalizing his account, if only in the “fantastic” title of the “small brochure.” Holmes’s reaction to this is telling, “He shook his head sadly. ‘I glanced over it,’ said he.

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¹ Low-brow, sensationalist fiction sold with illustrations for a penny per installment, popular in England throughout much of the nineteenth century.
‘Honestly, I cannot congratulate you upon it. Detection is, or ought to be, an exact science and should be treated in the same cold and unemotional manner. You have attempted to tinge it with romanticism’” (100). Holmes seems to be advocating for a strictly factual telling of the events, something that Conan Doyle does not do. Since the frame of his Holmes stories suggests that we are reading what Watson has written, the accounts we have are tinged with romanticism and are certainly not related in a “cold and unemotional manner.” Watson protests Holmes’s characterization of his writing: “But the romance was there … I could not tamper with the facts”” (100).

The idea of perspective comes into play here, with Holmes adamant that Watson has misrepresented events and Watson equally convinced that he has presented the information in “the fullest and most perfect account,” to use Reynolds’s phrase. Watson and Holmes can be viewed as representing contrasting responses to Conan Doyle’s earlier work A Study in Scarlet, with Holmes expressing some of the critiques of sensationalized writings and Watson presenting a plausible defense. Holmes ends the debate in the text with a characteristically egotistical statement: “Some facts should be suppressed, or, at least, a just sense of proportion should be observed in treating them. The only point in the case which deserved mention was the curious analytical reasoning from effects to causes, by which I succeeded in unravelling it”” (100).

Holmes argues that reasoning should be at the center of Watson’s “small brochure” and not the lurid or sensational details, however true they may be, that were used to sell dreadfuls in nineteenth-century England. And since Holmes was the one doing the reasoning, he should take the front and center position. Holmes even admits, to some extent, that Watson is right in seeing the romanticism in the facts by shifting his argument to suggest that “some facts should be suppressed.” The application of this line of thought being that some details, while true, should
not find their way into cheap fiction, and should be omitted to preserve the “unemotionalism” that Holmes sees as characteristic of good literature.

In these two passages from Conan Doyle and Reynolds, certain resonances start to appear. Both moments invoke cheap, mass-produced written narratives of stories concerning crime, which are metatextually related in cheap, mass-produced stories concerning crime. In both instances there is an acknowledgment of the sensational qualities of the narratives. Both include stories that have been crafted from “real-life,” or some form of reality, within the fictional realm in which the stories take place, creating stories within stories and texts within texts. And both stories use newspapers or some form of newsprint to illustrate these and other ideas. The similarities highlighted in these moments foreground what strikes me as evidence that Conan Doyle is adapting, for the lack of a better term, this usage of newspapers and newsprint from Reynolds.

Viewing Conan Doyle’s tales as adaptations of Reynolds’s is unconventional, but it allows us to see certain resonances between the work of the two authors that we may not have noticed otherwise. It is important to recognize, however, that Conan Doyle is not adapting Reynolds’s work in the traditional sense. Any attempt to argue that Conan Doyle has recycled Reynolds’s *Mysteries* would quickly crumble because there are no characters that feature in both narratives, nor are there strong similarities in the plot or other narrative elements. Yet viewing the newspapers in Reynolds and Conan Doyle as a Bahktinian chronotope, an object imbued with meaning that can be transferred across space and time while retaining its meaning, helps readers understand that Conan Doyle is indeed adapting the chronotope from Reynolds’s writing.

In literature, film, and other texts, a chronotope is one means by which abstract ideas are represented in texts. As Dennis Cutchins states, “The idea of the chronotope is important to
Bakhtin because it is the mechanism by which reality is assimilated into art, as well as the way that more or less abstract thought is made into a sign, a ‘language’” (58). In essence, Bakhtin suggests that abstract ideas must be transformed into something concrete in order to convey abstraction through the text and between texts. This concrete, fictional object is the chronotope. The chronotope functions as a “sign,” then, by attaching meaning to an object that is understood by the reader, in much the same way that language may be viewed as a system of signs, signifiers, and signifieds. Cutchins continues, “The creation of these chronotopes is part of the work of translation, and I would add, the work of adaptation. ‘It is precisely the chronotope,’ Bakhtin writes, ‘that provides the ground essential for the showing forth, the representability of events’ and makes literary and cinematic art, at least, possible” (58). Cutchins equates adaptation with translation here, suggesting that there are similarities between the two and that by viewing adaptation as an exercise in translation, one can see different aspects of the process, including the importance of chronotopes.

As a literary device, the chronotope bears similarities to a symbol and a motif, but it differs from both in important and significant ways. Whereas a symbol generally features a single, simple meaning that can indeed be carried across time and space (the cross symbolizing Christianity; the color white symbolizing purity; springtime and the color green symbolizing birth, rebirth, and new life, etc.) (Harmon 509), the chronotope can place a set of complex and interconnected ideas into the object being represented, transferring a compact package of information across time (“chrono”) and space (“tope”). Motifs are more similar to chronotopes than symbols in the amount of complexity that can be conveyed by them, but they generally lack the specificity and tightness of meaning contained in the chronotope, which nearly always appears as a single material object. William Harmon defines a motif as “a simple element that
serves as a basis for expanded narrative; or less strictly a conventional situation, device, interest or incident” (335). He continues to note that it can also be “recurrent images, words, objects, phrases, or actions that tend to unify the work” (335). The chronotope meets this definition, but goes beyond being a recurring element of the text, containing information and ideas that are carried throughout each usage in the text and in other instances, where it has been adapted.

Within the texts of Reynolds and Conan Doyle, that single material object is the newspaper, which carries significant and remarkably similar meanings for both authors. In the works of both, newspapers weave together the otherwise often unrelated ideas of criminality, communication, technology, and low-brow or popular culture. They operate both textually and metatextually, not surprising given that both *Mysteries* and the Sherlock Holmes stories were initially published in periodicals and other forms of newsprint, highlighting the interwoven relationship between reality and fiction.

As it is found in *Mysteries*—one of the earliest examples of Victorian detective fiction—the newspaper chronotope contains specific features and carries with it specific textual consequences that are carried over into Conan Doyle’s Sherlock Holmes stories half a century later. The physicality of the usage of newspapers and newsprint throughout the texts is the first feature of the chronotope as it operates for both Reynolds and Conan Doyle. Chronotopes inherently emphasize the material nature of whatever object they are, due to their function in a text. The newspaper chronotope does this partially by creating a sense of print’s pervasive presence. In the works of both authors, newspapers are mentioned frequently, and characters often read from newspapers to find important information that drives the plot forward. The newspapers thus become a tangible representation of information, but it is a particular type of information, and this becomes the second feature of the chronotope. In these narratives,
newspapers inevitably convey information about crime and criminality, occasionally extending to the areas of extra-judicial crime. Third, the newspapers are always associated with low-brow or popular culture. A scholar notes that, “Reynolds’s analysis of ‘popular culture’ is as wide-ranging and elastic as the term itself: in *The Mysteries of London*, working-class culture…, ‘mass’ commercial culture, the mass commodification of modern urban life, the democratization of culture and the relationship between radical politics and cultural formations are all subject to analytical scrutiny” (John 166). This wide-ranging analysis of pop culture allows the newspapers to serve as a unifying feature linking various lowly characters together throughout the texts, and forging connections between the low (typically abject) characters and those higher in terms of class, money, or education.

Two main consequences result from these three specific features of the newspaper chronotope as it is used in Reynolds’s *Mysteries* and the Sherlock Holmes stories. First, the information conveyed in the newspapers gains legitimacy regardless of its veracity. As both works are detective fictions, this becomes a crucial element of plots that attempt to unravel lies and sort out misinformation in order to find the truth. Second, space is opened in the text by the chronotope, allowing the text to self-consciously reflect on itself. This happens repeatedly; when characters encounter newspapers, the narratives pause and become overtly metatextual. The fact that these features and consequences are not only found in the Reynolds’s massive novel, who established this chronotope in British detective fiction, but also appear in Conan Doyle’s texts suggests that Conan Doyle was doing more than simply and randomly incorporating newspapers and newsprint into his Holmes stories. He was, in fact, adapting a specific newspaper chronotope that originated in Reynolds’s *The Mysteries of London.*
Understanding the role that Reynolds’s chronotope has played after its initial appearance in 1844 illustrates the importance of *Mysteries*, a sprawling text seldom discussed in accounts of Victorian literature. It also explains some of the features that recur in Conan Doyle’s stories, and perhaps most significantly, it revises the narrative of the evolution of British detective fiction. Leroy Panek writes of this narrative that “Occasionally a short list of forgotten writers—Godwin, Bulwer-Lytton, Ainsworth—gets a brief, retrospective nod, but the usual, conventional, traditional formula for the history of the detective story goes: Poe to Dickens to Collins to Gaboriau to Conan Doyle, and then off to the races” (1). Such a narrative ignores the important impact that significantly lower-brow works, such as Reynolds’s *Mysteries*, had on the Holmes stories. The influence of Reynolds’s chronotope may even be more substantial, particularly since “the nineteenth century was quite literally awash in detective stories” (Panek 2), a significant portion of which were contained in newspapers and various other forms of newsprint. Newspapers, and newsprint more broadly, were a key component of the publishing of nineteenth-century detective fiction, but also, for Reynolds and Conan Doyle, a significant factor within the fictions themselves.

II. Reynolds’s *Mysteries*: Newspapers, Crime, and Detection

_The Mysteries of London_ was originally published on cheap newsprint in the 1840s in weekly eight-page installments, with the first 136 installments later bound together and sold as a novel of roughly 1000 pages. The narrative is convoluted and labyrinthine revolving around a pair of brothers, Richard and Eugene Markham, who fall in and out of trouble while Richard

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2 Edgar Allan Poe uses newspapers in some ways that seem like they are laying the groundwork for what both Reynolds and later Conan Doyle would do. “The Murder of Marie Roget” is solved exclusively through the use of newspapers, while newspapers also convey important information to Dupin in “Murders in the Rue Morgue” (Perry). Poe’s usage of newspapers lacks some of the features and consequences that are present by the time Reynolds is incorporating the chronotope into *Mysteries*, but the presence of newspapers in Poe is suggestive of these ideas beginning to surface, nonetheless.
searches for Eugene, who has left home and adopted a disguise but still remains quite present in Richard’s life. Along the way, readers meet characters of all social classes who become entangled in criminal activities ranging from forgery to gambling to fraud to grave-robbing to arson to murder.

Reynolds was a prolific writer, running a few periodicals of his own that largely featured political writing, in addition to writing ten of the ultimate twelve volumes of Mysteries (which was later rebranded as The Mysteries of the Court of London). The book, while always disparaged as the most vulgar kind of mindless entertainment, was incredibly popular with Victorian readers. Indeed “[The Mysteries of London] was almost certainly the most widely read single work of fiction in mid-nineteenth century Britain, and attracted more readers than did the novels of Dickens, Bulwer-Lytton or Trollope” (Reynolds v). Mysteries is something of a beast to take on, and that is one of the reasons that I limit my focus to the first volume. However, understanding the sheer length of Reynolds’s work highlights the influence it had and is suggestive of the importance of the text in any account of Victorian literature.

The literary influences on Reynolds are also important to understand, as they further explain Reynolds’s reliance (and that of detective fiction in general) on newspapers. These influences serve to highlight the connections, in Reynolds’s influences that continued in his use of the chronotopr, between newspapers and with low-brow, popular culture. Stephen James Carver writes, “Reynolds is very much the successor of Edward Lloyd’s penny bloods, as well as an inheritor and refiner of the earlier magazine, Tales of Terror)” (152). Penny bloods, also known as penny dreadfuls, typically featured stories of criminality—the bloodier and more sensational, the better. They often had full-page illustrations of the most gruesome moment from the story to attract readers. Penny bloods first began to be published in the 1830s and rose in
popularity until the 1890s or so, when other literature was popular enough to compete with the dreadfuls. Reynolds drew from these cheap, low-brow literary traditions, using them as inspiration for his similar efforts with Mysteries. This insight gains significance and importance by the realization that bloods were frequently based on newspaper accounts of crime—they were cheap fictionalizations of newspapers, published in newsprint form. However, “these were not Reynolds’s only obvious influences. He also followed in the more recent wake of the middle-class Newgate novelists, writers of criminal romances briefly in vogue in the 1830s and named after the infamous London gaol” (Carver 152). Indeed, the Newgate novels, which themselves emerged from the newspaper The Newgate Calendar, receive some brief mentions within Reynolds’s text, but not nearly as many as newspapers generally.

The importance of newspapers to Mysteries is heightened by an observation from the foreword to the print edition, written by Louis James. It states, “Like a newspaper, particularly that in the French form of the feuilleton, one that combined news with serialized fiction, The Mysteries contains a great variety of material and kinds of writing” (ix). Not only is Reynolds’s text printed on newsprint, not only does it include numerous uses of newspapers (some that are marvelously metatextual), but the entire format of the text is styled after a newspaper. The introduction continues, “There is documentary description as sharp as anything in Dickens or Mayhew; digressions on economics, criminal biography in the style of the ‘Newgate Calendar’, melodramatic horror, and scenes of luxury as voluptuous as any in a fashionable ‘silver fork novel’” (ix). The sheer variety of texts mentioned here that could be found in nineteenth-century newspapers further serves as a testament to the complexity of the chronotope of the newspaper as it is taken up by Reynolds. The smorgasbord of materials create a rich, meaning-filled object that
allows for multi-faceted interpretations and intriguing insights, particularly when the chronotope is adapted from text to text.

It is little wonder that newspapers play such a prominent role in Reynolds’s novel, because throughout the nineteenth century, newspapers were immensely popular in Britain. Bob Nicholson writes of the importance of newspapers that “No other form of Victorian print culture allows us to explore the period with such precision” (242). Nicholson’s assertion that Victorian print culture gives a uniquely insightful window into Victorian culture enhances the value of analyzing the role of newspapers within Victorian texts. These papers formed a significant portion of the print culture, as Panek attests: “in the nineteenth century and perhaps up into the beginning of the twentieth century, a lot more people found what literature they read in magazines and in newspapers rather than in books” (Panek 5). This may be linked, in part, to the abolition of a newspaper tax which, as Richard Altick observes, “spread the newspaper-reading habit throughout the provinces” (356). Altick points out that in “Manchester alone, by 1876, the total circulation of daily papers was around 125,000” (356). This number is dwarfed by Altick’s calculations for the circulation of newspapers in London. “The Times’s sales hovered between 50,000 and 60,000 … the Daily News’s circulation reached a steady 150,000 … and the Daily Telegraph, attaining 200,000 in the early seventies, was able to compliment itself on the largest circulation in the world” (Altick 355). These numbers serve to highlight the pervasive presence of newspapers in Victorian England. Reynolds and later Conan Doyle thus are reflective of the broader saturation of newsprint when they adopt the newspaper as chronotope in their texts.

Reynolds’s use of newspapers in The Mysteries of London, however, serves as more than a reminder of the popularity of the medium. The way that newspapers are being used as key components of the detective narrative, the features that they have, and the textual consequences
of their appearance all suggest a strategic deployment. I will first examine how Reynolds deploys the newspaper throughout *Mysteries*, investing it with a specific set of meanings, before turning to Conan Doyle’s adaptation of this chronotope later in the century. An understanding of what Reynolds was doing with the chronotope is key to seeing the adaptation at work in Conan Doyle.

If we return to the example from Reynolds’s *Mysteries* that opened this paper, we can immediately see the newspaper chronotope functioning in a complex way. Bill Bolter, a character who initially seems to have a large role to play but who ultimately turns out to be a minor character in the novel, hears the hawker peddling his dreadful while hiding in a safe-house, having abandoned his children after a violent, quasi-accidental altercation with his wife (also a criminal) that left her dead. While hiding, he hears the vendor call: “*Here is a full and perfect account of the horrible assassination committed by the miscreant William Bolter, upon the person of his wife*” (201). Immediately, Bill recognizes that the news of his misdeed has traveled far faster than he anticipated. Not only this, but the penny dreadful account has somehow gotten hold of “*a portrait of the murderer,*” which it has printed, along with “*a representation of the room as it appeared when the deed was first discovered by a neighbour*” (201).

The physicality of the chronotope is on full display at this moment in the text. “William Bolter” isn’t simply a name but an image that can be purchased and viewed. And a drawing of his room, complete (one would assume) with all the bits of furniture and personal items a family collects, becomes a selling point for the tale. The voice concludes with, “*Only one Penny! The fullest and most perfect account—only one Penny!*” (201, italics in original), but it’s the commodity itself—the newsprint brochure, the material object present within the narrative—that is ultimately highlighted here, rather than the bargain price. This emphasis on the material, the
physical, is also emphasized by some of the language used, as when Reynolds says the hawker’s “voice . . . fell upon [Bill’s] ear” (201). The voice is given the physical qualities of a concrete object, something that falls upon Bolter’s body and hits him like a blow. The physicality of the information contained in the dreadful thus spreads to those who convey the information and the otherwise non-corporeal elements that would be related to it.

This first feature of the newspaper chronotope, the association of newspapers with physicality, is clearly related to the second aspect: its association with crime and criminality. The crime related in the penny dreadful being sold by the hawker is particularly egregious—not some petty theft, but the murder of a man’s own wife. As the hawker continues to circulate within Bill’s hearing, he expands his advertisement of the dreadful, making it seem even more gory and criminal than it was at first. He yells, “A full and perfect account of the bloody and cruel murder in Upper Union Court; showing how the assassin first dashed out one of his victim’s eyes, and then fractured her skull upon the floor. Only one Penny, together with a portrait of the murderer, for whose apprehension a reward of One Hundred Pounds is offered! Only one Penny!” (201). This second version highlights the sensational elements of the crime, that Bolter “dashed out one of his victim’s eyes” before he “fractured her skull upon the floor,” all of which is framed as a “bloody and cruel murder.” It becomes clear that the usage of the newsprint is forging a link between newspapers and crime, cementing the relationship that may already be present for the readers of Mysteries who had most likely encountered such hawkers and such dreadfuls before. The later account shares much of its language with the first one, but the differences serve to enhance the emphasis on criminality.

The mere presence of the dreadful also forms an association between newspapers and low-brow popular culture. Penny dreadfuls historically appealed to lower classes, and at this
point in *Mysteries*, we’re neck-deep in the life of a low-class character. Not only this, we move from the slum in which Bill’s crime takes place to an even rougher neighborhood where Bill hides when he hears the penny dreadful being sold. The men and women who would conceivably buy the story of the murder are among London’s poorest, perhaps just literate enough to read the gory details (Sweet). These readers formed a large portion of the audience of Reynolds’s *Mysteries* which, as mentioned earlier, was built on the popularity of real-life narratives like this fictional penny dreadful being sold within the text. The lines become even more blurred by the unknown level of fictionalization that the dreadful within the text represents. It may be a news account, presenting the facts, but more likely it in and of itself is already a sensationalized version of Bolter’s ‘murder’ of his wife. The pop cultural appeal of this kind of literature is also illustrated at this moment in the text. In the short time that Bolter was listening to the vendor sell his wares, a whole crowd of people has gathered around the vendor, and rather than simply purchasing the dreadful and going about their business, they remain. This crowd, “which [the vendor’s] vociferations had collected” stay together as “the itinerant vendor of pamphlets passed on” (202). Their strange solidarity (one wonders why they don’t disperse after making their purchases) seems to represent the cultural power and significance of texts like this dreadful about Bolter’s murder of his wife. It brings the low-brow together, unites them as a cultural community.

Not only does this scene in *Mysteries* embody all of the features of the newspaper chronotope, it also highlights the consequences that inevitably accrue when we find this chronotope in Reynolds’s text. The first of these is the legitimation of information: the information contained in the vendor’s penny dreadful is legitimized by its mere physical existence in newsprint. Once Bolter has heard the vendor hawking his papers, the text notes that
“instinctively he put his fingers to his neck, to feel if the rope were there yet, and he shook his head violently to ascertain if he were hanging on a gibbet or could still control his motions” (202). Bolter feels as though he is already being hanged for his crimes. The information contained in the dreadful legitimizes his fears and begins to create a reality for Bolter, independent of the reality that he actually inhabits. He feels the noose around his neck and needs to confirm that he is not actually on the gallows. These anxieties are introduced, they become a reality, by virtue of their existence in the penny dreadful. Bolter knows that he is guilty; he has not yet heard police searching for him, but it is the presence of the penny dreadful that leads to his severe increase in concern. And Bolter’s anxieties continue to mount as he reflects on the language used in the pamphlet. “The words ‘miscreant,’ ‘horrible and bloody murder,’ and ‘portrait of the assassin,’ still rang in his ears—loud—sonorous—deep—and with a prolonged echo like that of a bell” (202). Interestingly, the phrase “portrait of the assassin” is not actually used by the vendor but is a conflation of various phrases that the vendor used, giving the words a life of their own. This suggests that the legitimization of information that occurs when newspapers appear in Mysteries also allows the information to transform in the mind of the reader, after it has been conveyed. The words interact with Bolter’s imagination and create a new reality, as is evident by his earlier feelings of the noose and gallows.

Bolter pauses to reflect on this strange power the newspaper has to shape its own version of reality. He laments that the information being circulated about him has become legitimate to the point that “already were the newspapers, the cheap press, and the pamphleteers busy with his name. None now mentioned him save as the miscreant William Bolter” (202, italics in original). Bolter has become the version of himself presented in and created by the newspaper. There’s an interesting metatextual element at work here, a metatextuality that is almost always a
consequence of the newspaper chronotope. Such moments of metatextuality are illuminated by an observation Simon Joyce makes about the convoluted relationship between the dreadfuls and criminals in the work of William Harrison Ainsworth, another writer of low-brow, Victorian crime fiction: “In a momentary confusion here, art begins imitating life imitating art, and it becomes increasingly hard to tell exactly what is originary and what a copy” (Joyce 323). Joyce goes on to suggest that “such confusions, moreover, are not confined to the internal world” of the text, but “recur in the history of its reception” (323), in other words arguing that the text is imitating reality, which in turn is imitating the text—a relationship that is confusing within the text, but becomes even more complicated in studying the text and its reception. Joyce’s ideas here about the difficulty of discerning between original and copy perfectly describe what happens to Bolter. Bolter loses sight of what is originary—his lived reality first in the room and now in hiding, and what is the copy—the information contained in the dreadful sold by the vendor. Bolter’s world begins to become a blend of the two, the dreadful serving as a new basis for his own reality. Metatextuality defines this complicated relationship and it is on display here in the text. The dreadful not only blends Bolter’s reality and copy of the reality, but serves to trigger the textual mechanisms of detection. Reynolds writes that at this moment, when Bolter’s actual life and assured death begin to merge, “the blood-hounds of the law were already upon his track” (202). The acts of detection essential to detective fiction are kick-started by the introduction of the vendor’s dreadful. It is not until this paper comes into play that Bolter realizes that he is being tracked, that there are police searching for clues as to his whereabouts.

In this single instance in Mysteries, all the features and consequences of Reynolds’s newspaper chronotope are on display. Throughout the novel, different events highlight singular features or consequences, but here with Bolter and the penny dreadful vendor, the chronotope is
fully contained. The physicality of the chronotope is evident, the links to crime and criminality are strongly present, as is the link to the low-brow and popular culture. The features then lead to two specific consequences, which are illustrated here in abundance. Bolter’s reality is shaped by the information delivered from the dreadful, with the physicality of the dreadful legitimizing what is being said to the point that Bolter internalizes it and allows it to dictate what he thinks is happening around him. This internalization bleeds over into some of the metatextual elements that are present, with the increasingly blurred lines between reality and copy of reality within the fictional narrative, but also between the reality of Victorian England and readers of *Mysteries* and of those that follow the vendor of Bolter’s dreadful.

This space of increasingly blurred lines is occupied and somewhat clarified by the chronotope. As Cutchins writes, “‘Chronotope,’ an invented word that may be roughly translated as ‘time/space,’ is Bakhtin’s elegant solution to a vexing problem, the apparently unlimited subjectivity of art” (57). For Cutchins, and Bakhtin, the chronotope allows for the creation of some sort of objective space. This space is created around the meaning that is packed into and conveyed by the chronotope, the newspapers that emphasize physicality, link to crime and criminality, as well as the low-brow and popular culture, while legitimizing the information contained therein and creating opportunities for metatextual commentary. Cutchins observes later that, “In fiction, characters, events, locations, and so on all might give time and place to an artistic idea, and thus function as chronotopes” (58). This idea highlights some of the flexibility that using the chronotope provides. The constellation of meanings packet into a chronotope can be applied in different circumstances as a kind of signifying shorthand.

William Harrison Ainsworth, a contemporary of Reynolds and fellow-writer of penny dreadfuls, once wrote that in the composition of dreadfuls, “The newspaper level is the line to
take,” and as Carver points out, “Reynolds took it” (161). Other examples from *Mysteries* highlight the pervasive presence of print culture and illustrate the myriad ways that Reynolds uses the newspaper chronotope throughout his novel. The physicality of the chronotope and legitimization of information it suggests are intricately intertwined in a way that makes them highly conducive for grouped analysis. Some of this can be seen in an event that occurs later in the text. In this scene, an aristocratic, secretly royal, Italian family, in a vague sort of self-imposed exile in England, learns of their impending bankruptcy by reading the newspaper: “The count resumed the perusal of the newspaper; but his eyes had not dwelt many minutes upon the page ere he uttered a loud exclamation of mingled astonishment and alarm” (651). The newspaper is a material object, conveying information to the count that the reader will not know until later in the novel. The physicality of the newspaper, which acts here like a wall or a screen, enhances its ability to build suspense and separate the characters from readers, who are left in the dark. The text continues this suspense (and acknowledges it) as it dwells on the state of the count, who: “with an ashy pale face, continued to read the article that had caught his eyes, for some moments, ere he explained the cause of his emotion” (651). For a brief moment in this section, a character knows something that the reader and most of the other characters do not, with the physical newspaper being the means of this occurring. The paper is also the means of creating a physical reaction in the count. He has “an ashy pale face” because of what he has read in the newspaper; the information led to a transformation within him. This ability to conceal specific information from readers, while still conveying it to characters and showing its effects, is particularly useful in detective fiction where clues are paramount to the narrative and information may on occasion need to be conveyed to characters, but not to the readers, who must still be informed that something important has taken place.
At this point in the text, Reynolds finally reveals the information that has devastated the count by introducing another reader: the countess. “‘Ruined,’ repeated the countess; and taking up the newspaper, the following article instantly met her eyes:--‘ROBBERY AND STOPPAGE OF TOMLINSON’S BANK’” (651). A full two-and-a-half pages of the novel is then comprised of text from the fictional newspaper conveying the story (which would have been read, of course, on newsprint indistinguishable in material form from the newspaper being held by the countess). The story in the newspaper reads in part, “‘The City was yesterday morning thrown into a state of the greatest fermentation by a rumour which prevailed at about eleven o’clock, that the above-mentioned old-established and well-known banking establishment had been plundered to an enormous amount, and had suspended its payments. Unfortunately the rumour was but too true’” (651-52). Readers know, however, that this information is not entirely accurate. The “rumours” confirmed by this account are actually not true, the “robbery” being part of a complicated plot to deceive the public. A variety of illegal activities are being undertaken in conjunction with the bank, but Tomlinson himself remains solvent and very much in control of the “plundered” money. For the Italian family, the information conveyed by the newspaper report is shattering; for the reader, it’s only part of the larger machinations of the novel’s main villain, machinations that we assume will be unmasked as the elements of detection run their course in the novel. But none of this is known by the Italians, and to a large extent, the veracity (or non-veracity) of the information in the newspaper account is immaterial to them and to the other characters in the text. This information has been published and read in a newspaper, whose physicality and reputation lend credibility to the information. The falsity of the information is enhanced by the newspaper explicitly confirming the veracity of the information, which began as a rumor, while the readers know that regardless of the newspaper’s claims, it is not true.
This theme of newspapers legitimating misinformation—a primary consequence of Reynold’s use of the newspaper chronotope—is carried over into another episode in *Mysteries* concerning the Italians. Richard Markham, the novel’s hero, is with the Italians and has been striving to work up the courage to talk to the Signor about his daughter, Isabella, whom Markham wishes to marry. Unfortunately, as the text notes, “Misfortunes never come alone. Richard was destined to receive a crushing blow, although innocently inflicted, the moment he entered the drawing room” (363). As he arrives, he stumbles upon a conversation that the family is engaged in, where the countess says, “‘We were only talking about the Chevalier Guilderstein, whose death was mentioned in yesterday’s newspaper. … I was saying that I remembered how delighted I was when I discovered a few years ago that the Chevalier was not related to our family as he had always pretended to be’” (363). The countess expresses this delight because the chevalier had been falsely accused of crimes, and then even when proven innocent, the suspicion of such guilt was enough to stain the memory of him and his potential relationship with the family. The countess goes on, saying, “‘I should not like to have amongst my ancestors a man who had been criminally convicted, however innocent he may in reality have been’” (363). Markham is crushed by this information, for he, too, has been criminally convicted, though innocent. His hopes of marrying Isabella are dashed, for the unintended consequence of this newspaper’s misinformation about Guilderstein is the revelation that no man linked to criminal activity—however innocent he may be—can ever hope to join himself to the family. Here again the misinformation conveyed by a newspaper is legitimized by its very appearance in that venue, altering the course of the novel’s plot.

Although Markham is well aware of his own innocence, the impact of the information conveyed through the newspaper in this scene, and the memory of older newspaper accounts that
had falsely condemned him (as they are falsely condemning Guilderstein), affect Markham in much the same way that the penny dreadful affects Bill Bolter (and to a lesser extent the count himself). Markham’s countenance turns “as pale as that of a corpse” when he hears what he knows is not true about Guilderstein in the newspaper, as though he is haunted by the thought of the crimes that have been associated with his own name in the newspaper—crimes which he did not commit (364). These crimes become so real in their print form that Markham begins to suffer “all the horrible tortures which man can conceive” from guilt and remorse: “He threw himself upon his couch—he writhed—he struggled, as if against a serpent which held him in its embraces. His eyes seemed as if they were about to start from their sockets; his teeth were fast closed—he wrung his hair—he beat his breast—and low moans escaped from his bosom” (364).

The physical reality of the information again has led to the creation of a world that haunts the receiver. In this instance, however, it is information directly conveyed by a newspaper in conjunction with the thought of what else newspapers have conveyed and might still convey that forms an alternate, but terribly tangible, reality. This suggests that the information embodied by the newspaper can affect characters in ways far beyond the words that are on the page; the implications of and associations that those words form for the readers of the newspapers spread outward to memories of events that didn’t actually take place. Here and elsewhere in the novel, newspapers thrive on the unseemly. They report, and in some cases exaggerate, accusations of criminality, working to spread misinformation by making the information “real” due to its material embodiment in the newspaper.

Perhaps this is why Markham feels the need to act preemptively, in some places in the novel, to counter information about himself that is printed in newspapers. Knowing that a false report linking him to gambling and forgery will shortly appear in the press, Markham writes a
letter to his friend and guardian “beseeching him not to be prejudiced against him by the report which he might read in the newspapers the following day” (173). This report is patently untrue (“It is false—false as hell!” cries Markham [171]), and it’s the only piece of evidence against Markham. But it’s enough to convince both a magistrate, who finds Markham’s true account to be “a very lame story, indeed” (172), and a jury, which convicts Markham and sends him to prison. In the face of even the most sensational print copy, truth seems hobbled. The physical, palpable nature of the newspapers lends them a sense of legitimacy that other forms of communication lack.

The paradoxical way in which Reynolds’s chronotope presents newspapers, in Mysteries, as both unassailably self-legitimizing and yet inevitably associated with crime and criminality lends a unique irony to some of Reynolds’s characterizations. For example, Reynolds signals to readers the despicable nature of the prosecutor who argues against Markham simply by depicting him as a newspaper reader. He writes “The counsel for the prosecution, who had done his duty by exerting all his talents, all his energies, and all his eloquence, to obtain the conviction of a youth who had never injured him, and whom he had never seen before, coolly took up a newspaper and perused it with evident gratification” (246). In pages that follow, Reynolds pens a tangential rant about the evils of prosecutors, confirming this man’s despicable nature with phrases like “how horribly depraved and vitiated must be that state of society in which hundreds of talented men are constantly employed, with large recompense, in procuring the condemnation of their fellow-creatures to the scaffold, the hulks, or eternal banishment!” (246). But readers know before this that the prosecutor is a crook because of his cool perusal of newsprint—for Reynolds, the newspaper encapsulates the horrors and ills of society, linking it with crime, a plague that infects all of the classes and attacks indiscriminately. And yet this is the same
medium that readers of Mysteries devoured with every installment. Thus we, too, are readers of
his newsprint dreadful, perhaps also taking “evident gratification” in the story of Markham’s
plight. If the “dreadfuls” were seen as having a disproportionately large influence on the reader
(Pittard 82), a decidedly negative influence, then becoming a good reader of Mysteries perhaps
means becoming bad a citizen. We, too, are affected by the fictions materialized and legitimized
in newsprint.

Throughout Mysteries, Reynolds fleshes out the idea of the chronotope, creating a
complex package of meaning associated with newspapers that is able to travel through time and
space. The chronotope has several features: physicality, which becomes linked strongly with the
legitimization of information; links to crime and criminality; as well as links to the low-brow and
popular culture. Typically, the information that is contained is actually false, but it is granted a
sense of legitimacy regardless of this frequent lack of veracity. Crime and criminality are
everywhere in Mysteries and frequently spread through references to and the presence of
newspapers. The chronotope not only creates a sense of legitimacy for the information contained
in the newspapers, but it also allows for metatextual commentary. All of this works together in
the physical object of the newspapers to convey meanings and ideas to readers through the text.

III. Conan Doyle: Adapting the Chronotope

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle adapted this chronotope that we have seen throughout
Reynolds’s Mysteries in his Sherlock Holmes stories. Conan Doyle’s stories, in fact, feature the
chronotope with the same set of features and consequences that Reynolds created. This is evident
throughout the Holmes canon but is particularly apparent in a number of stories from the
collection of the first twelve stories, The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes, in addition to the
second novel, The Sign of Four. I will be looking at this novel, along with “The Adventure of the
Noble Bachelor, “The Adventure of the Blue Carbuncle,” “The Red-Headed League,” “The Boscombe Valley Mystery,” and “The Adventure of the Engineer’s Thumb,” all of which feature the use of the same newspaper chronotope that we find in *Mysteries.*

Conan Doyle began publishing his Sherlock Holmes stories in 1887, some forty-plus years after Reynolds wrote *Mysteries.* The introduction to the Barnes and Noble Classics version of the text notes that “The stories have been in print continuously since the time the first one, *A Study in Scarlet,* was published in 1887” (xiii). There are fifty-six short stories and four novellas in the official Holmes canon, although countless authors have added to that number since Conan Doyle ceased writing (xiii). *A Study in Scarlet,* like nearly all of the Holmes stories, was published in newspaper form, in *Beeton’s Christmas Annual* in 1887 (xxi), while the rest of the stories appeared in the *Strand,* a relatively new magazine at the time (xxv). Conan Doyle had initially agreed to a run of six stories, which he wrote in the span of roughly six weeks. He was reluctant to write more than the initial run and asked for £50 per additional story, hoping that would be far too expensive, but the *Strand* eagerly agreed (xxvi). These first twelve stories were collected as a book, *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes.* The *Strand* wanted another twelve, which would make a total of twenty-four stories and two novellas, which Conan Doyle did not want to write, so he asked for £1000, thinking that it would be absurdly high, but again, the *Strand* eagerly agreed (xxviii-xxvix). Conan Doyle had a fascinating life as an author, but “Ironically enough, all these events have a chance to be remembered only because he [Conan Doyle] created what he regarded as ‘a lower stratum of literary achievement,’ his peerless detective, Sherlock Holmes” (xiii). Conan Doyle was dismissive of Holmes, even though he was immensely popular throughout Britain and the United States. The Sherlock Holmes stories had a notable impact on detective fiction. They were seen as the culmination of nineteenth-century
detective fiction and paved the way for the explosion of detective fiction in the “Golden Age” of the early twentieth century.

Readers can see Conan Doyle adapting Reynolds’s newspaper chronotope perhaps most evidently in his 1891 story, “The Adventure of the Noble Bachelor.” Conan Doyle builds on the theme of misinformation in this story, wherein misinformation spread by a newspaper report sets in motion a series of events that result in a compromising and complex outcome. The story revolves around Lord Robert St. Simon, the titular “noble bachelor” and his marriage to Miss Hatty Doran. Hatty, an American, was previously married to Frank Moulton, whom she believes to have been killed in an Indian attack back in America. When Hatty disappears shortly after her wedding to St. Simon, St. Simon enlists the assistance of Sherlock Holmes to help him find his new bride, whom he presumes to be kidnapped.

The initial piece of misinformation offered and then legitimized by the newspaper is not relayed to readers of the story until its resolution, even though it occurs first chronologically. After Holmes has solved the case and found Hatty, he briefly reunites her with Lord St. Simon, so that she can explain to him why she bolted at the altar. Hatty describes how, years previously in America, after hearing rumors of her husband, Frank Moulton, going missing while away on business, she came upon “‘a long newspaper story about how a miners’ camp had been attacked by Apache Indians, and there was my Frank’s name among the killed’” (Doyle 355). This knowledge drives her to grief and ultimately to England with her father, where she meets Lord St. Simon. Hatty is driven by a belief gained from lies that were spread in a newspaper. The misinformation has not only been legitimized but is essential for the plot to be propelled forward. Without that piece of misinformation, she never would have agreed to marry the noble bachelor. It is the information’s presence in the newspaper that convinces Hatty that what she has read is
true. This is remarkably similar to the chronotope’s function in *Mysteries*, particularly when misinformation relating to Markham leads to his arrest and imprisonment. The misinformation is vital to the action of the plot moving forward. If the newspapers had contained accurate information, neither of these stories would have taken place in the same way that they did.

Yet in a fitting twist of fate, it is newspapers that communicate the information necessary for Hatty’s salvation. Holmes discovers that while Hatty thought that her husband, Frank, had been killed, he was actually still alive. Frank learned of Hatty’s upcoming marriage to St. Simon from a newspaper and traveled to England to stop her. “‘I saw it [the wedding announcement] in a paper,’ explained the American. ‘It gave the name and the church but not where the lady lived’” (356). The same means of communication that led to the miscommunication ultimately serves to resolve it, but not before matters are further complicated by Frank’s whisking Hatty away from her new husband. It is poetic justice in a way, even as the new information results in a series of complications for the “noble bachelor” leaving him wife-less. Although here the information relayed through the newspaper is accurate and correct rather than untrue, the information is still legitimized by its presence in the newspapers. Frank may not have believed simple hearsay, but because he read of Hatty’s engagement in a newspaper, he trusted it, which allowed him to reunite with his long-lost wife. Conan Doyle uses the newspapers to create a web of extra-judicial crime, despite the absence of specific illegal activity, an interesting move that seems to rely on the foundational connections of newspapers and crime that Reynolds established.

An earlier exchange between Holmes and Watson in “The Adventure of the Noble Bachelor” further illustrates the connections between newspapers and crime, reminding us of the chronotope’s origins in *Mysteries*. Holmes inquires of Watson, “‘You have been reading the
papers diligently of late, have you not? ... It is fortunate, for you will perhaps be able to post me up. I read nothing except the criminal news and the agony column. The latter is always instructive” (343). In this case, Holmes uses Watson’s knowledge of portions of the paper that he would deem useless to provide him with information necessary to understanding the background of Lord St. Simon and his missing bride. In fact, almost the entirety of the information that Holmes needs is found in the newspapers. Holmes’s request, “‘Pray give me the results of your newspaper selections’” (344), is followed by Watson’s reply, which includes reprinted material directly from various newspapers. This presents another moment of metatextuality, where the text (a piece of newsprint itself like Mysteries) doubles as a fictional newspaper. The conversation comes to a close with Watson noting “‘Only one little item in another of the morning papers, but it is a suggestive one’” (346). Watson is acting in some respects as the ideal reader. He pays attention to small details and in particular is looking to the newspapers for clues and hints as to how things could be understood, highlighting the metatextual elements of the passage. Readers of Doyle in the nineteenth century would have read the story in newsprint, including full, block quotes from newspapers, with the newsprint being layered just as Reynolds layered it in Mysteries.

This moment also highlights the newspapers ties to low-brow and popular culture. Holmes notes that he only reads the crime section and the agony column, whereas Watson is able to assist Holmes by relaying information he has gathered from the social pages. The crime section and agony column are representative of the low-brow that is exemplified by the penny dreadfuls and much of the writing that Reynolds does. Reynolds frequently highlighted the low-brow roots of his own writing, and Conan Doyle seems to be alluding to some of that here, with Holmes finding newspapers useful only for their information on crime and criminality. Watson,
however, illustrates that the social pages, the record of popular culture of the day, may also bear relevance on criminal activity, whether within the scope of the legal system or not. The incident suggests that even the seemingly innocent pages of the newspaper have come to be tainted with the stain of crime.

The newspaper chronotope is further evident in “The Adventure of the Blue Carbuncle,” where Conan Doyle develops the link between newspapers and crime and highlights the physicality of the newspapers. In this tale, Holmes is working to find the man who stole the Blue Carbuncle, a precious jewel. He knows the details of the theft from an advertisement that he has seen in newspapers. Holmes states in the text, “I ought to know its [the Blue Carbuncle’s] size and shape, seeing that I have read the advertisement about it in The Times every day lately” (295). Holmes uses information derived from advertisements in newspapers as a clue for a case. The crime notice was placed in the newspaper, creating an obvious link between newspapers and crime, which is strengthened by Holmes’s reading of the newspapers and gathering the information contained in the papers to learn about the case and ultimately to solve it. The information in the newspapers about the theft cements the crime-newspaper link that is the second feature of the chronotope as it was used by Reynolds.

Holmes furthers this connection by using newspaper advertisements himself to bring people—suspects, victims, informants—to him, further cementing the relationship between newspapers and crime, but also highlighting the physicality of the newspapers. In an attempt to bring the thief (or at least information of him) to Baker Street, Holmes writes an advertisement that reads: “Found at the corner of Goodge Street, a goose and a black felt hat. Mr. Henry Baker can have the same by applying at 6:30 this evening at 221B Baker Street” (296). He gives a servant instructions for the placement of the advertisement saying, “Here you are, Peterson, run
down to the advertising agency and have this put in the evening papers.’ ‘In which, sir?’ ‘Oh, in the Globe, Star, Pall Mall, St. James’s, Evening News Standard, Echo, and any others that occur to you’” (296). The newspapers are evolving somewhat from Reynolds’s bleak picture of linking to and perpetuating crime to also aiding in the solution and resolution of crimes. The crime-newspaper bond is still quite strong, but Conan Doyle highlights the positives that can come from the links forged between newspapers and crime.

Throughout this passage the newspapers have a strong physical presence, which is highlighted earlier, when Watson writes of Holmes that “He rummaged amid his newspapers, glancing over the dates, until at last he smoothed one out, doubled it over, and read [a] paragraph” (295). There’s a physical newspaper that requires being “smoothed … out, doubled … over, and read.” This is not information that has been relayed to Holmes by word of mouth; this is verifiable information printed in a newspaper. It is also striking that Holmes chooses to place a physical advertisement in the newspaper, rather than simply relying on word of mouth or some other use of his many contacts. There is something about the physical nature of the newspaper that lends legitimacy but also connects more strongly with individuals, garnering strong physical reactions, such as bringing people to Baker Street that otherwise would never come. “The Adventure of the Blue Carbuncle” thus integrates Reynolds’s chronotope into the Holmes stories, highlighting the importance of the newspapers’ physicality, as well as suggesting potential positive links between newspapers and crime.

In a similar way, the plot of “The Red-Headed League” links newspapers with the idea of crime (once again, a sort of extra-judicial, clandestine strain of crime), and relies on the legitimization of information that occurs in newspapers to set up illegal endeavors. As Jabez Wilson shares his story with Holmes and Watson, Watson notes that “The portly client puffed
out his chest with an appearance of some little pride and pulled a dirty and wrinkled newspaper from the inside pocket of his greatcoat” (207). The man carries with him “a dirty and wrinkled newspaper” that serves as the catalyst for the action of the story and also functions as the primary clue for Holmes and Watson as they go about seeking to solve the case. The advertisement in the newspaper reads:

**TO THE RED-HEADED LEAGUE:**

On account of the bequest of the late Ezekiah Hopkins, of Lebanon, Pennsylvania, U.S.A., there is now another vacancy open which entitles a member of the League to a salary of £4 a week for purely nominal services. All red-headed men who are sound in body and mind, and above the age of twenty-one years, are eligible.

Apply in person on Monday, at eleven o’clock, to Duncan Ross, at the offices of the League, 7 Pope’s Court, Fleet Street. (208)

This advertisement serves to mislead Wilson and sews the seeds for the deception that occurs throughout the text. The clandestine activities are occurring unbeknownst to the majority of the “red-headed league,” who simply function as pawns in the scheme. The information in the advertisement gains legitimacy from being in the newspaper, even though it seems slightly suspect. In this case the context, the newspaper, in which the advertisement is viewed lends it legitimacy that makes up for the suspicious nature of the information contained in the advertisement.

Newspapers also play a brief role in the set-up of “The Boscombe Valley Mystery,” in a similar way to “The Adventure of the Noble Bachelor.” The story opens with Watson noting that “We had the carriage to ourselves save for an immense litter of papers which Holmes had brought with him” (239). Holmes is gathering information for a case, linked closely enough to
crime that he knew where in the papers to look and does not need to rely on Watson for the information. Some ideas relating to low-brow and popular culture are evident, here, particularly in the language used to describe the papers, “an immense litter,” which does not convey the most positive of images. Holmes describes his efforts to Watson, stating that “‘The London press has not had very full accounts. I have just been looking through all the recent papers in order to master the particulars. It seems, from what I gather, to be one of those simple cases which are so extremely difficult’” (239). This conversation hearkens back to earlier conversations between Holmes and Watson about the nature of detection and more particularly, the practice of reporting on it. Holmes highlights the limitations of the newspaper reports: even though they are inextricably linked with crime, they do not tell the entire story. There is always something missing. However, Holmes is able to piece things together from the fragments presented, using them as the basis for his investigation, exploiting the relationship between crime and newspapers for the benefit of others.

Newspapers again play a role in “The Adventure of the Engineer’s Thumb,” where they provide a clue that is integral to understanding and solving the case. Watson describes the moment where the information is found, writing that “‘Then Sherlock Holmes pulled down from the shelf one of the ponderous commonplace books in which he placed his cuttings. ‘Here is an advertisement which will interest you,’ said he. ‘It appeared in all the papers about a year ago. Listen to this’” (338). Holmes keeps a collection of newspaper clippings, relating to crimes. The physicality of the newspapers is essential to his ability to keep the information logged. Holmes keeps any and all information that strikes him as relevant to crime, not only those that relate to his current cases, because the information could become valuable at any moment. Holmes continues, reading the advertisement, “‘Lost, on the 9th inst., Mr. Jeremiah Hayling, aged twenty-
six, a hydraulic engineer. Left his lodgings at ten o’clock at night, and has not been heard of since. Was dressed in----’ etc., etc. Ha! That represents the last time that the colonel needed to have his machine overhauled, I fancy’” (338). Holmes has found a clue that confirms his suspicions, using the links between the newspaper and crime to allow him to solve the crime.

Watson, in “A Case of Identity,” echoes some of the sentiments found in The Sign of Four that was examined at the start of this paper, saying, “‘The cases which come to light in the papers are, as a rule, bald enough, and vulgar enough. We have in our police reports realism pushed to its extreme limits, and yet the result is, it must be confessed, neither fascinating nor artistic’” (225). There is some level here of Watson working to distinguish his efforts as a writer from the vulgar trash of the newspapers (an interesting metatextual moment, which could be read as Conan Doyle providing a defense for his stories). Holmes is less convinced, remarking, “‘A certain selection and discretion must be used in producing a realistic effect…. This is wanting in the police report, where more stress is laid, perhaps, upon the platitudes of the magistrate than upon the details, which to an observer contain the vital essence of the whole matter. Depend upon it, there is nothing so unnatural as the commonplace’” (225). Holmes echoes sentiments he expressed in “The Boscombe Valley Mystery” in this passage and seems to put down Watson’s artistic efforts. This scene is particularly interesting when read with the exchange from The Sign of Four that I examined at the beginning of the paper. Describing Watson’s brochure ‘A Study in Scarlet,’ Holmes states to Watson, “‘Some facts should be suppressed, or, at least, a just sense of proportion should be observed in treating them. The only point in the case which deserved mention was the curious analytical reasoning from effects to causes, by which I succeeded in unraveling it’” (100). There’s a metatextual element to this quotation, with the fictional Holmes essentially critiquing all of Conan Doyle’s Sherlock Holmes stories, which are presented as
narratives composed by Watson. Watson, the defender of his romanticized stories that Holmes criticizes and calls sensational, can be viewed as writing the new “Mysteries of London.” He is working in the same tradition as Reynolds, and these exchanges between Watson and Holmes illustrate that Conan Doyle was aware of the low-brow roots of his famed detective and may have had some reticence about it.

IV. Conclusion

Understanding that Conan Doyle adapted Reynolds chronotope, with all of its features and consequences, changes a number of important things about the way we read these texts. First, it suggests a stronger relationship between the high-brow and low-brow cultures that are constantly in tension both within these books and within Victorian literature at large. Second, it pushes for a recognition of Reynolds’s importance to the development of detective fiction, while also suggesting that other low-brow writers such as Reynolds had a significant and yet unrealized role to play in the development of the genre. This is particularly important for the narrative concerning detective fiction, which typically ignores the low-brow in order to establish a stronger, more literary tradition.

It also allows us to think about why, perhaps, Reynolds’s low-brow text virtually disappears from this narrative while Sherlock Holmes lives on in the form of countless adaptations. By foregrounding newspapers in their texts, both writers examine the process of commodification that is ultimately responsible for the reiteration of texts in cultures and canons. Both explicitly address this commodification in their discussions of newspapers. But Reynolds’s work remains wholly inside the process of commodification represented by the newspapers. He

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3 The role of newspapers in Conan Doyle can still be examined in more depth, as I looked at events only from the first twelve of the fifty-six stories that have been written. Conan Doyle’s development of the chronotope throughout his body of work may provide fruitful ground for further research.
never separates *Mysteries* from the seedy, pulpy world in which it circulates. The text itself—lumbering and enormous, topping out at several thousand pages across many volumes—seems to embrace this commodification, being printed in newsprint and functioning as a commodity of its own. And inside the text, the papers commodify the same kinds of crime, information, and low-brow, popular culture that *Mysteries* itself commodifies. Throughout *Mysteries*, the papers make the entire cast of characters victims of their commodification. No one is safe from this process, which functions like a machine intent on producing and reproducing itself endlessly for “only one Penny.”

This is contrasted sharply with the Sherlock Holmes stories. Conan Doyle seems to self-consciously place himself, and his texts, apart from and above the process of commodification that plays such a central role in *Mysteries*. Conan Doyle uses newspapers in his fiction, publishes his stories in newspapers, and yet works to keep a critical distance from them, allowing himself (and, subsequently, his texts) to exist outside the realm of commodification with which they are aligned. As in “The Adventure of the Blue Carbuncle,” where Holmes sends a servant out to place advertisements in various newspapers in order to bring the presumed criminal to Baker Street, Holmes is able to exploit the commodification process, remaining separate from it. He uses the newspapers to bring the criminals to him, while he remains aloof and distant from the grimy world the newspapers commodify. Holmes’s commentary in “The Sign of Four” on Watson’s brochure, panning newspaper accounts as sensationalist and overly-emotional, also serves to highlight his difference from the individuals in *Mysteries* who are entirely at the mercy of the newspapers, even when they are publicizing false information. In *Mysteries*, the papers control people. In the Holmes stories, Holmes controls the papers.
This distance from the process of commodification, highlighted in Holmes’s ability to use that process for his own purposes of detection, allows readers to exist in the space of print commodification in which the stories reside without feeling commodified themselves. This is not possible in *Mysteries*. Given that Reynolds’s text exists completely inside the process of commodification, it would be difficult for readers not to feel consumed by it. Reading Reynolds thus places readers themselves within the process of commodification—a process defined, in *Mysteries*, by the very worst aspects of society. Perhaps this is part of the enduring appeal of Conan Doyle’s texts, which allow readers to remain apart from that society, while Reynolds’s magnum opus languishes in obscurity.
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