

USE OF SUPERNATURAL MYTHS IN SHERLOCK HOLMES

Sharma, Mitali
Research Scholar
English
University Of Rajasthan

Abstract: This study is undertaken to study the use of myths in Sherlock Holmes. This paper presents the idea of using supernatural myths to make the detective fiction more intriguing and fascinating for the readers to arouse a sense of thrill while reading and experiencing the crime in one's imagination.

Keywords: Sherlock Holmes, detective fiction, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, David Stuart Davies, Vampire, Hell Hound, myth, folklore.

Though Sherlock Holmes is a detective fiction, yet supernatural myths have become its part and many authors have used it. Sir Author Conan Doyle, the originator of Sherlock Holmes himself has had used some of these myths in his detective fiction, where he has only used science to solve the crime. There are almost hundred authors of Sherlock Holmes, but the topic I have chosen to talk about is the comparative study of Sherlock Holmes of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and David Stuart Davies. And today I am going to take the two famous folklore used by these two in two different periods of time, to make their work more interesting, mysterious, more spellbound, more unpredictable, more jumpable, and finally awesome and spicy.

Now, if we take Sir Arthur Conan Doyle first, he has had used the myth of 'hell hound' to encapture his reader in his novel 'The Hound of Baskerville'. Let's get the meaning of hound first and then we'll see how Sir Arthur Conan Doyle has had used this supernatural creature. ^[1]Hound is a synonym for 'dog', which is used by hunters to track or chase prey.

In Sir Arthur Conan Doyle novel one of the minor character, a farmer living near Baskerville Hall, during the time of 'Hugo Baskerville' called the thing following Hugo, ^[2]“‘hound of hell’”. This 'hound of hell' or 'hell hound', is a supernatural myth dog leashed by 'Devil' himself in folklore.

^[4]This supernatural, hellish dog occurs in mythologies around the world. The features provided to this mythological creature includes mangled black fur, glowing red eyes, super strength, and speed, ghostly and foul odour. Mostly the same features are provided by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle in his novel, ^[5]“there stood a foul thing, a great black beast, shaped like a hound yet larger than any hound...as it turned its blazing eyes and dripping jaws upon them...”. ^[6]It is also said that these dogs may have fire-based abilities and are often assigned to guard the entrances of the world of the dead, such as graveyards and burial grounds or undertake other duties related to the afterlife or the supernatural, such as hunting lost souls or guarding a supernatural treasure. Bearer of death is another name assigned for 'hellhound', which is used by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, actually as the name suggests, hellhounds was there to punish and collect the lost soul of 'Sir Hugo Baskerville', which torn Hugo's throat as his deeds were and become the reason of his death. ^[5] “And even as they looked, the thing tore the throat out of Hugo Baskerville, on which, as it turned his blazing eyes and... the three shrieked with fear and rode for dear life, still screaming across the moor.” It seems that Hugo Baskerville, drunken ordered his hounds to follow the maiden, whom he had captured without her or her parent's permission ran away for her life and safety from his grip when he was busy drinking and talking with his friends, and when he realised she had run away from him, he sent his hounds to follow her and like the same devil sent his hound to gather this corrupted soul and fiend named Sir Hugo Baskerville, to punish him for his wicked deeds and poor judgements, ^[2] “They had gone a mile or two... upon the moorlands,... And the man, as the story

goes, was so crazed with fear that he could scarce speak but at last, he said that he had indeed seen the unhappy maiden with the hounds upon her track."

'But I have... 'for Hugo Baskerville passed me upon his black mare, and there ran mute behind him such a hound of hell...'"

And now, after over a century away from the origin, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's concept and his everlasting character Sherlock Holmes is still used by many pastiches, here from those many pastiches I am taking the work, 'The Tangled Skein', by David Stuart Davies, the famous author and editor of Sherlock Holmes of present time. David Stuart Davies has had used the mythological creature 'Vampire and Dracula'.^[7] Vampire and Dracula are in the category of legendary creatures.^[8] They are the part of folklore, which are dead but now are un-dead, because of some curse upon them and sub-site themselves feeding on the life essence of other living beings. It is said that they often had a hypnotic charm,^[9] "There were no words, just a melodic, hypnotic humming..." And they can mesmerize other humans to do their work without knowing themselves what they are doing or offering these un-dead, unholy creatures,^[10] "As her gentle humming and hypnotic gaze began to captivate me, a sense of ease and relaxation swept over my body.... Without fully realising what I was doing, I moved..." which allow them to suck blood from their victim's jugular (throat) without any opposition, without even realising what is happening with them. It is said that they wore shrouds and were often described as bloated, colourless, pale,^[10] "Her face, the colour of pale ivory, held a wide cruel mouth, two lifeless eyes..."^[10] "She was dressed in a long, white, amorphous gown clung to her." It seems or it is shown that they are awfully handsome and beautiful, so the living being if wanted cannot resist their charm.

^[11] Although vampire entities have been mentioned in most cultures, the term was not popularised until the early 18th century.^[12] In modern society vampires are generally held to be a fictitious entity but, in earlier days, for people, it was the ignorance of the body's process of decomposition after death and to rationalise what they saw, they created a creature named vampire to satisfy their ignorance and to explain the mysterious deaths.^[13] The modern vampires were born in 1819 with the publication of 'The Vampyre' by John Polidori. However, it was Bram Stoker's novel 'Dracula' in 1897, which is remembered as the quintessential and provided the basis of the modern Vampire and their legacy. It is said in some lore's that if a vampire bit you and you die, after death you will come to life again but as an undead, like it is shown by David Stuart Davies in his novel, 'The Tangled Skein', where Cilia Lydgate has had become the vampire, after phantom lady sucked whole of her body blood and she died and was found by Portland police.^[14] "This was Cilia Lydgate back from dead."

Whatever lore it is, whatever country it is in, and whatever it says, but at the time it had become the sensation of the 18th century and at present also. As there are many fan clubs and most importantly this myth is loved by all age groups and gender. And to prove this point of mine, there are many TV series and movies produced and loved following the same concept of vampire and Dracula and other supernatural myths.

Work Citation

Primary Source

[2] Bantam Classic, Sherlock Holmes, The Complete Novel and Stories, Volume II, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle with an Introduction by Loren D Estleman, Chapter 2, page 12, edition September 2003

[5] Doyle, Sir Arthur Conan, Bantam Classic, Sherlock Holmes, The Complete Novel and Stories, Volume II, with an Introduction by Loren D Estleman, Hound of Baskerville, Chapter 2, page13, edition September 2003

[9] Davies, David Stuart, Tales of Mystery & The Supernatural, Sherlock Holmes: The Shadow of the Rat & The Tangled Skein, editiedon 2010, The Tangled Skein, Chapter 11 page 209

[10] Davies, David Stuart, Tales of Mystery & The Supernatural, Sherlock Holmes: The Shadow of the Rat & The Tangled Skein, editiedon 2010, The Tangled Skein, Chapter11 page 210

[14] Davies, David Stuart, Tales of Mystery & The Supernatural, Sherlock Holmes: The Shadow of the Rat & The Tangled Skein, David Stuart Davies, edition 2010, The Tangled Skein, Chapter11 page232

Secondary Sources

[1] "Hound Dog Breeds", Animal Planet, Discovery Communications, LLC, Retrieved 17 December 2013

[3] Jeffrey Shaw, Whitby Lore, and Legend, (1923)

- [4]Henderson, William (1879), Ch.9, Notes on the folklore of the Northern Counties of England and the borders (2nd edition), Folklore Society p.275
- [6]Carol, Rose's Giants, Monsters & Dragons, an Encyclopaedia of Folklore, Legends, and Myth, New York: Norton, 2000
- [7] "Vampire", Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary, 13-06-2006
- [8]Twilight Saga, the movie, directed by Catherine Hardwicke, 2008, The Vampire Diaries, TV series based on The Vampire Diaries by L.J.Smith, The CW network, Sep 10, 2009
- [11]Silver, A & Ursini, J (1997), The Vampire film: from Nosferatu to Interview with the Vampire page 22-23, New York: Limelight Edition
- [12]Lane, Nick "Borne to the Purple: the story of Porphyria Scientific American, archived from the original on 2017-01-26
- [13] Silver, A & Ursini, J (1997), The Vampire film: from Nosferatu to Interview with the Vampire page 37-38, New York: Limelight Edition

