

THE IMAGE OF SIR ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE IN J. BARNES NOVEL ARTHUR AND GEORGE

Alexey G. Melikhov

*Kazan Federal University
melikhov.ag@gmail.com*

Olga O. Nesmelova

Kazan Federal University

Oleg E. Osovskiy²

Kazan Federal University

Ogarev Mordovia State University

Abstract. The article analyzes the novel of the famous British author Julian Barnes *Arthur and George* dedicated to the life of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, the creator of Sherlock Holmes. The novel, being a work of fiction, is based on the real events from the biography of Sir Doyle. Using the method of comparative analysis, we compare the facts known about the life of Conan Doyle with their artistic interpretation presented by Julian Barnes in the novel in order to reveal the author's understanding of the historical figure and its relation to the depiction of history in general. In the process of the study it was established that even though the novel strictly adheres to historical facts on the level of the plot and the author even uses the historical documents, Barnes does not seek to recreate either the historical truth objectively or the historical personality close to what she most likely was. The novel is both a psychological prose on a historical subject and a metafiction, a statement about history, how the reality, the life of a person and their literary creativity are correlated, how they influence each other.

Keywords: J. Barnes, “Arthur and George”, A.C. Doyle, postmodernism, history, metafiction.

1. Introduction. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle is one of the more prominent figures in the literature of last centuries. His works had a great impact on the modern mass culture, the evolution of the detective fiction and an author of works that are widely read up to this day. The image of Sherlock Holmes a long time ago grew into something bigger than works of Conan Doyle and the literature itself. He became not only the symbol of the detective genre, but the symbol of rationality and justice and one of the national symbols of England. He spawned a lot of other iterations and inspired by him images in fiction, and some people in the police even used his methods while investigating cases.

However, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle himself had arguably as interesting life as his character despite being discussed and mentioned far less than Sherlock Holmes. The man who, for the most part, has achieved everything himself, a self-made man. A practicing doctor. A volunteer military doctor. A scientist. One of the leaders of the pacifist movement during the First World War. One of the most highly paid writers of his time, working in a variety of genres. A public figure. A person who helped to clear the name of two falsely accused people. An ardent adherent of spiritualism. Married twice. Twice he entered the Masonic Lodge and twice left it, and so on. It is no surprise that a person with such life inspired several works of fiction about him, be it literature, cinema or TV shows. In fact, it is more amusing that there are not too many fictional works about Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, he seems to be a good choice for a protagonist of a fiction. Two particularly interesting facts from the biography of K. Doyle are his devotion to spiritualism and participation in two resonant campaigns to clean the names of people who are unjustly convicted. Spiritualism is especially noteworthy, because for Doyle, it was not just a passing fad, but the most important thing – he was part of different spiritualism communities, constantly giving lectures, participating in campaigns against haters of spiritualism and even propagating the teachings in his books. It seems that Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, the creator of the unsurpassed image of the rationalist detective Sherlock Holmes, a doctor and an educated man, will oppose spiritualism – but by no means the reality decreed otherwise. The second (participation in the company in order to clean the names of people who are unfairly convicted) is interesting because the creator, perhaps the greatest detective in the history of literature, himself acts as a detective, in his life as if twisting reality and fiction.

One of the fiction books dedicated to the life and personality of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle is *Arthur & George* written by one of the most famous contemporary British novelists Julian Barnes in 2005. We will analyze the novel, compare it to some facts from biography of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and try understand the author's interpretation of the historical figure and his stance on history, literature and reality.

2. Methods. The methods used in this work are as follows:

- The primary method is comparative;
- Another method that was being used is the biographical method aimed at the analysis of the personality of the author, but it is used here mostly in connection with the comparative method [Jerebilo, 2013].

3. Results And Discussion. Julian Barnes stated that *Arthur & George* is “a contemporary novel set in the past”. It is evident from the language of the novel that is not stylized to fit the time when the events happen. One of the opening passages has a word combination “tourism of soul” which is not likely to be used on the turn of XIX and XX centuries, for example, using such vocabulary in the beginning sets expectations of the readers, shows that the novel would not be stylized. Another thing that proves it is the fact that the themes and problems of the novel mostly is not tied to the epoch. Themes of racism and your fate being in the hands of uninterested, ignorant people are strong in the novel, but they appear to be more universal and not being a commentary on the similarities between past and present.

Since it is not a stylization, but “a contemporary novel set in the past”, the line between past and present blurs, and the history blends with modern world.

Despite treating the age rather freely, the novel follows many biographical facts quite closely. Sometimes Barnes even resorted to the use of the document, and in a quite unusual, ironic way. Doyle discusses with his first wife Touie the interview he gave the newspaper, and his wife quotes it. The interview is real, and in the Russian edition of the novel is provided in the classical translation [J. Barnes, 2017, Caridad, Migdalia, et al. 2018].

He says... I am “a most charming woman”. And, on cue, she blushed, and hurriedly changed the subject. “Mr. How says, that “Dr. Doyle invariably conceives the end of his story first, and writes up to it”. You never told me that, Arthur [J. Barnes, 2010].

This abstract is very telling of the Barnes’ attitude towards the history, biography and document in fiction. He uses the historical document, but uses it not to illustrate what the document actually was about, but to provide a psychological inside into his relationship with his first wife that already starts to slowly fall apart. It makes the document less important at some level because now it has nothing to do with the creative process that was discussed in the interview, but at the same time, more important in a psychological sense because it shows small details in life that are signs discord.

Because of this, it can be perceived as an ironic commentary on the biographical fiction and history itself. The historical document is used not to illustrate the real creative process of Conan Doyle (which was the theme of quote), but to enrich a fictional (but possible) psychological narrative of his relationship with his first wife. History and facts become basis for a fictional narrative. Moreover, Barnes does not pay significant attention to the facts that interest many biographers of Conan Doyle, for example, his relationship with Joseph Bell and him fighting with other children in the slums of Edinburgh [M. Sims, 2018, Etcuban, J. O., & Pantinople, L. D. (2018)]. According to some biographies, Conan Doyle was persistent and prone to almost obsessions [Muhin], and these qualities of him are toned down in the novel. The book alternates between chapters about Arthur and chapters about George, and shifts focus to George and the detective Campbell, when a crime occurs for which George is unfairly condemned (killing cattle and sending letters with threats and insults). This alternation shows that the stories and lives of Arthur and George are equal and equally important. The lives of the famous writer and a falsely accused half-Indian solicitor are equal because they are both people. The fact that some chapters follow the actual detective not doing his work well is quite ironic since Conan Doyle has created Sherlock Holmes, and later in a way serves as a detective too.

Doyle’s enthusiasm for spiritualism is interpreted as, on the one hand, the result of a meeting with death, which he experienced as a child, and now again experienced the death of his father, whom he disliked, and his wife’s illness, and on the other hand, because he was endowed with everything – money, fame, family, position in society, but feels that he was born for more, and in the framework of the old world religions he is cramped. These searches lead him to spiritualism.

Until Touie’s illness announced itself, he had everything the world assumed necessary to make a man contented. And yet he could never quite shake off the feeling that all he had achieved was just a trivial and specious beginning; that he was made for something else. But what might that something else be? He returned to a study of the world’s religions, but could no more get into any of them than he could into a boy’s suit. <...> The demolition of antique faiths had been fundamental to human advancement; but now that those old buildings had been levelled, where was man to find shelter in this blasted landscape? How could anyone glibly decide that the history of what the species had for millennia agreed to call the soul was now at an end?[J. Barnes, 2010]

This abstract again brings up the themes of history and the psychological themes. According to Barnes, Conan Doyle starts investigating religions when he feels that what he had achieved in his life already is not enough, there has to be something more – but only when he achieved a lot, more than most people. This is certainly an interpretation, but it has some ground. There is an opinion that Doyle turned to spiritualism after the death of his son, but actually, he started to take interest in the subject two years before the death of his son. While we cannot say for sure how true this interpretation is, but it certainly goes in line with psychological approach of Barnes.

The theme of history is fascinating in this light too, especially knowing Doyle’s interest in the genre of historical novel. According to Barnes, Doyle finds something constant in the history, while admitting that destroying some of the things of past is necessary. But it is the notion that there is something constant, unchanging in the history is important to us – and to Barnes. Because the history, as it seems judging by *Arthur & George*, to him is just people with their lives and worries who does not change that much during different epochs, therefore it is not so important what age is now. What worries Arthur and George could also worry people of many different times, and it can explain the not stylized language of the novel.

The real Arthur Conan Doyle considered the works about Sherlock Holmes to be an “easy reading”, entertainment in the intervals between historical novels that has actual importance. This led to the fact that Doyle considered it necessary to kill Sherlock Holmes – but under pressure from the public and publishers (according to different versions) later revived him. In his memoirs he does not even write much about his creativity at all [Doyle, 2001]. According to Barnes’s novel, Conan Doyle, in addition to this, felt some kind of jealousy towards the character he had created, which he never considered “serious”. That people are not as interested in him and his personal tragedies and experiences as in the fictional character he created. This is evident from this scene, for example:

The London newspapers had contained no obituaries of Charles Doyle, but were full of protest and dismay at the death of a non-existent consulting detective whose popularity had begun to embarrass and even disgust his creator.

It seemed to Arthur that the world was running mad: his father was fresh in the ground, and his wife condemned, but young City men were apparently tying crepe bands to their hats in mourning for Mr. Sherlock Holmes [J. Barnes, 2010, p. 88]. In this light, the fact that he took up the cause of George one can perceive as a challenge to his hero prove that he himself is not worse than him (even before he refused all the requests to help), and at the same time to do something worthwhile, important in life. But another, more psychological explanation seems even more probable in the context of the novel. His conscience tormented him because a few years before his wife's death he had an affair with another woman, younger than him, and after the death of his wife, he is ready to run away to her. He feels guilt even though he did not cheat on his wife physically. Sir A.K. Doyle suffered from spirit downfall after the death of his wife Touie, at the same time experiencing the bitterness of loss and guilt. Help to an unfairly condemned at the same time gives an opportunity to distract from gloomy thoughts, and helps to calm the feeling of guilt.

It is important to note that at some point in the book Doyle accepts on some level the overwhelming existence of Sherlock Holmes and the fact that his shadow will always loom over him and even proud of his character becoming real, but is still somehow irritated at it at times and even confused, especially by the fact that people send Sherlock Holmes letters. In the work of Barnes, Arthur Conan Doyle of an outstanding, somewhat mysterious historical figure turns into an ordinary person. Not “small”, but ordinary, full of contradictions and worries. A man who at the same time is proud of the fact that the hero he created is alive, and the shadow that eternally hangs over him annoys him.

4. **Conclusions.** To sum up, in paper we compared the facts from the biography of Arthur Conan Doyle with their representation in the novel *Arthur & George* and analyzed abstracts from the novel in order to analyze the image of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle in the book and understand the author's perception of the historical figure and his attitude towards the history. Our conclusions are provided further.

5. **Conclusions.** The novel is an interpretation of a historical figure, the author does not set himself the goal of recreating a person as he most likely was. This is a fantasy, albeit in a psychological vein. As a result, a kind of metafiction that combines the facts about Doyle's personality, the characteristics of his creativity and the author's own vision, statements about the relationship between reality and creativity. This can not be called a non-fiction, because of the liberty of interpreting the biography, can not be called historical novels because of the underlined modernity, but they are not a full-fledged “fiction” because of a certain binding to reality. The book weaves together reality, fiction of other people and author's fiction, author's views on life, creating a fascinating picture. Barnes shows us that the history itself is just people who does not change much, so the history is always the same, and it does not matter much what epoch is now, and therefore history can be used for building narratives about universal values not changing through the history (psychology, for example). It is weirdly coincides in the context of the novel with the process of creating Sherlock Holmes, a fictional character that was created by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, and the fictional narrative impacted his life and became blended with the reality, therefore it can be named “metafiction.”, which is typical for postmodernism [K. Molokov, 2017]. However, it is not entirely “Impulse of total denial, characteristic for post-modern” [Frolov, 2016], not “post-modernistic schizophrenic discourse” [T. Breeva, 2014]. Barnes partially deconstructs the biographical novel and the notion of history, but finds something important, something steady in them – the psychology of people, their worries and experiences. We would not go as far as calling it “post-postmodern” [A. Bobileva, 2017], but would like to note this dissimilarity.

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