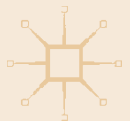




The Gestalt
Shift in Conan
Doyle's Sherlock
Holmes Stories

MICHAEL J. CROWE



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Sherlock Holmes Stories

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*This book is dedicated to two wonderful friends,
both Sherlockians:
Denis P. Burke
and
Frederick J. Crosson (1926–2009)*

PREFACE

Numerous readers view Arthur Conan Doyle as the most skillful creator of detective fiction who ever put pen to paper. Doyle's four novels and fifty-six short stories featuring Sherlock Holmes are available in numerous languages, and his famous characters appear in dozens of plays and hundreds of films and television shows. Moreover, the studies of these stories number in the thousands. Hundreds of scholars and authors have sought the sources of Doyle's highly successful Sherlockian writings and investigated how Doyle achieved this extraordinary level of success. Such information makes one hesitant to propose a new analysis of Doyle's skills. Such, however, is the goal of this book, which draws on insights that emerged mainly in the latter half of the twentieth century in an area far from traditional literary studies. My book draws on a book published in 1962 by University of Chicago Press in an obscure series of volumes designed to be read mainly by philosophers and historians of science. In fact, the reaction to and interest in the book was extraordinary. As we shall later see in detail, one source of this book was ideas developed by Ludwig Wittgenstein, a German philosopher teaching in England, who himself dealt with ideas studied by perceptual psychologists. Another source was studies done by historians of science investigating the nature of scientific change; for example, the adoption of the Copernican theory. The author of this relatively short volume was Thomas Kuhn, who titled it *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. Gradually Kuhn's book caught on. As of 2010, sales reached over 1.4 million copies. Many scholars believe it is the most influential book on the nature of scientific development published in the last half of the twentieth century. Moreover, scholars began applying Kuhn's

approach to nearly every area of intellectual inquiry. One exception has been literature. My goal in this book is to suggest that Kuhn's ideas may significantly illuminate the study of Doyle's Sherlockian stories. My chief credential for attempting this is that for over four decades while teaching at the University of Notre Dame, I taught courses and published a number of books and essays on the development of astronomy, physics, and mathematics, many of which drew on Kuhn's writings.

Potential readers of this book may feel more confident that it is worth their time when I report on the reaction to it that came from a highly respected scholar who seemed to me to be the ideal judge of whether my thesis is plausible. This was not a personal friend; rather, what led me to contact him was that he is a highly respected scientist and historian of science as well as an active Sherlockian. This is Dr. Bradley Schaefer, Distinguished Professor at Louisiana State University and the author of a widely republished and now classic article on Sherlock Holmes and astronomy. A month after receiving my request and manuscript, he sent me a long email that began:

I read your book fast, because it was a fun read. As a life-long Sherlockian, the whole discussion was dear to my heart. Your basic thesis is completely new, both within the Sherlockian literature, and within the literature about detective stories. (And coming up with anything new under the Sun within the Sherlockian literature is hard and rare.) I am convinced by your basic thesis. And I can see applications going past the Sherlockian stories.

Near the end of the letter, he added:

I expect that your book will be comparable in sales to the best of the secondary Sherlockian literature. You are offering a completely new idea and of broad application, so I expect that every Sherlockian will want a copy. I don't know numbers, but this is not a small market.

My hope is that his endorsement will give readers confidence that my thesis merits their attention.

Various persons at the University of Notre Dame also contributed to the composition of this book. Notre Dame recognizes that emeritus faculty can still contribute to scholarship by supplying an office and some support for those who continue to wish to contribute. Moreover, various individuals at Notre Dame have been helpful in significant ways. Among

these are Thomas Stapleford, Chair of the Program of Liberal Studies, my office mate Rev. Nicholas Ayo, C.S.C., and Denise Massa, Curator at Notre Dame's Visual Resource Center, who prepared most of the illustrations. Dr. Daniel Johnson, who is Notre Dame Digital Humanities Librarian and also teaches in the English Department, contributed significantly to locating publications relevant to my project. Elizabeth Sain very carefully indexed this volume.

For the last six years, I have co-taught a course on Sherlock Holmes at Forever Learning Institute, a local senior center, with Denis Burke, a retired attorney, who has been wonderfully supportive of my efforts to teach these materials. So has my wife, Dr. Marian Crowe, whose doctorate is in English and who has frequently supplied highly useful insights. Allie Troyanos and Rachel Jacobe of Palgrave Macmillan skillfully and graciously guided my efforts to put my manuscript into final form.

Notre Dame, IN

Michael J. Crowe

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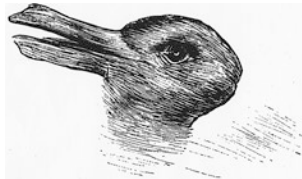


CHAPTER 1

Introduction

GOAL OF THIS BOOK

What makes the Sherlock Holmes stories so dramatic and engaging? This book offers an explanation of these effects in terms of the idea of a Gestalt shift or switch.¹ Gestalt is a German word meaning form or shape or configuration. A Gestalt shift happens when one first experiences an image or entity in one way and then in a quite different way. A famous example of such a shift is the duck/rabbit Gestalt shift.²



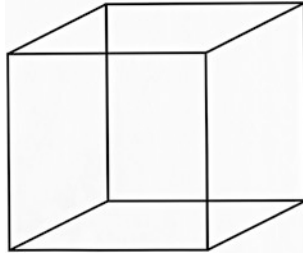
¹In October 2014, I did a Google search for “Gestalt Shift” and “Gestalt Switch.” The former name got 8640 hits, whereas “Gestalt Switch” produced 17,700 hits. In this book, I prefer the term shift.

²The duck-rabbit pair first appeared in a German humor magazine *Fliegende Blätter* (October 23, 1892), 147.

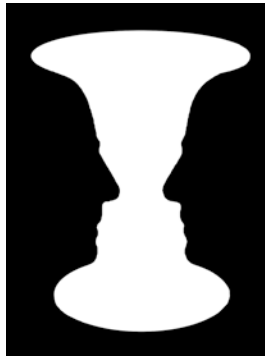
In looking at this image, one sometimes sees it as a rabbit, but then it turns into a duck. This remarkable ambiguity makes Gestalts and Gestalt shifts important in a number of ways, as we shall see. The word Gestalt is increasingly common in English. If one sees a silhouette composed of a human head with a deerstalker hat atop it and a pipe hanging from the mouth area, one readily recognizes it as a “Holmes Gestalt.” Hundreds, perhaps thousands, of copies of this Gestalt adorn the Baker Street tube stop in London.

PART ONE: GESTALT FIGURES AND GESTALT SHIFTS

We shall begin by examining a few Gestalt figures and Gestalt shifts. The first diagram represents a Necker Cube.



Is it a box pointing up and to the right or a box pointing down and to the left? Note that one cannot see both perspectives simultaneously. Or possibly you see twelve lines on a planar surface. Similarly, in the Rubin Vase, you can see either two faces or a chalice, but not both simultaneously).³



Typically, in Gestalts, the two or more sights are quite different; for example, a chalice is very different from two faces. Note that although it may take some time to see what is represented in a Gestalt diagram, one

³Sometimes dated as created in 1915, it actually appeared much earlier. See “Rubin Did Not Discover the Rubin Vase” on the internet at <http://figuresambigues.free.fr/ArticlesImage/rubin1.html#axzz5CcbaTVFn>. Viewed April 14, 2018.

typically sees it suddenly—and it may disappear suddenly. Discussions of the Rubin Vase frequently distinguish between the ground and the figure. In this case, the figure consists of the two faces, whereas the dark area is the ground. What is meant by a Gestalt shift is the shift between the two or more images seen on the page.

My thesis is that in a large number of Arthur Conan Doyle's sixty Sherlock Holmes stories one can detect one or more patterns that correspond to a Gestalt shift. Moreover, I will claim that the dramatic character of many of these stories results from the reader having an experience comparable to what one experiences in a Gestalt shift. I shall also claim that analyzing the stories in this manner provides a deeper understanding of their dramatic structure and effect. I do not claim that Doyle was aware of Gestalt figures or Gestalt shifts, at least in the ways that contemporary psychologists are aware of them.

Verbal Gestalt Shifts

The Gestalt experience or Gestalt shift can also occur in regard to verbal expressions, including jokes. Some examples: Think of the story of the panda that walked into a bar, ate his lunch, pulled out a gun, began shooting, and then left. When confronted by the police, the panda explained that he was just doing what the encyclopedia article on pandas directed. It said that a "Panda eats shoots and leaves."⁴ Lowly commas are important, and can save lives: compare "Let's eat, grandma" with "Let's eat grandma." These sentences are very similar; their meanings are very different. Or consider these three headlines: "Teacher Strikes Idle Students," or "British Left Waffles on Falkland Islands," or "The President Wins on Budget, but More Lies Ahead." Or think of the story of the missionary who was very pleased by the natives wanting to have him for dinner, until he remembered they were cannibals. Note that as you go back and forth between the two readings, nouns may turn into verbs and vice versa.

Admittedly, these examples are all quite short. Visual Gestalts take up more space. Are larger verbal Gestalt shifts possible? A student once delighted me by presenting a paper similar to what follows. Hint: You do not need to know a word of Greek to read the following selection; you do, however, need to be familiar with the Greek alphabet and be acquainted with Sherlockian writings. Can you determine what the next paragraph says?

⁴This story is central to a best-selling book by Lynne Truss, *Eats, Shoots & Leaves: The Zero Tolerance Approach to Punctuation* (New York: Gotham Books, 2006).

Ἰν τῆς ψεαρ 1878 Ἰ τοοκ μψ δεγρεε οφ Δοχτορ οφ Μεδιχινε οφ τῆς Ὑνιπερσιτυ οφ Λουδον, ανδ προχεεδεδ το Νετλεψ το γο τηρουγη τῆς χουρσε πρεσχιριβεδ φορ συργεουσ ιν τῆς αρμψ. Ηαπινγ χομπλετεδ μψ στυδιεσ τηρεε, Ἰ ωασ δυλψ ατταχηεδ το τῆς Φιφτη Νορτηυμβεργλαυδ Φυσιλιερσ ασ Ασσισταυτ Συργεον. Τῆ ρεγιμευτ ωασ στατιονεδ ιν Ἰνδια ατ τῆς τιμε, ανδ βεφορε Ἰ χουλδφοιυ ιτ, τῆς σεχουδ Αφγηαν ωαρ ηαδ βροκευ ουτ. Ου λαυδιγ ατ Βομβαψ, Ἰ λεαρνεδ τηατ μψ χορπσ ηαδ αδπαυαχεδ τηρουγη τῆς πασσεσ, ανδ ωασ αλρεαδψ δεεπ ιν τῆς ενεμψΞσ χουυτρψ. Ἰ φολλοωεδ, ηοωεπερ, ωιτη μαυψ οτηερ οφφιχηερσ ωηο ωερε ιν τῆς σαμε σιτυατιον ασ μψσελφ, ανδ συχχεεδεδ ιν ρεαχηινγ Χαιδαηαρ ιν σαφετψ, ωηερε Ἰ φουυδ μψ ρεγιμευτ, ανδ ατ ουχε εντερεδ υπον μψ νεω δυτιεσ.

If you have succeeded in reading this paragraph, it seems probable that you puzzled over it for a period, possibly looked at a table matching up Greek and English letters, and then suddenly saw it as the opening lines of Doyle's *A Study in Scarlet*. Moreover, having managed this paragraph, you are able to supply the next paragraph, and hundreds more paragraphs if you wish. If still puzzled, see the information in the footnote that follows this sentence.⁵

More on Verbal Gestalt Shifts⁶

Cambridge University scholars have developed some new results on verbal Gestalts. Try reading the following passage:

7H15 M3554G3 53RV35 7O PR0V3 H0W 0UR M1ND5 C4N D0
4M4Z1NG 7H1NG5! 1MPR3551V3 7H1NG5! 1N 7H3 B3G1NN1NG17
WA5 H4RD BU7 N0W, 0N 7H15 L1N3 Y0UR M1ND1S R34D1NG
174U70M471C4LLY W17H0U7 3V3N 7H1NK1NG 4B0U7 17.⁷

This may explain your success or absence thereof in reading verbal Gestalts such as the one below.

⁵To produce this paragraph, I went to an electronic copy of the first Sherlock Holmes story, *A Study in Scarlet*, copied it onto my computer, pasted it into this document, and converted the font to Symbol font. With this clue, you could within five minutes produce an entire book and if you learned to read Greek letters, even if you did not know a single Greek word, you could read the entire volume. Realizing that this is simply the opening paragraph of Arthur Conan Doyle's *A Study in Scarlet* would seem to qualify as a quite extended verbal Gestalt shift.

⁶I wish to thank Denis Burke for introducing me to this form of Gestalt shift.

⁷Googling this collection of letters will produce a number of discussions of such configurations.

it dseno't mtaetr in what oerdr the ltteres in a word are, the olny iproamtnt tihng is that the frsit and last ltteer be in the rghit pclae. The rset can be a taotl mses and you can still raed it whotuit a pboerlm. This is bcuseae the huamn mnid deos not raed ervey lteter by istlef, but the word as a wlohe. Azanmig huh? Yach and I awlyas tghuhot spleling was ipmorantt!

Note the following:

- We do not always see what is really there.
- As in the preceding examples, the BRAIN corrects for errors.
- We want things to fit together in a recognized pattern.
- We see what we think we should see.⁸

Classes of Gestalt Shifts

Many kinds of Gestalt shifts exist. Considering some of these will both illustrate what constitutes a Gestalt shift and suggest how varied, even in form, Gestalt shifts can be.

Similarly, one can imagine a detective story that presents readers with an apparently chaotic array of clues but eventually the detective puts them in a comprehensible order. We can recognize a visual version of this pattern by considering the Dalmatian diagram (Fig. 1.1).



Fig. 1.1 Dalmatian Gestalt.

⁸For more information on this thought pattern, Google “7H15 M3554G3 53RV35 7O PROV3 HOW OUR MIND5.”

At first it appears as chaos, but then one detects the image of a Dalmatian.

Examples of the Bipolar Shift

Bipolar shifts are very common. In these cases, one moves from one image to another. A person cannot recognize two distinct images simultaneously. The Rubin Vase Gestalt shown earlier is of this type. We can see either a chalice or two people face to face. Note that we cannot simultaneously see both the chalice and the two faces. What we see are two wholes: One sees the chalice, but then two faces. One does not see a face on the left, and half a chalice on the right.

Another example of a bipolar Gestalt shift emerges from the next image, which has been named the Boring Figure⁹ because it was analyzed in 1930 by the prominent psychologist Edwin G. Boring of Harvard (Fig. 1.2).



Fig. 1.2 Boring Figure.

⁹See Morton Hunt, *The Story of Psychology* (New York: Doubleday, 1993), 447. Edwin G. Boring, "A New Ambiguous Figure," *American Journal of Psychology*, 42 (1930), 444–445. Boring's figure can be traced back to 1915 when W. E. Hill published it in *Punch*.

Persons sometimes see a young woman looking away; then she exits and the person sees an older lady, chin downward, and looking parallel to the plane of the paper. A small circle serves as the left ear of the young woman, whereas it is the left eye of the other woman. What appears as a necklace for the younger woman is the mouth of the more senior woman. It is not vital that the reader succeed in seeing all these Gestalts as multifaceted, but if one is to follow the claims later to be made, it is important to have struggled and sometimes succeeded at seeing these images as Gestalts.

The duck/rabbit shift, which dates back to the nineteenth century, has become well known not only to psychologists but also to philosophers. As will be shown later, it has had a long history and a surprisingly large influence. One can see either a duck looking to the left or a rabbit looking to the right.¹⁴ Note that once you see the rabbit, you will probably notice the rabbit's mouth, which is nearly invisible when you are examining the duck.

Triple and Multiform Shifts

The Necker Cube (see p. 3) is an ideal image to show that it is possible to have three or more images emerge even from a relatively simple image. Note that in viewing this cube one can see it in any one of three (or more) distinct ways. One can see it either as a cube pointing up and to the top right or as a cube pointing down and to the left or as a set of twelve lines in a plane. Note also that one cannot simultaneously see it as more than one figure.

Multiple Gestalts are not impossible. A good example is a painting created in 1990 by the artist Octavio Ocampo. The name of the painting is *La Familia del General* (The General's Family), this name being appropriate because all his family members appear in the painting but hidden in the face of the General and elsewhere, as one can see from examining the portrait.¹⁰ One might ask whether Ocampo created this technique. An examination of a painting by Johann Michael Voltz (1784–1858) of the Emperor Napoleon named *Triumph des Jahres* suggests that this is far from correct. Voltz's painting is an excellent candidate for being a source of Ocampo's artistry.¹¹ This suggests that the history of the idea of a Gestalt extends well into the past, although the term Gestalt shift is far more modern.

¹⁰To inspect the portrait, search Google images for Ocampo's "La Familia del General."

¹¹To inspect Voltz's painting, search Google images for Johann Voltz's *Triumph des Jahres*.

Some Comments on Gestalt Shifts

If you like engaging with Gestalt shifts, you may want to visit one of my all-time favorite Gestalts, which is available on the internet.¹² If you wish to see more Gestalt shifts, insert the search term “Gestalt shift” or “Gestalt switch” into Google after clicking on the Images button on the Google web page. When I just tried this, Google reported that it could provide about 129,000 images in this category.

Do some novels contain Gestalt shifts? A very interesting candidate is Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice*. Think of the scene where Elizabeth Bennett goes through a transformation in her view of Fitzwilliam Darcy while visiting his estate called Pemberley.¹³

The Necessary and Sufficient Conditions Characteristic for a Gestalt Shift

Four characteristics must be present in a Gestalt shift. The Gestalts must be **distinct** and the change must be **rapid**, **unexpected**, and **global**. The Gestalt images must be distinct from each other. Associated with distinctiveness is the idea of contrast. Doyle as a writer was passionately interested in creating contrasts. His “Man with the Twisted Lip” story centers on the contrast between a deformed beggar, Hugh Boone, barely surviving on coins dropped into his cup by persons passing him on London streets and a successful businessman, Neville St. Clair, whom, it is believed, the beggar has murdered. The two characters are strikingly distinct from each other. The Gestalt shift in “Twisted Lip” occurs when Holmes applies some soap and water to the jailed beggar; then the beggar disappears and St. Clair appears. The associations of the beggar and businessman we would assume must be very different. But in fact a man suspected of being a capital murderer turns out to be a successful petty criminal, whose only crime is deceitful begging. The magnitude of a shift measures how impressive it is: a duck changing to rabbit is impressive; into a dinosaur is awesome.

¹² See http://www.liveleak.com/view?i=829_1360099797. This Gestalt is called the Speed Painter.

¹³ Around 2002, when I was teaching Thomas Kuhn’s *Structure of Scientific Revolutions* in an undergraduate class, a very gifted student, Kate Diaz, did a paper using Kuhnian ideas to analyze Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice*. I admired the paper and asked her to give me a copy. After this book was well along, I found her paper in my files and still believe she makes an interesting and plausible analysis. Kate is now a prominent physician, Kate Diaz Vickery.

Regarding **rapidity**, consider the “Boring Figure” Gestalt. We see the young woman disappear rapidly and the elderly woman appear quickly. It is true that it may take a long time to see the elderly woman, but finally she jumps onto the stage. The two images are quite distinct from each other. An ear becomes an eye. The women are looking in different directions. One does not expect that in the blink of an eye, a person in a picture will age by fifty years. And the associations of each woman are scarcely less different; one may be your wife; the other your mother-in-law. One does not expect a picture to shift in such a major fashion. One is surprised by the change. Magicians pull rabbits out of hats, whereas Gestalt psychologists within a few seconds turn a rabbit into a duck. We witness Holmes within a matter of seconds turn a deformed beggar suspected of murder into a successful businessman. The change must be of the form that the first image disappears and another view appears. It may take some work to get back to the first. Moreover, we have to be told to look for the young woman and to be told how to do this.

Just as we do not expect a rabbit to turn into duck, we believe it is **unexpected** that a beggar will turn into a businessman or that a murdered man will suddenly appear on the scene. It is also unexpected that an arch criminal will turn within seconds into a courageous guardian of the good, but Doyle delivers both these unexpected changes in his *The Valley of Fear*.

Global changes also occur within Holmes stories. Suddenly a pillar of the community turns into an arch criminal. Holmes reveals that a brilliant mathematics professor is the “organizer of half that is evil [in London] and all that is undetected.”¹⁴ The worlds of the beggar and businessman are very different. The former is a loner, living in a slum neighborhood; the latter is a married man with children living in an attractive house. The reformed beggar will disappear from the lives of those who drop coins into his cup. The businessman must now find employment in the business world and must dress for and act according to this role. Possibly the term global is too strong a word; I have chosen it to stress how extensive and pervasive the changes can be that result from a Gestalt shift. It is characteristic of a Gestalt shift that the reader experiences an “Aha!” feeling. The source of this feeling may be the major difference between the two images. Or perhaps it is the suddenness of the change or possibly the magnitude of the change.

One should not assume that the story is essentially over at the Gestalt shift point. Holmes typically must still find evidence that will satisfy authorities as to who has or will commit the crime or even that a crime can

¹⁴ Arthur Conan Doyle, *The Complete Sherlock Holmes* (New York: Doubleday, 1953), II, 544.

or will occur. Holmes may also need to discover how to capture or convict the criminal. It is true that in *A Study in Scarlet* only moments separate the time when Holmes reveals the name of the criminal as well as his methods and motives, and the time at which Holmes captures the criminal, but this is an exception, a remarkable exception, which Doyle could not duplicate in *The Hound of the Baskervilles*.

The term global has the advantage that it suggests one very striking feature that very frequently occurs in stories that contain Gestalt shifts. Words and sentences may change their meaning when a new Gestalt comes into view. For example, the reader may come to see that a remark made by Holmes early in a story should be understood as said with ironic overtones. Numerous examples of this will be presented in the commentaries on the stories. One example: on a first reading of the “The Crooked Man” story, one identifies the crooked man as Henry Wood; a more careful reading leads one to see that the person meant is Barclay.

Must all four characteristics be present? Certainly not in the same degree. Suddenness is a major source of dramatic effect and is closely associated with surprise. We do not experience as a Gestalt shift the gradual emergence of a wall to which workers daily add bricks. The year-by-year growth of a person’s net worth—this is not stuff for the dramatist. The chief point made by describing a change as a Gestalt shift is that it is no ordinary change; it is an extraordinary change.

Having found that it is not always easy to recall these four criteria for Gestalt shifts, I devised a method of recalling them; it is to recall the word DRUG, which provides the first letter of each criterion: DistinctRapidUnexpectedGlobal.

Measuring a Gestalt Shift: Category Mistakes

Not all Gestalt shifts are equally impressive. Nor are all tricks magicians perform. A magician who can turn a duck into a dog will get fewer bookings than a conjuror who can turn a dog into a dinosaur. One measure of a conjuror’s competence is the magnitude of the change produced. Another measure is the difference between the object first presented and the object replacing it on stage. We are impressed when the author of a detective story has Joe—a character whom the reader rules out as killer of the heroine—turn out to be the culprit. An especially interesting example of this is what the philosopher Gilbert Ryle in his *Concepts of Mind* (1949)

described as a “category mistake.”¹⁵ These are mistakes when one assumes that the answer to a question must be in a specific category, failing to see that there are perfectly good answers not in this category. An excellent example of this occurs in Doyle’s “The Adventure of Silver Blaze,” where it turns out that the culprit in the killing of the trainer was not a murderer; rather it was the horse, Silver Blaze, acting in self-defense. It does not seem possible to supply a metric to measure Gestalt shifts, but it is worth noting that such shifts are not all equally impressive.

The Gestalt Shift Point

In many Holmes stories, it is possible to locate what can be called a Gestalt shift point or Gestalt shift moment. We shall see cases where one can point to a sentence or a few lines after which the story dramatically changes. Holmes may announce: “I have solved this case.” Of course, it may take some time for Watson and the rest of us to recognize that Holmes is right, but the change begins with these words. The Gestalt shift point for Holmes occurs rapidly in *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, but others need time to be convinced that Holmes’s view is correct. On the other hand, in *A Study in Scarlet* developments rapidly follow Holmes’s announcement which developments convince his associates of the correctness of his claims.

Did Conan Doyle Attain the Idea of a Gestalt Shift?

Also an Early Account of a Gestalt Shift Experience

Is there evidence that Doyle had the concept of a Gestalt shift? Did anyone in Doyle’s day describe such an experience?

Historians of psychology typically trace the origins of Gestalt psychology to the year 1912, with the candidates as founders including Christian von Ehrenfels (1859–1932), [Wolfgang Köhler](#) (1887–1967), [Max Wertheimer](#) (1880–1943), and [Kurt Koffka](#) (1886–1941), by which time Doyle had written most of his Holmes stories. I can find no evidence that Doyle used the term Gestalt or that he read any of these authors. Moreover, although some figures now labeled Gestalt images were known even in the nineteenth century, they were not described as Gestalt figures. On the other hand, Doyle spent some time in Vienna and Paris in 1891–1892 studying ophthalmology, which indicates his strong interest in perception.

¹⁵ See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Category_mistake. Viewed January 25, 2015.

Everything considered, I have concluded that there is no direct evidence that Doyle attained the concept of a Gestalt shift.

In understanding the notion of a Gestalt shift it is important to examine carefully the process of a Gestalt shift occurring. The Gestalts discussed earlier in the book should provide readers some sense of this complex experience in which an image, at first invisible, becomes visible, typically only after some effort is made to perceive it. It will be productive to provide one detailed early account of such a Gestalt shift. This is particularly interesting because the author of the account was none other than Arthur Conan Doyle and the account appears in perhaps the most famous of his Holmes stories, *The Hound of the Baskervilles* (1901–1902). This account discusses a Gestalt shift experienced by both Holmes and Watson. Up to this point in the story, Doyle has portrayed Stapleton as a bookish butterfly fancier who roams the moors and is friendly to Henry Baskerville. During his visit to Baskerville Hall, Holmes, while meeting with Watson, Baskerville, and Lestrade, becomes absorbed in looking at portraits of the Baskerville ancestors. Although this hardly seems relevant to the case, it turns out that it transforms Holmes's view of the situation. My suggestion is that Holmes undergoes a Gestalt shift and discusses his experience with Watson. Holmes asks about various aspects of the portraits, but focuses especially on one (Fig. 1.3):



Fig. 1.3 “Good heavens!” I cried in amazement.

“And this Cavalier opposite to me—the one with the black velvet and the lace?”

“Ah, you have a right to know about him. That is the cause of all the mischief, the wicked Hugo, who started the Hound of the Baskervilles. We’re not likely to forget him.”

I gazed with interest and some surprise upon the portrait. “Dear me!” said Holmes, “he seems a quiet, meek-mannered man enough, but I dare say that there was a lurking devil in his eyes. I had pictured him as a more robust and ruffianly person.”

“There’s no doubt about the authenticity, for the name and the date, 1647, are on the back of the canvas.”

Holmes said little more, but the picture of the old roysterer seemed to have a fascination for him, and his eyes were continually fixed upon it during supper. It was not until later, when Sir Henry had gone to his room, that I was able to follow the trend of his thoughts. He led me back into the banqueting-hall, his bedroom candle in his hand, and he held it up against the time-stained portrait on the wall.

“Do you see anything there?”

I looked at the broad plumed hat, the curling love-locks, the white lace collar, and the straight, severe face which was framed between them. It was not a brutal countenance, but it was prim, hard, and stern, with a firm-set, thin-lipped mouth, and a coldly intolerant eye.

“Is it like anyone you know?”

“There is something of Sir Henry about the jaw.”

“Just a suggestion, perhaps. But wait an instant!” He stood upon a chair, and, holding up the light in his left hand, he curved his right arm over the broad hat and round the long ringlets.

“Good heavens!” I cried in amazement. The face of Stapleton had sprung out of the canvas.

“Ha, you see it now. My eyes have been trained to examine faces and not their trimmings. It is the first quality of a criminal investigator that he should see through a disguise.”

“But this is marvellous. It might be his portrait.”

“Yes, it is an interesting instance of a throwback, which appears to be both physical and spiritual. A study of family portraits is enough to convert a man to the doctrine of reincarnation. The fellow is a Baskerville—that is evident.”

“With designs upon the succession.”

“Exactly. This chance of the picture has supplied us with one of our most obvious missing links. We have him, Watson, we have him, and I dare swear that before tomorrow night he will be fluttering in our net as helpless as one of his own butterflies. A pin, a cork, and a card, and we add him to the Baker Street collection!”