

Principles of Literary Study

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March 23, 2026. Plot: Conan Doyle.

Shahid: inconclusive closing remarks

- ▶ *Call Me Ishmael Tonight* as a volume
 - ▶ it has motifs, clusters, symmetries
 - ▶ it does *not* have a consistent narrative
 - ▶ the ghazal is not narrative
 - ▶ the book is a sequence of poems composed over time
 - ▶ each of Shahid's ghazals are consistently inconsistent
 - ▶ and anyway, "even as I add, / I decompose"
 - ▶ (Shahid / Ramanujan: Indic affinities? Indo-American?)
- ▶ "Tonight": variations on unfaithfulness
 - ▶ mutable meaning of deictics "you," "I," "tonight"
 - ▶ faithlessness shared by beloved, speaker...and God
 - ▶ rejection/exile transvalued as freedom from constraint
 - ▶ ...but who wants to be rejected forever?

review: principles again

1. How texts are *composed* out of words or other signs matters.
2. The circumstances of the text's *production* matter.
3. The circumstances of the text's *circulation and use* matter.
4. The text's *relationships to other texts* matter.

principle 5: what is literature?

- ▶ Literature is writing that is socially and culturally marked as distinctive.
 - ▶ What is marked changes.
 - ▶ How the distinction is marked changes.
 - ▶ The significance of the distinction changes.

universal	literature
(language)	(writing)
song	poetry
stories	prose fiction
performance	drama
rhetoric	non-narrative prose

the entire history of literature since 2800 BCE

2800 BCE	invention of writing, Sumer
2nd–1st millennia BCE	verse hymns, verse epics, verse sacred narratives (Gilgamesh, Iliad, Vedas, Shijing, Hebrew Bible...)
1st millennium BCE	poetry predominates in ancient literatures “axial age” philosophy: verse, mainly, but prose too (Upanishads, Laozi, Confucius, Plato...)
1st-2nd c. CE	Greek prose romance (earliest “novel,” maybe)
11th c. CE	<i>Tale of Genji</i> , Jpns. <i>monogatari</i> (prose/poetry mixture: earliest “novel,” maybe)
	European vernacular narrative poems written down (<i>Chanson de Roland</i> , <i>Beowulf</i> , Norse sagas)
14th c. CE	<i>Romance of the Three Kingdoms</i> (earliest “novel,” maybe)
1605	Cervantes, <i>Don Quixote</i> , pt. I (earliest “novel,” maybe)
18th-19th c.	emergence of mass literacy in Europe “rise of the novel” as a genre poetry retains status, but prose is predominant
early 20th c.	emergence of the art novel
early 21st c.	does anyone know what a novel is?

non-quiz

- ▶ Who committed the crime in “A Scandal in Bohemia”?

order, order

Then he stood before the fire, and looked me over in his singular introspective fashion...

“I must be dull, indeed, if I do not pronounce him to be an active member of the medical profession.” (5–6)

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1. [Holmes sees the details when Watson enters]
2. [Holmes tells Watson what he's seen]
3. “And in practice again, I observe”
4. “you had been getting yourself very wet”
5. “you had a most clumsy...servant girl”
6. “[you had] secreted [your] stethoscope”

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(3) (6) (4) (5) (1) (2)

layers of narrative

- text* the narrative discourse, a structured sequence of (linguistic or other) signs
- sjužet* (Ru. сюжет) a particular organization or arrangement of fictional events
- fabula* (Ru. фабула) a series of logically related events caused or experienced by actors, proceeding forward in time

anachrony

anachrony differences between the arrangement in the *sjužet* and the chronology of the *fabula*

focus	direction	term
external	forward	objective anticipation
	back	objective retroversion
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- Find an example of anachrony in “A Scandal in Bohemia.”

who's in charge?

“It was the most preposterous position in which I ever found myself in my life, and it was the thought of it that started me laughing just now.”
(18)

who's in charge?

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< classical Latin *praeposterus* placed in the wrong order, inverted, unseasonable, wrong-headed, perverse (< *prae-* pre- prefix + *posterus* later, next)

OED, 3rd ed. (2025), s.v. “preposterous.”

power, gender

- ▶ “Now it was clear to me that our lady of to-day had nothing in the house more precious to her than what we are in quest of.” (24)
- ▶ “My dear Holmes...you would certainly have been burned, had you lived two centuries ago.” (5)
- ▶ “She has the face of the most beautiful of women, and the mind of the most resolute of men.” (12)

the final retroversion

ADVENTURES OF SHERLOCK HOLMES.

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His Majesty to regain it with his own hands."

"And when will you call?"

"At eight in the morning. She will not be up, so that we shall have a clear field. Besides, we must be prompt, for this marriage may mean a complete change in her life and habits. I must wire to the King without delay."

We had reached Baker-street, and had stopped at the door. He was searching his pockets for the key, when someone passing said—

"Good-night, Mister Sherlock Holmes."

There were several people on the pavement at the time, but the greeting appeared to come from a slim youth in an ulster who had hurried by.

"I've heard that voice before," said Holmes, staring down the dimly lit street. "Now, I wonder who the deuce that could have been."

III.

I SLEPT at Baker-street that night, and we were engaged upon our toast and coffee in the morning when the King of Bohemia rushed into the room.

"You have really got it!" he cried, grasping Sherlock Holmes by either shoulder, and looking eagerly into his face.

"Not yet."

"But you have hopes?"

"I have hopes."

"Then, come. I am all impatience to be gone."

"We must have a cab."

"No, my brougham is waiting."

"Then that will simplify matters." We descended, and started off once more for Briony Lodge.

"Irene Adler is married," remarked Holmes.

"Married! When?"

"Yesterday."

"But to whom?"

"To an English lawyer named Norton."

"But she could not love him?"

"I am in hopes that she does."

"And why in hopes?"

"Because it would spare your Majesty all fear of future annoyance. If the lady loves her husband, she does not love your Majesty. If she does not love your Majesty, there is no reason why she should interfere with your Majesty's plan."

"It is true. And yet—! Well! I wish

she had been of my own station! What a queen she would have made!" He relapsed into a moody silence which was not broken, until we drew up in Serpentine-avenue.

The door of Briony Lodge was open, and an elderly woman stood upon the steps. She watched us with a sardonic eye as we stepped from the brougham.

"Mr. Sherlock Holmes, I believe?" said she.

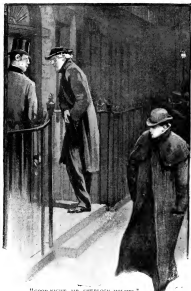
"I am Mr. Holmes," answered my companion, looking at her with a questioning and rather startled gaze.

"Indeed! My mistress told me that you were likely to call. She sent this morning with her husband, by the 5.15 train from Charing-cross, for the Continent."

"What!" Sherlock Holmes staggered back, white with chagrin and surprise.

"Do you mean that she has left England?"

"Never to return."



"GOOD-NIGHT, MR. SHERLOCK HOLMES."

Sidney Paget (illus.), "Good-night, Mr. Sherlock Holmes," *Strand* 2, no. 1 (January 1892): 73, [HathiTrust](#).

next

- ▶ Ko, “The Contractors” (print out; also look on amazon)