The Hound of the Baskervilles

By Arthur Conan Doyle

A Language-Illustrated Classic

by Michael Clay Thompson

September 2014

Royal Fireworks Press
Unionville, New York
Michael Clay Thompson’s
Language-Illustrated Classics

A written word is the choicest of relics. It is something at once more intimate with us and more universal than any other work of art. It is the work of art nearest to life itself.

- Henry David Thoreau, *Walden*

I have selected and edited this collection of language-illustrated classics in trilogies—in groups of three related classic novels or other distinguished works—with separate implementation manuals, making four-book sets. Each implementation manual addresses a trilogy as a whole and contains discussion questions, suggestions for cumulative essay tests, and recommendations for formal academic papers as presented in my *Advanced Academic Writing* series. The trilogies are not age-graded or specifically linked to individual strands of my English curricula; you may determine readiness and use them where you would like to and where you know is best. My hope is that each trilogy will be used as a one-semester project, providing a minimum of six major readings per year, with emphasis on the word *minimum*. 

The Hound of the Baskervilles
In creating this collection, I have aimed to have as few purposes as possible.

One purpose is to provide a library of superb, world-recognized books that will strengthen students with stories, characters, sublime English, and rigorous vocabulary, while giving them personal acquaintance with the classic books most loved by good readers. Reading the classics is an essential part of a proper education. There are reasons—having nothing to do with school—why classics become classics; there are things in them worth keeping that books of the moment lack.

A second purpose is to demonstrate how profoundly formal language study benefits important reading; to accomplish this, I have developed a language-illustration format that incorporates and applies the methods of formal language study found in my texts on vocabulary, grammar, writing, and poetics. We have been in rehearsal long enough; now let us read.

The language illustrations are only that: illustrations. Many books have illustrations of pirates or dogs in the snow, and the books in this collection too have illustrations—of language itself. There are vocabulary definitions augmented with parts of speech and sometimes Latin or Greek stems; there are good looks at poetic writing; there are Socratic plot questions to think

4  Arthur Conan Doyle
about. When sentences have telling structures, I have used four-level analysis to dig the grammar out. These illustrations are meant to flow unobtrusively with the story, available as quick, elective glances for a reader’s enjoyment.

Might the reader pause from the story and spend a moment or two looking at the illustration of a detail of language? Surely, but that is the case with any illustration. I often have paused and glanced from the text to enjoy a painting, such as one of N.C. Wyeth’s paintings of pirates in *Treasure Island*, and then moved back to the text of the story. Here, too, one may look at an illustration of the author’s language and then return to the story.

The content of these illustrations is sometimes advanced and technical. That is as it should be. These books are a locus of confluence where the elements of my curricular programs converge. It is thrilling to see it happen, and to see what full-powered language arts can do. Those who have not studied the preparatory grammar, vocabulary, or poetry texts may be perplexed by some of the more rigorous illustrations; if so, the preparatory texts are available. This collection of literature is not the place to teach grammar or poetics; it is a place to enjoy them. Those who have studied my English curricula
deserve a program of literature that lets them run with the talent they have developed.

These illustrated classics have not been diminished to the blank stare of a textbook. They are still good stories. Happiness must be pursued. The language illustrations must be symbiotic and not break or block the reading adventure. What Coleridge called “the suspension of disbelief” is paramount. The illustrations are designed to complement the book in a reader’s way, making it needless to stop reading and look something up in a reference book. Likewise, discussions and papers that enhance the series are presented in separate manuals in a read-first, analyze-later process that respects the primacy and integrity of the reading experience.

Good books have a visual magic that real readers know. I have worked on the look of the page; each book is set in readable Goudy Old Style type, with roomy, open-spaced lines and indented paragraphs. There are few hyphenated lines, keeping words intact. There are wide margins and a wider center gutter. The page itself is hand-sized, just right for good reading. In a glittering digital age, here is a reminder of why we still do, and always will, love books.

Each title also contains good biographical background about its author and other historical and cultural facts
that benefit our thoughts.

What criteria have I used to choose the books for the collection? I know them. They are my friends. They have been loyal to me during the decades of my life. They are read everywhere, whether schools and colleges assign them or not. They have exciting vocabularies with words to learn, characters that blink and look back, and sentences that make my hair stand on end.

I am sometimes asked, would it not be better to use modernized versions of the classics, versions with current English? It is a chilling question. The assumption is that we should present students with language they already know—in other words, removing the words they do not already know—thus avoiding the very thing most worth seeking out: learning. The answer is no; it is this margin of growth that we value; it is the very thing that we want not to miss.

Finally, many classics include words, events, or values that might seem regrettable. Often, hard details are necessary to the hard truth of the art. When an offensive value—such as prejudice—appears, the novel is in part a kind of historical document, and I have made no attempt to censor any book. Education means knowing the truth.

Now, as it always has been, being educated is about what you have read.

Michael Clay Thompson

The Hound of the Baskervilles
Arthur Conan Doyle (1859-1930)

Arthur Conan Doyle was born less than a mile—within walking distance—from the birthplace of Robert Louis Stevenson in Edinburgh, Scotland. Stevenson was nine years Conan Doyle’s senior. Although he became a successful physician, Conan Doyle began writing poems and stories when he was still in medical school, and he went on to write classic detective fiction, including the stories of Sherlock Holmes, modeled partly on professor Joseph Bell, for whom Conan Doyle served as clerk at the Edinburgh Royal Infirmary. The likeness was so apt that Robert Louis Stevenson wrote to Conan Doyle from Samoa, asking if this was “my old friend Joe Bell?”

There are also clear tones of Edgar Allan Poe’s
Auguste Dupin in Sherlock Holmes. Harry Houdini, who knew Conan Doyle, once said that Conan Doyle was a plagiarist “who pinched Edgar Allan Poe’s plumes.” Conan Doyle was acutely aware of Poe’s Dupin. In Doyle’s *A Study in Scarlet*, Dr. Watson says to Holmes, “You remind me of Edgar Allan Poe’s Dupin. I had no idea such individuals did exist out of stories.”

Sherlock Holmes rose and lit his pipe. “No doubt you think that you are complimenting me in comparing me to Dupin,” he observed. “Now, in my opinion, Dupin was a very inferior fellow. That trick of his of breaking in on his friends’ thoughts with an apropos remark after a quarter of an hour’s silence is really very showy and superficial. He had some analytical genius, no doubt; but he was by no means such a phenomenon as Poe appeared to imagine.”

Literary history resounds with influences, and here Conan Doyle is clearly publishing his debt to Poe’s Dupin as an influence for his own detective fiction. In fact, Conan Doyle once said that “The best detective in fiction is E.A. Poe’s Monsieur Dupin.”

In 1902 Conan Doyle was knighted by King Edward VII.
“Perfectly sound!” said Holmes.

“And then again, there is the ‘friends of the C.C.H.’ I should guess that to be the Something Hunt, the local hunt to whose members he has possibly given some surgical assistance, and which has made him a small presentation in return.”

“I think also that the probability is in favour of his being a country practitioner who does a great deal of his visiting on foot.”

“Why so?”

Any student of philosophy will recognize the tenor of this dialogue as modeled on the Dialogues of Plato, in which Socrates interrogates his victim with sharp, succinct questions. Page 14.

“Really, Watson, you excel yourself,” said Holmes, pushing back his chair and lighting a cigarette. “I am bound to say that in all the accounts which you have been so good as to give of my own small achievements
anthropological museum. It is not my intention to be fulsome, but I confess that I covet your skull.”

Sherlock Holmes waved our strange visitor into a chair. “You are an enthusiast in your line of thought, I perceive, sir, as I am in mine,” said he. “I observe from your forefinger that you make your own cigarettes. Have no hesitation in lighting one.”

The man drew out paper and tobacco and twirled the one up in the other with surprising dexterity. He had long, quivering fingers as agile and restless as the antennae of an insect.

...fingers as agile and restless
as the antennae of an insect.

This brilliant simile gives us a vivid image of Dr. Mortimer’s moving fingers.

Holmes was silent, but his little darting glances showed me the interest which he took in our curious companion. “I presume, sir,” said he at last, “that it

fulsome: adj. flattering
anything were done to increase its already rather grim reputation. For both these reasons I thought that I was justified in telling rather less than I knew, since no practical good could result from it, but with you there is no reason why I should not be perfectly frank.

...a man of science shrinks from placing himself in the public position of seeming to indorse a popular superstition.

Conan Doyle gives Dr. Mortimer’s words a proper scientific crispness with combinations of s’s and p’s used in alliteration and consonance. Page 41.

“The moor is very sparsely inhabited, and those who live near each other are thrown very much together. For this reason I saw a good deal of Sir Charles Baskerville. With the exception of Mr. Frankland, of Lafter Hall, and Mr. Stapleton, the naturalist, there are no other men of education within many miles. Sir Charles was a retiring man, but the chance of
was certainly no physical injury of any kind. But one false statement was made by Barrymore at the inquest. He said that there were no traces upon the ground round the body. He did not observe any. But I did—some little distance off, but fresh and clear.”

“Footprints?”

“Footprints.”

“A man’s or a woman’s?”

Dr. Mortimer looked strangely at us for an instant, and his voice sank almost to a whisper as he answered.

“Mr. Holmes, they were the footprints of a gigantic hound!”

...and his voice sank almost to a whisper as he answered.

Conan Doyle renders Dr. Mortimer’s whispery answer in whispery consonants.
given my reasons for not wishing to do so. Besides, besides—"

"Why do you hesitate?"

...and I have already given my reasons for not wishing to do so. Besides, besides—"

"Why do you hesitate?"

Conan Doyle supports Dr. Mortimer’s hesitation with a structural pause: a dash, the end of the sentence, and a new paragraph.

“There is a realm in which the most acute and most experienced of detectives is helpless.”

“You mean that the thing is supernatural?”

“I did not positively say so.”

“No, but you evidently think it.”

“Since the tragedy, Mr. Holmes, there have come to my ears several incidents which are hard to reconcile with the settled order of Nature.”

“For example?”
Hall. I fear lest I should be swayed too much by my own obvious interest in the matter, and that is why I bring the case before you and ask for your advice.”

Holmes considered for a little time.

And yet it cannot be denied that the prosperity of the whole poor, bleak countryside depends upon his presence. Page 54.

The bleak landscape is rendered in bleak stopped consonants, much like the harsh description in Thomas Hardy’s poem “The Darkling Thrush”:

I leant upon a coppice gate
When Frost was spectre-grey,
And Winter’s dregs made desolate
The weakening eye of day.

Conan Doyle used alliterated k sounds in his poem “The Irish Colonel”: “Said the king to the colonel, the complaints are eternal.”
committed at all; the second is, what is the crime and how was it committed? Of course, if Dr. Mortimer’s surmise should be correct, and we are dealing with forces outside the ordinary laws of Nature, there is an end of our investigation. But we are bound to exhaust all other hypotheses before falling back upon this one. I think we’ll shut that window again, if you don’t mind. It is a singular thing, but I find that a concentrated atmosphere helps a concentration of thought. I have not pushed it to the length of getting into a box to think, but that is the logical outcome of my convictions. Have you turned the case over in your mind?”

...a pleasure to exercise any small powers which I possess at your expense.  Page 59.

...the devil did desire... Page 61

Holmes (at top) speaks to Watson in crisp combinations of $p$, $s$, and $x$. Dr. Mortimer paints the devil with diabolical $d$’s.

“Yes, I have thought a good deal of it in the course

surmise: n. a guess. Surmise also can be a verb.
have run from the house instead of towards it. If the gipsy’s evidence may be taken as true, he ran with cries for help in the direction where help was least likely to be. Then, again, whom was he waiting for that night, and why was he waiting for him in the yew alley rather than in his own house?”

In this common but interesting interrogative structure we see a prepositional phrase both divided and reversed. The sense of the statement is he was waiting for whom, but in question form the object of preposition whom shifts to the fore.

“You think that he was waiting for someone?”
“The man was elderly and infirm. We can
CHAPTER FOUR

Sir Henry Baskerville

Our breakfast table was cleared early, and Holmes waited in his dressing-gown for the promised interview. Our clients were punctual to their appointment, for the clock had just struck ten when Dr. Mortimer was shown up, followed by the young baronet.

Our clients were punctual to their appointment....

Here is a swift brushstroke of sound that illustrates a typical technique: the crucial word, *punctual*, acts as a kind of donor word, surrounded by words that echo its *p-c-t-l’s*.

The latter was a small, alert, dark-eyed man about thirty years of age, very sturdily built, with thick black eyebrows and a strong, pugnacious face. He wore a

---

*punctual*: adj. on time  
*pugnacious*: adj. combative
it’s a case for a policeman or a clergyman.”

“Precisely.”

“And now there’s this affair of the letter to me at the hotel. I suppose that fits into its place.”

“Dr. Mortimer, I think you could not do better than to tell your story as you told it to us.”

Thus encouraged, our scientific friend drew his papers from his pocket....

Here is paragraph transition at its most graceful: two simple words connecting back to the previous paragraph and avoiding a sharp break in thought. Page 79.

“It seems to show that someone knows more than we do about what goes on upon the moor,” said Dr. Mortimer.

“And also,” said Holmes, “that someone is not ill-disposed towards you, since they warn you of danger.”
and to decide at one sitting. I should like to have a quiet hour by myself to make up my mind. Now, look here, Mr. Holmes, it’s half-past eleven now and I am going back right away to my hotel. Suppose you and your friend, Dr. Watson, come round and lunch with us at two. I’ll be able to tell you more clearly then how this thing strikes me.”

“Is that convenient to you, Watson?”

“Perfectly.”

“Then you may expect us. Shall I have a cab called?”

“I’d prefer to walk, for this affair has flurried me rather.”

“T’d prefer to walk, for this affair has flurried me rather.”

Watson’s discomposure is rendered in a line of amiable r’s and fricative f’s and th’s. He can hardly puff his way through the sentence.