The Conan Doyle Review

An interdisciplinary journal for scholarship on the life, works, creative afterlives, and cultural legacies of Arthur Conan Doyle

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ADAPTING CONAN DOYLE

KEN LUDWIG'S SHERLOCK HOLMES PLAYS

I am privileged to share this inaugural special issue of *The Conan Doyle Review* with you. In the years ahead, this journal will provide a space for scholarship from across disciplines as we facilitate dialogue between scholars whose work touches the diverse corners of the life, works, and legacies of Arthur Conan Doyle. In addition to a broad array of peer-reviewed scholarship, *The Conan Doyle Review* will publish editorials and reviews as well as original interviews of interest to our readers. This special issue includes the first such interview: a conversation with playwright Ken Ludwig about his two plays that adapt Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes stories to the stage.

Ken Ludwig has been an American theatre mainstay since his first major success, *Lend Me A Tenor*, premiered in 1985. However, Ludwig's work first became entwined with that of Arthur Conan Doyle two years earlier with his play *Postmortem*, a murder mystery revolving around the popular stage actor William Gillette, best remembered as the foremost Sherlock Holmes impersonator of his day. Nearly 30 years later, Ludwig premiered a new play that revisited the premise of *Postmortem*—a party hosted by William Gillette at his eccentrically-designed home on the Connecticut River during which he must solve a murder—but completely rewrote the plot. It's called *The Game's Afoot or Holmes for the Holidays*. In 2012, *The Game's Afoot* won the Edgar Award for Best Play from the Mystery Writers of America.

In 2015, Ludwig returned to Conan Doyle via a more direct route, adapting *The Hound of the Baskervilles* to the stage in a play simply titled *Baskerville*. The play addresses the Sherlock Holmes tale in much the way Patrick Barlow's *The 39 Steps* addresses its Hitchcock and Buchan antecedents—earnestly telling the mystery narrative by way of a farcical theatrical conceit. Ludwig retells Conan Doyle's tale with a cast of five actors covering over three dozen roles.

In the few years since its premiere, *Baskerville* has become a favorite of theatres across the US, rivaling *Lend Me A Tenor* for licensed

productions. In light of this success, Ludwig has chosen to return to Sherlock Holmes for another play in the same style, this time adapting and weaving several of Conan Doyle's tales into a single thriller. The play, *Moriarty,* not only includes several tales, it also includes several favorite characters: Irene Adler, Professor Moriarty, and Sherlock's brother Mycroft Holmes. A draft of *Moriarty* had a public reading in June, 2019, and will have its world premiere in the 2020-2021 theatrical season.

Though the text of *Moriarty* is not yet available to the general public, Ludwig shared it with me as I prepared a conference paper on his Sherlock Holmes plays in the early Autumn of 2019. A portion of that paper is included in this special issue as a complement to the interview I conducted with Ludwig especially for *The Conan Doyle Review*. Both the article and the interview are particularly focused on Ludwig's two plays—*Baskerville* and *Moriarty*—that directly adapt the work of Arthur Conan Doyle. The interview was conducted in Washington, D.C., where Ludwig resides, on 13 December, 2019; in it, you will learn about the challenges and pleasures of adapting Conan Doyle from a practitioner's perspective. The article analyzes that perspective and the works themselves, and it invites you to consider what such adaptations are actually trying to accomplish and how they go about doing it.

The editors of *The Conan Doyle Review* look forward to publishing a wide range of exciting new scholarship on Arthur Conan Doyle beginning with our complete first issue in Spring 2021. I hope this special preview whets your appetite for all the great things to come.

Dr. Ashley D. Polasek
20 December, 2019
Greenville, South Carolina

THE GENIUS OF CONAN DOYLE

KEN LUDWIG

Let's begin broadly with something you've acknowledged in the past, which is that you've always come at your Sherlock Holmes plays in a non-traditional way. What you've said previously was that you didn't feel like you could match Conan Doyle's genius. Tell me a little bit more about that. What is his genius? What is it that's hard to match about his writing?

I think two things are remarkable about his writing that are really genius—sheer genius. One is a genius he shared with several other authors, particularly of the period, which is his felicity of language. He really put sentences together in an extraordinary, inspired way. Sentence for sentence, he writes as well as Dickens, I think. Conan Doyle is clearly of his time; he's late Victorian—and it feels late Victorian—but he's managed to transpose that late-Victorian prose into something quite extraordinary. It's terrifically accessible: he tells such compelling stories the way that Dickens does, and like Dickens, manages to float that on a level of prose that turns it into real literature.

The second facet of his genius is the creation of Holmes and Watson. Dickens managed it a few times; he created Oliver Twist; he created Scrooge and the other characters in *A Christmas Carol* that have become iconic and part of our language and literature to an extraordinary degree. They seep into our bones. You can't be an educated person and grow up loving any aspect of literature without loving *A Christmas Carol*. Similarly, you can't grow up in our society without rubbing shoulders with Holmes and Watson, and then getting to a deeper understanding of the contrast between them, which is, itself, brilliant. That this immensely quirky fellow who doesn't really care if he hurts people's feelings—except Watson's—is paired with this former military man who is correct and cares about manners and is a gentleman, and who falls in love with Holmes and Holmes in love with him. That pairing is a work of genius: it has lived on and will live on forever. If I could do it, I'd do it! I can't. I keep trying. Maybe I'll do it before I die, but I don't think I will!

Those are two aspects of his genius that are so tremendous, and of course, even the stories have become iconic. None more so than *The Hound of the Baskervilles*—and I did *The Hound of the Baskervilles*. Now I'm tackling Moriarty because the other great iconic construct of the Holmes world is that he has an evil genius that he faces in the course of his fight for right and good. Or at least his fight for solution and stasis—for completion. Of course, Moriarty only appears in one story and is mentioned in a few others, which is extraordinary in itself. It shows the level to which this is mythic. Conan Doyle created a myth. How often do people create myths? There's *The Three Musketeers*, some of the Dickens characters, there's Elizabeth Bennet, Harry Potter. Maybe Jeeves and Wooster, though they don't feel as mythic. They feel timeless, which isn't quite the same thing.

Let's look at each part of that answer in turn. You first said that the language is important. In adapting, do you feel like you're making an effort to replicate Conan Doyle's voice or are you using your own voice while echoing his? How do you feel like your work is engaging with that voice?

The way I try to engage it is not to replicate it in the sense of the narrative. Of course Watson does, in the case of both *Baskerville* and *Moriarty*, speak to the audience in the kind of prose that Conan Doyle created. It's a truncated version of it. Usually the sentences are just a little bit shorter, so even when I quote them verbatim—which is maybe only once or twice in *Moriarty* and maybe five times in *Baskerville*—even there, I'm shaving things off and truncating. But I am trying to recreate the atmosphere of that voice—very much so.

On the stage there's the necessity of keeping the story going at a pace the audience will sit and listen to. You could certainly read *The Hound of the Baskervilles* to an audience and have them entranced if you had the right reader. Patrick Stewart did *A Christmas Carol*, verbatim, on Broadway. He read the whole thing from beginning to end, and it's fantastic. It was a wonderful way to do *A Christmas Carol* because it's short enough that you can do it. *Baskerville* is too long, but you could do it with a short story or two, and it would be

tremendously engaging. But I, as a theatre artist, would go, "Wait a minute. I'm only telling this story with five actors on stage, so I have to be more economical." I've therefore got two things competing when I'm writing these pieces, which is, one: create the atmosphere as if he's telling that same rich, multi-layered kind of a story that is working at different levels, but two: all the while, make sure the piece is snapping along at a pace for a modern audience.

You said the second attribute of Conan Doyle's genius was the creation of the Holmes and Watson characters themselves. You found your characters' voices and their relationship in Baskerville. *Did you feel like you built on the same relationship in* Moriarty*? Did you learn anything or change their dynamic in any way?*

I didn't want to feel that I was repeating myself and going over old ground—as much as that's old ground that's great to do. In the theatre, I think to some extent people turn their noses up at the word "sequel," and they shouldn't. What is a series of short stories? Each one is a sequel to the previous short story. Sure, it's a whole new story, but a sequel means the same characters in the same setting. Each *Harry Potter* novel is a sequel. The mystery novels that we love so much in so many ways—the Dorothy Sayers novels—those are sequels in a way. I don't think there's anything wrong with writing a sequel, but I think there is if you don't try to ignite new ground, try to create something that's fresh, because otherwise, why not just go see *Baskerville* again?

One of the ways I tried to do that quite consciously in *Moriarty* was by creating two other really big iconic characters—that is, I created my stage versions of them—Irene Adler and Professor Moriarty. I hope by doing that, audiences will go, "I saw *Baskerville* and I loved it," and when they go to the next one, instead of saying, "Well, it's kind of just like seeing *Baskerville* again. It's just another good story, another good mystery," instead, they'll say, "Oh wow! Sherlock Holmes is smitten with this extraordinary woman, who is his equal. That's pretty exciting!" And with a nemesis who is so extraordinarily smart, but evil. It's the same kind of a challenge to his life: will he fall in love, and will he defeat Moriarty?

One of the things I learned when I wrote the very first early draft of *Moriarty* was that I thought that the way I needed to create Moriarty was to have him in the first act quite a bit. It makes sense in a way: you get to know this evil nemesis and so on. But I found out that was not the way to do it. I should learn my lesson from *Harry Potter* and from Conan Doyle. You don't need Moriarty very much, even in "The Final Problem." Holmes has that one encounter with him in his office, and then at the end, he shows up at the Reichenbach Falls. So I ended up doing that, and that's why the second act worked. Moriarty virtually doesn't appear in the first act. We hear his voice, but we never see him. I learned my lesson. Great evil villains can't be too present. It's true in Tolkien, and it's true in *Harry Potter*—you never spend too much time with Voldemort.

Those two characters—Adler and Moriarty—have had much, much longer, richer lives in adaptation than they ever had in Conan Doyle's stories. What is it about them that was appealing to you?

Holmes fell in love with one and was killed by other. Sort of. Almost. Those are the two most extraordinary points in his life. He almost doesn't solve cases, but this is someone who captures his heart—forever—she was always *the* woman, and someone whom he calls the "Napoleon of Crime"—whom he views as his equal. Conan Doyle really created these as the two biggest characters other than Holmes and Watson. Is there anyone as huge and grand? Whom we love so much? I mean, we love some of the other stories, but none of the characters stands out in the same way, do they?

Only Holmes, Watson, Moriarty, and Irene Adler have had such extraordinary afterlives. Perhaps Mycroft as well. But Mycroft is also in Moriarty.

I put Mycroft in purposely! Though he hasn't had the same impact. There aren't too many books called *Mycroft*, the way there are so many called *Moriarty*. There could be and should be—intellectually, he's wonderful. He's the third great supporting character, so I threw him in, too!

Let's talk just a bit about the form of the two plays. Baskerville *and* Moriarty *share their form—this limited cast of five. It worked splendidly with* Baskerville*, and I think it works splendidly with* Moriarty*, too. It's really fun. Nevertheless, they're different beasts because* Baskerville *was adapted top to bottom from one tale, and* Moriarty *is kind of a quilt, with more original material from you. How do those processes differ? Were there unique challenges associated with each?*

Moriarty was harder, and I don't know if I've succeeded yet in this draft. But to create any one story that has a central mystery that's as brilliant as *The Hound of the Baskervilles* is like creating those two great characters—it's something that's extraordinarily difficult to do. Conan Doyle was able to do it—though it's interesting that he wrote four Sherlock Holmes novels and did it once. With due respect to him, the others—I'm sorry—they just don't do it like *Baskerville*.

It's hard to write a good mystery. Peter Shaffer managed to do it once. He kept trying afterwards. Ira Levin managed it once with *Death Trap*. If you don't think he was sitting there thinking, "God, I want to write another one of these!" They're hard to do even once. I spent a lot of time trying to give *Moriarty* a "mystery soul." I don't think I've quite gotten there yet. Will I ever get anything that's as good a single story as *Baskerville*? I don't know. I keep trying. Because I wasn't sure I could do a single story as great as *Baskerville*, I've quite purposefully made sure that there are other concerns in the play, which is primarily that Holmes loses his heart to Irene Adler.

You chose to knit together several of the Conan Doyle short stories in Moriarty. *Did you ever play with the idea of trying to do an original pastiche from scratch?*

I don't think so. There are so many rich stories, but none of them made a full-length play. I tried to think of them this way and that way, and I could have put bells and whistles on any one of them to make a full-length play, and they'd have felt like bells and whistles. They'd have felt like filler because Conan Doyle's stories just move at such a great crack. "Silver Blaze" is a real personal favorite of mine, but to make a full-length play out of that—he figures out the knife cut and

the dog—it's not enough. I wanted to use Conan Doyle's stories, so I ended up, therefore, trying to weave together Holmes's engagement with Moriarty and his engagement with Irene Adler. I wanted to make that into one really interesting narrative with drive that you want to keep reading—in this case keep seeing.

That seems to me the job of the dramatist, no matter what else the dramatist does. And I know there are people who would disagree with me, people who would say, "*Waiting for Godot* changed the theatre," and you wouldn't particularly describe "narrative drive" as the reason you engage with it with so much depth and joy, but in its own way, of course, it does have a tremendous, interesting narrative drive. But us mortals want to write plays with narrative drive. That seems to me to be what plays need to deliver. It's like a book. You have to want to turn the page. If your readers don't want to turn the page, you failed them; nobody's going to want to pick it up with enthusiasm until the end of time. And when some people say, "Oh, no. I'm too much of an artist to worry about those things," they don't understand playwriting; they don't understand novel writing; they don't understand fiction. You have to want to turn that page. Maybe the reason you want to turn the page is a cerebral reason. It doesn't have to be overt action, but you need to want to turn the page or watch the next minute of the play. Within the world of Holmes and Watson, we expect a story that's going to tell us a mystery and keep us on the edge of our seats.

Moriarty*, like* Baskerville*, has three Players—in addition to Holmes and Watson—who cover the dozens of supporting roles in the play.* Baskerville *has two male and one female Player while* Moriarty *has two female, one male Player. Was that something that preceded your plotting of the piece or was that something that came of necessity because you needed two women on stage at the same time?*

I wrote it with two women because I wanted two women in the cast. That preceded the plot. I therefore set myself a task that I then had to fulfill because, of course, Sherlock Holmes stories are so male-centric. As is most of our literature. I've made part of my life's job to create more parts for women: I've loved writing rich women's parts from early

in my career. If you go to high schools, to colleges, to community theatres where my shows are done all the time, and off-Broadway and Broadway, there are just as many female actors as male actors. They all want to work, and there are fewer parts because our history is so male-centric. There's always one good woman's part to five good men's parts.

I purposely set myself the task of shifting the balance from four men, one woman—which is *Baskerville*—to three men, two women. If I could have turned it more, I would have. My problem was that I couldn't do that in this play because I had to have Holmes, Watson, and Moriarty. There was a temptation to make a double of Watson and Moriarty, and I tried it in early drafts. But the reason I didn't like it was because no matter what I did, it cast a light on Watson I didn't like. Even though it's an actor playing a different part, I didn't want people to read Moriarty onto Watson. I wasn't out to write a play where Watson has an ounce of evil in him. That's not Watson. I love the characters as they are, so I needed three men.

If these plays were done by a high school and all five roles in either play were done by women, would that be something you would enjoy or would you find it problematic?

Not only would I enjoy it, it is now done all the time with *Baskerville*! They have to ask my permission, so I get letters all the time asking to do it that way. One of the big productions in California right after *Baskerville* opened starred a woman who had played the female role in the play and now wanted to play Holmes. She did, and the next thing was an all-female cast of *Baskerville*, so it's done all the time, and I think it's so rich. When you switch genders in playing parts, you also then get to the question: do you play the part as an actor—we'll say "actress" for the purpose of clarity—an actress playing a male role, or do you play it as a female role because you're an actress. It's done both ways.

Which one do you think would be more interesting to see?

It would be more interesting to see them play it as if she's a woman. Wouldn't that be cool? I'd love it.

THEATRICAL CONSPIRACY

ASHLEY D. POLASEK

Who could write like Conan Doyle? Who could invent such incredible characters that live on forever? He is in the pantheon because he was a genius in his own way.
–Ken Ludwig

The admittedly rather alarmist title of this article, "Theatrical Conspiracy," comes from an interview with playwright Ken Ludwig, who said of his play *Baskerville* that the play's form let the audience "in on the conspiracy." This article is about two of Ludwig's plays, which, despite appearing to be rather traditional adaptations of Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes tales, are arguably not really Sherlock Holmes plays. At least, they are not *primarily* Sherlock Holmes plays. They do not so much adapt Sherlock Holmes as they perform the adaptation of Sherlock Holmes. They perform the idea of what audiences might expect Sherlock Holmes plays to be and do, but they ultimately question their own identities as Sherlock Holmes plays. That's the conspiracy: it is the playwright conspiring with his audiences such that his plays—plays that are really about the process of adapting and performing Sherlock Holmes—are viewed and understood as plays that are merely about Sherlock Holmes. This article will consider a few of the primary methods Ludwig uses to execute this conspiracy.

In 2015, Ken Ludwig adapted *The Hound of the Baskervilles* for stage. The play, simply called *Baskerville*, draws heavily on the narrative of Arthur Conan Doyle's novella, but the play is in the style of Patrick Barlow's thriller-farce *The 39 Steps*, which uses a very limited cast, overt doubling, and on-stage quick changes. *Baskerville* casts one actor as Holmes, one actor as Watson, and three actors—traditionally two male and one female—to cover the other 35 roles.

At present, Ludwig's next Sherlock Holmes play, *Moriarty*, has had a first public reading and is undergoing revisions prior to a world premiere in the 2020-2021 season with a top regional theatre. While *Moriarty* is not yet available to the public, Ludwig has been kind

enough to share the current draft of the script with me. Because he shared it in confidence, I'm going to be circumspect when it comes to details, but it is in the same style as *Baskerville*: a cast of five—three men and two women—covers, in the present draft, 41 roles.

I've spoken to Ludwig at some length about his Sherlock Holmes plays, and he frequently circled back to the question of how one adapts a work that one doesn't feel artistically capable of replicating. Ultimately, he answered that question through his development of the plays' shared form: "Conan Doyle's stars were Holmes and Watson, and you can't compete with that. It's such a lightning stroke of genius. I decided I would try to make the theatre the star."

This is the jumping off point and ultimately the central focus of my analysis: a playwright who keeps returning to the same source material, but rather than adapting that source material, he echoes or recalls it instead. Ludwig offers entertaining adaptations of Sherlock Holmes, while at the same time, invites his audience to consider what it means to adapt Sherlock Holmes—to consider their expectations and the challenges involved. In short, these plays illustrate a distinction between *being* an adaptation and *performing adaptation*. They remind us that adaptation is a process more than a product. The recurring theme of performance in both plays serves constant reminders to the audience that the Sherlock Holmes character, and in a broader sense, adaptation itself, is something that can only be performed rather than something that can simply be.

Baskerville and *Moriarty* both appear to meet a traditional narrative definition of adaptation. Indeed, the former is subtitled "A Sherlock Holmes Mystery" and the latter "A New Sherlock Holmes Mystery." Nonetheless, these plays do represent a conspiracy of form. As noted earlier, both plays are staged with a cast of five in a neutral space, inviting the audience to participate more actively in the world-building than they would with a fully-cast play staged on a realistic set.

The theme of performance is paramount. These plays lay bare the expectations an audience might have for a Sherlock Holmes adaptation and challenge the audience to actively examine those expectations—even as they are being met by the plays through their function as

entertaining escapist drama. According to Ludwig, when he approached *Baskerville*, he didn't begin with the idea of writing a play for a limited cast: "I didn't set out," he says, "to find something that fit *The 39 Steps* bill." First, he began re-reading Conan Doyle's novella, and as he was reading, he was struck by the idea of adapting it. As soon as he asked himself how he might go about dramatizing the tale, he landed on the form. "It was really all of a piece," he says. The form exposes all the hidden mechanisms of theatre, and according to Ludwig, is "a way to explore the conventions of a play."

The form relentlessly reasserts the theatrical moment: audiences are never left to passively consume these two plays as Sherlock Holmes adaptations as they are with, for instance, most film and television adaptations of Sherlock Holmes, which sit firmly within a realist aesthetic. Instead, audiences are constantly reminded that they are watching the performance of Sherlock Holmes adaptations. These reminders take several forms, but I want to focus on three.

First and most obviously are the on-stage character changes that occur throughout both *Baskerville* and *Moriarty*. For a sense of how frequently this occurs, if *Baskerville* is staged strictly according to the script, there can be no fewer than ten instances of an actor shedding one character and adopting another in plain view of the audience, with opportunities for a good many more depending on the direction. Vitally, there is no effort to disguise this process: it is not born of practical necessity, but rather is intrinsic to the meaning of the play.

Further, the various methods for distinguishing between characters played by the same actors are rarely just tricks of costume or props. Instead, they are mostly distinctions in how the actors speak and move—distinctions that highlight the acting craft, the labor of performance. In *Baskerville*, these include a range of accents: Cockney, Castilian, lower-middle-class English, upper-class English, German, Texan, Swedish, Scottish, and Irish; and also a range of recurring performative traits, such as distinctive laughs, idiosyncratic walks, perennially loud talking, and whistling speech. *Moriarty* is built the same way.

Secondly, the form reminds the audience of the performances in action by periodically breaking the fourth wall. Even as the actors shift

between characters within the play, they step outside the fiction entirely to recognize the play they're enacting. This awareness works on two levels. As with the Conan Doyle tales, Dr. Watson serves as narrator in these plays. He speaks directly to the audience just as the written Watson speaks directly to his readers. This would be an unremarkable convention in itself, utilized in many adaptations, but Watson isn't merely aware of narrating the tale; the character seems to be aware that he and the rest of the characters are engaging in a live performance. The most salient example is a recurring joke in *Baskerville*, which shows that Watson can hear the play's non-diegetic sound cues:

STAPLETON. "Fertile?" Ha! That is the great *Grimpen Mire*.
(*We hear a blast of discordant music*.)
WATSON. "The Grimpen Mire?"
(*the sound again*)
STAPLETON. One false step means death to man or beast. Only yesterday I saw one of the moor ponies wander into it. He never came out. I saw his head for quite a long time craning out of the bog-hole, then his writhing neck shot upwards and it sucked him down at last.
WATSON. But why do you ever go near the Grimpen Mire?
(*The sound again*. **WATSON** *is getting a bit tired of it*.)
STAPLETON. Because that is where the specimens are, and that's what I do for a … *wait! Look! It's a Cyclopides!* Excuse me, I'll be right back. Get back here you devil!
(*He runs off after the butterfly*.)
WATSON. Be careful! You're heading for the Grimp … the mire! For God's sake man!

Watson changes his words in response to music he can only hear if he's an active conspirator. The audience is once again reminded that the play is a self-reflexive performance of a Sherlock Holmes adaptation.

The final important way the form of these plays serve the "conspiracy" is by exploiting disguise. The conceit of heavy, explicit doubling of parts demands that the audience actively and constantly work to process every character as distinct. The audience learns to see a single actor as many different characters as a matter of course, so that when an actor plays one character disguised as another, the audience cannot see the change in costume and performance as a disguise. The disguise becomes impenetrable because the form of the play *is* the disguise.

This is important for plays that adapt Sherlock Holmes because disguise is an essential index of the Sherlock Holmes character—Holmes is seen to adopt over a dozen distinct disguises within the 60 Conan Doyle tales, with hints of many more. In only the second tale, Dr. Watson tells Holmes, "You would have made an actor, and a rare one." Disguise is also a common trope of the mystery genre in general, and for all that he disguises himself, Holmes also frequently encounters others in disguise as well. As such, an audience attending a Sherlock Holmes play may expect to encounter characters in disguise, yet because of these plays' form, they upend that expectation—meeting it and not meeting it simultaneously. When a character is revealed to be another character in disguise, as happens in both plays, and to particularly great effect in *Moriarty*, the audience is compelled to recognize the success of the disguise within the narrative as a function of the theatrical form, not as the result of that character's aptitude for disguise. In short, these plays suggest that this important component of what makes Sherlock Holmes *Sherlock Holmes* only works through the performance of the adaptation.

The form of *Baskerville* and *Moriarty* necessarily exposes the gears of the adaptation in a way that a traditional realistic approach to the material doesn't. In consequence, the audience doesn't passively experience the adaptation as a product. Instead, they participate in the process of adapting as they watch the performance unfold. As the actors work to perform dozens of unique characters, audiences work to recognize those characters, even as those audiences are aware of and enjoying the conscious effort it takes to do so. The adaptation becomes an active performance rather than a static artifact.

Nevertheless, an obvious question arises: how is it that *Baskerville* and *Moriarty* are not quite clearly Sherlock Holmes adaptations, even bearing their form in mind? They are, after all, both identifiable transpositions of Conan Doyle narratives. I believe that the answer is in Ludwig's stated primary subject for these plays. While we may expect an adaptation to situate the adapted text as the central focus of the process, Ludwig quite explicitly says these plays are about theatre. The form bears out his intent. He says it took him all of "three minutes" to move from "I want to adapt *The Hound of the Baskervilles*" to "I'm going to do it in this form," and *Moriarty* began with that form *a priori*, building on the commercial success of the previous play. The form, not the Sherlock Holmes text, thus became the primary purpose of the adaptations.

Consider this illustration of the importance of form over narrative text: *Moriarty* is not a direct adaptation of any single Sherlock Holmes tale. In it, Ludwig has woven several Conan Doyle short stories together, interspersing his own original characters and material for the sake of narrative sense and entertainment value. During our discussions, it became apparent that Ludwig was prepared to exchange one of the Conan Doyle stories on which he had originally built his play's plot for another, causing a radical alteration to the whole middle third of the play. In addition to illustrating an impressively pragmatic approach to playwriting that's worth examining in its own right, these potential revisions lay bare Ludwig's priorities. The Sherlock Holmes stories he selected are not the point of the play. The tale he constructed for *Moriarty* is instead an opportunity to exercise the theatrical form. Thus, the usual relationship between subject and form is reversed: instead of using theatre to tell stories about Sherlock Holmes, these plays use Sherlock Holmes to tell stories about theatre.

These are only a few of the methods Ludwig's plays employ to express this duality between being an adaptation and performing adaptation. This is certainly only an overview in terms of analysis, but I think it benefits from Ludwig's willingness to interrogate his own process. Perhaps because Ludwig's plays are comedy—designed first and foremost to entertain—they haven't been the subject of much

academic criticism. This dismissal is short-sighted. These plays function on several levels, and it's worth exploring how these layers operate, particularly as they inform Adaptation Studies as a discipline. I would argue this academic scrutiny is not warranted in spite of, but rather because of the status of Ludwig's plays as popular entertainment. I have hopefully demonstrated that his work interrogates the boundaries of the adaptation process, as we might commonly define it, by utilizing a form that reveals the mechanisms of that process as the performance is underway. Whether these are Sherlock Holmes adaptations or not is really a question I have not yet answered, which suggests that Ludwig has been successful in executing his conspiracy.

Portions of this article were originally presented at the Association of Adaptation Studies Annual Conference, 20 September, 2019, in Brno, Czech Republic.

The author wishes to thank Ken Ludwig for generously sharing both his time and a draft of Moriarty.

CONTRIBUTORS

KEN LUDWIG is a two-time Olivier Award-winning playwright who has written over 28 plays and musicals, including six shows on Broadway and seven in London's West End. His first Broadway play, *Lend Me A Tenor*, won two Tony Awards and was called "one of the classic comedies of the 20th century" by the *Washington Post*. Many of his works have become a standard part of the American repertoire, including *Crazy For You* (five years on Broadway; Tony and Olivier Awards for Best Musical); *Moon Over Buffalo* (starring Carol Burnett); *Twentieth Century* (starring Alec Baldwin); *Baskerville*; *Shakespeare in Hollywood* (Helen Hayes Award); *The Game's Afoot* (Edgar Award for Best Play); *A Fox on the Fairway*; *Leading Ladies*; and a stage version of *Murder on the Orient Express*, written at the request of the Agatha Christie Estate. His book *How To Teach Your Children Shakespeare* won the Falstaff Award for Best Shakespeare Book of the Year, and his essays are published by the Yale Review. His newest plays are *Moriarty* and *Dear Jack, Dear Louise*, which premiered in December 2019 at Arena Stage. He holds degrees from Harvard, where he studied music with Leonard Bernstein, and Cambridge University. His work has been performed in over 30 countries in more than 20 languages and is produced somewhere in the United States every night of the year.

ASHLEY D. POLASEK, PhD is a Lecturer in English and Honors Interdisciplinary Studies at Tri-County Technical College in South Carolina. She is the Founding Editor-in-Chief of *The Conan Doyle Review*. Her articles on adaptations of the Sherlock Holmes character have been published in *Adaptation*, *Literature/Film Quarterly*, and *Transformative Works and Cultures*. She is the co-editor, with Deborah Cartmell, of *A Companion to the Biopic* (2020), co-editor, with Lyndsay Faye, of *Sherlock Holmes: Behind the Canonical Screen* (2015), and author of *Being Sherlock: A Sherlockian's Stroll Through the Best Sherlock Holmes Stories* (2019) and *Hounding the Screen: A Century of Adapting The Hound of the Baskervilles* (2021). She also serves as a technical advisor for film and stage adaptations of Sherlock Holmes.