ARTICLE

Ways of reading Sherlock Holmes: the entrenchment of discourse blends

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Abstract

Current work on conceptual integration and literary texts often features detailed analysis of a single reading of a text in terms of the conceptual integration networks involved in constructing that interpretation. However, a single linguistic form can inspire manifold readings. This article takes a historical view of the conceptual blends involved in a range of different literary interpretations generated by different groups of readers of a single set of texts, the Sherlock Holmes detective stories by Arthur Conan Doyle. First, it examines the case of the numerous and diverse historical readers who took these fictional texts to be non-fiction, and how their conceptions mirror and diverge from the ways readers become immersed in texts they know to be fiction. This is followed by an analysis of the early 'Sherlockian' essays, criticism operating under the pretense of a historical Holmes and a historical Watson who recorded his adventures with varying accuracy. In the Sherlockian tradition, something very like the naïve believer stance independently emerges from this playful and parodic novel blend. The history of this stance among its practitioners is then shown to be an example of the routinization of a blend within a discourse community. These complex discourse blends turn out to have much the same capacity for entrenchment and semantic change as any grammatical construction.

Keywords: *blending; cognitive stylistics; Doyle, Arthur Conan; mental spaces; narrative viewpoint; reception history*

1 Introduction

From the first publications of Sherlock Holmes stories in the late 1880s, readers, editors, advertisers, and wags have been speaking of Holmes as if he were a real person. For some of these people, this belief was purely sincere. Doyle biographer Martin Booth (1997) reports that the British post office had received letters addressed to Holmes until at least 1950. As early as 1890, Doyle marveled that a tobacconist in Philadelphia had written to his editor, J. M. Stoddart, to inquire 'where he could get a copy of the monograph in which Sherlock Holmes described the difference in the ashes of 140 different kinds of tobacco' (Green, 1986: 4). Booth also tells an anecdote of his own which, even if he romanticizes slightly, indicates the widespread and continuing nature of this belief. When Sherlock Holmes came up in conversation at a hotel where Booth was lodging at Naini Tal, in the Himalayan foothills of India,

> 'Ah, yes!' [the proprietor] exclaimed. 'Shur-luck Homes! You know he came to Naini Tal?'

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> 'You mean', I corrected him, 'Arthur Conan Doyle came to Naini Tal?'
> 'No, sahib. It was Shur-luck Homes.'
> When I asked why he had come, the proprietor did not know. It had happened before the war, before he was born. His father had told him about it. (1997: xi)

There is also a lively tradition of intentional 'believers' in the existence of Holmes and Watson. These fans of the stories, popularly called 'Sherlockians', write scholarly articles, squibs, and entire books under the conceit that Holmes and Watson were real people (and sometimes that Sir Arthur Conan Doyle was a fictional one, as well). Michael Saler, who has written about this brand of literary appreciation as a cultural product of modernism, refers to this category of reader as the 'ironic believer', as opposed to the 'naïve believer' represented by the Philadelphia tobacconist (Saler, 2003: 609), and I will adopt his terms throughout this discussion.

Much of the current work on conceptual integration and literary texts involves the detailed analysis of a single interpretation, or reading, of a text in terms of the conceptual integration networks involved in constructing that interpretation. This means that it often sidesteps a phenomenon that reception theorists, reader-response theorists, narratologists, and many practitioners of applied linguistics consider one of the central attributes of textuality: the multiplicity of readings available for a given text, and the way that those readings may be encouraged, discouraged, and conventionalized within a culture or community. The fact that interpretations do differ across communities, individuals, and even a single person's multiple encounters with the same text is an important, verifiable datum about language use as it happens in the world.

This observation is not, in itself, a departure from Fauconnier and Turner's conceptual integration theory as developed in Turner and Fauconnier (1995); Turner (1996); and Fauconnier and Turner (1998, 2000, 2002). Nor is it foreign to the theory of mental models and meaning construction that blending theory incorporates, mental spaces theory (Fauconnier, 1985, 1997). Indeed, one of the key arguments of mental spaces theory is that language underspecifies cognitive structure; that is, any linguistic expression is likely to be compatible with many different mental space configurations. What meanings a hearer or reader constructs in keeping with the relatively slender instructions encoded in a given linguistic prompt may be resolved in part by general pragmatic considerations of discourse coherence, relevance, and so on, and in part by her personal predilections, store of background knowledge, and other idiosyncratic elements particular to her personality and state of mind at the moment she happens to encounter the prompt.

Fauconnier and Turner are careful to mention the potential for variation in the mental space networks that assorted real people might construct in response to the same prompts. For example, in the course of their analysis (2002: 156) of the conceptual mappings prompted by the sentence *Prayer is the echo of the*

darkness of the soul, they point out: '. . .it is up to the imagination to construct an appropriate space. . . and again the imagination may make many different choices, any of which could later be revised'. Yet even they consistently settle on a single one of these potential choices for the sake of their analyses, for the obvious reason that showing individual possible configurations is the best way to illustrate the mechanisms involved in conceptual integration and emphasizing the 'general operations for the construction of meaning that cut across all these levels and make them possible' (2002: 18). But it is important, too, to pay attention to the patterns that emerge when we compare an assortment of different blends that arise in response to the same linguistic prompts.

In order to engage with the phenomenon of manifold readings inspired by the same linguistic form, this article takes a historical view of the conceptual blends involved in a range of different non-canonical interpretations generated by two groups of readers of a single set of texts, the Sherlock Holmes detective stories written by Arthur Conan Doyle. One of these groups is composed of the many diverse readers who have mistakenly read the stories as non-fiction – and whose interpretative experiences are both tantalizingly similar to and yet not identical with the temporary experience of the ordinary reader who is 'lost in a book' as she reads. The other group is the subset of fervent fans of the stories who call themselves 'Sherlockians', who adopt for playful purposes the pretense that they share the first group's misapprehension that Holmes was a historical figure, and Watson his real biographer and author of the tales, and produce a vast quantity of mock-scholarly articles under this conceit.

The Sherlockians comprise a discourse community in the sense proposed by Swales (1990): they have common public goals, they have mechanisms for communication and information exchange among their members, they make use of community-specific genres and specialized terminology, and the group features a high general level of relevant expertise. The former group is not a discourse community in this sense, nor is it a speech community in the sociolinguistic sense used, for example, in Labov (1972). Outside of their common conception of the non-fictional status of the Holmes stories, these readers do not necessarily share any special linguistic or social norms nor do they generally communicate with one another or even know of other people who share their interpretations.

I argue that the history of the Sherlockian stance is an example of what happens when a blend is routinized within a discourse community. In lexical semantics, the routinization of an expression (Haiman, 1994; Traugott and Dasher, 2002; Hopper and Traugott, 2003) is associated with signal simplification and semantic bleaching. For example, the English word 'goodbye' has undergone both kinds of changes since its origins in the phrase *God be with you*. Its form is reduced phonetically, and the meaning has become more abstract; some of the original semantic content of the phrase has been 'bleached' away. Similarly, as the Sherlockian community dedicated to producing and disseminating works that adopt this stance has solidified its institutional status,

the explicit ironies and parodies that were the original raison d'etre of the form have atrophied. As the blend and associated forms become entrenched in the discourse of the community, the ironic dimension of the stance may be de-emphasized or abandoned altogether. The result is parodies in which the object of parody is underspecified or absent, and increasingly earnest iterations of a form with its roots in satire and comedy. These readings invoke a historically ironic frame that has been bleached of much of its ironic meaning.

The analysis begins with a discussion of the conceptual structures involved in naïvely reading these fictional texts as if they were non-fiction, and how these conceptions mirror and diverge from the ways readers become immersed in texts they know to be fiction. Next, I look at the case of the first Sherlockian essays, in which something very like this naïve believer stance emerges independently from a playful and parodic novel blend. Finally, I proceed to analyze the routinized and increasingly sincere approach that pervades contemporary Sherlockian publications as an example of how a complex blend underlying an idiosyncratic reading stance can become conventionalized within a discourse community.

2 Discourse situations and reading stances as conceptual blends

Contemporary theoretical approaches to culture and literature such as post-colonial theory and cultural studies take a particular interest in the way that texts construct their ideal readers, the flip side of the equally common observation that readers in some sense construct all texts. Both of these kinds of construction do take place in the blends that readers enact and texts prompt. On the one hand, the reader has a great deal of agency in constructing meaning in response to the prompts of a text, but the text itself and the reader's repertoire of culturally acquired genres act as a powerful source of pre-defined roles into which the reader inserts herself in the blend.

As language users engage in a discourse, they have a view of several different aspects of the activity in which they are participating. The participants in the discourse, their roles, their relationships to one another, the genre(s) of discourse they are taking themselves to be engaged in, the setting in which the discourse is taking place, and the status of what they can take to be common ground between them are all elements of the discourse situation they understand themselves to be interacting within. These elements of discourse situations exist in the physical world, outside of the minds of the participants – both the physical and the cultural circumstances of a discourse setting[1] are vital components of the participants' experience – but it is in the participants' conceptualizations of those circumstances that they are meaningful as *situations*, and, as with any conceptual content, discourse situations can be framed (Goffman, 1974; Fillmore, 1982) in a variety of different ways.

The classic interactional frames discussed in Goffman (1974) can be thought of as the answers people continually attempt to provide to the question 'what is it

that's going on here?' (1974: 8) – how should I conceptualize the activity I'm taking part in? Should I apply the waiting-for-a-bus frame? The watching-a-horror-movie frame? The testifying-in-court frame? All frames are schematic cognitive structures that organize the perception and representation of reality, and the process of 'framing' specific elements within those schematic frameworks is itself a process of conceptual integration. In a simplex network, the relevant part of a frame in one input space is projected as an organized package of roles, while elements from another input space are projected into the blend where they serve as values of those roles.

And so, among the many other complex blends readers must construct in order to read a book and understand themselves to be reading a book[2], they also construct a blend with a frame for a particular type of discourse situation in one of the inputs, and themselves and the other individuals they will take to be participants in this discourse in another. The way that a reader applies a generic frame to a given discourse and the way she understands the participants in that discourse situation to inhabit the roles in that frame – that is, her deployment of the framing blend – constitutes what I will call her 'discourse stance'. If the organizing frame that the reader invokes for this interpretive act has separate roles for 'author' and 'narrator', for example, her understanding of the participants in the actual discourse situation as it is construed in the resulting blend will differ from the version that would result from a simpler discourse frame in which there is but a single authorial role.

Any of these discourse frames is itself the result of blending the very schematic frame of a basic communicative scene with more constrained roles and relationships particular to one or more communicative genres – genres being a subset of Goffmanian interaction frames specific to communicative events, 'a more or less standardized communicative event with a goal or set of goals mutually understood by the participants in that event and occurring within a functional rather than a social or personal setting' (Swales, 1990: 58). So-called derivative settings, such as jokes, movies, news reports, and dictation, all require multiple nested framings in order to make sense – that is, in Fauconnier and Turner's (2002) terminology, they rely on a 'megablend' of compounded mapping networks. Written narratives are universally complex in terms of the discourse situations they invoke (though some are certainly more complex than others). These can, implicitly or explicitly, involve not just readers, authors, narrators, and characters, but also narratees, implied authors (Booth, 1961) and implied readers (Booth, 1961; Iser, 1978). Similarly, in order to understand rhetorical effects such as irony, allegory, sarcasm, and homage, language-users must be able to appreciate different levels of communicative activity and draw analogies and disanalogies between them.

The simplex blend involved in understanding the author–narrator relationship between Arthur Conan Doyle and Watson is very similar to the blend involved in understanding a dramatic performance on stage. In a play, the person on stage is a blend of one person, the actor, and another, the character who is being

portrayed. The vital relation of representation (Fauconnier and Turner, 2002) links these two entities across the input spaces; the gestures, speech, and movements of the actor represent those of the character. In the blend, this relation is compressed into one of uniqueness; the actor is the character. An integration network that recognizes this relationship allows the viewer to keep multiple different framings in mind: one in which an actor is performing on stage, and another in which the character is performing similar actions within the story world of the play. In the standard, or assumed, reading of texts like the Holmes stories, the author and narrator have a similar relationship. In this reading, cues to the reader such as the byline prompt the construction of a conceptual integration network in which the 'I' of the stories represents the narrator Watson, while the author Doyle, a separate person, performs the part of Watson, much as an actor might perform the part of Hamlet[3]. The Sherlockian stance, to be explored in more detail below, is another such deployment, selected consciously as an alternative to some more 'natural' or 'accurate' approach. So too is the stance of the naïve believer, though in this case the stance does not reflect any deliberate strategy or choice on the reader's part.

3 Naïve believers

Fictions famously 'transport' their readers; we get 'lost in a book', 'discover new worlds', or maybe only 'suspend our disbelief' when we read a compelling story. When we are emotionally engaged with a novel or movie we seem for the time being to behave less and less as if there is any difference between represented events and the real world we experience directly. Recent work in cognitive psychology, neurology, and linguistics suggests that there may well be a concrete physiological basis to this intuition. Research by Tomasello (1992), Gibbs (1994), Richardson et al. (2003), and Barsalou (1993, 1999) among many others indicates that motor and perceptual structures in the mind are activated in language comprehension and production tasks, and that competing motor or visual tasks and language describing motion or related visual content interfere with one another. These results support a 'simulation semantics' view in which producing or understanding language of any kind involves a direct neural simulation of what the words describe. Meanwhile, psychologists such as Dolf Zillmann and collaborators (Zillmann et al., 1975; Zillmann and Cantor, 1977; Zillmann, 1980, 1991, 1994, 1996) suggest that affective responses to fictional narratives, such as the experience of suspense, function by virtue of an empathy that relies on readers' feeling themselves to be participating as direct witnesses in the narrative events they read about. Studies such as Graesser et al. (1999) also suggest that the immersed perspective is foremost in readers' experience: even third-person narrators are generally not nearly as accessible in memory as first-person narrators and non-narrator characters. Clark (1996) addresses this phenomenon from a discourse perspective, saying that the 'topmost' layer of a

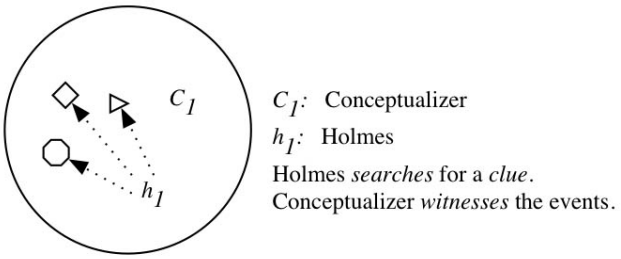

Figure 1 The conceptualizer witnesses an event

complex, multi-level discourse scenario is typically what is in focus; supporting layers are generally latent, and the more successful a piece of fiction, the more fully immersed readers are in the frame associated with the top layer.

And yet the most interesting thing about these phenomena is not merely that they exist – that reading is in fact immersive and that there is a level on which people are demonstrably simulating the experience of witnessing things from the domain of the narrative, sometimes even overriding their direct experience of their own surroundings and experience. The curious thing is that reading is immersive, but also non-immersive. Stories do their trick partially, incompletely, in such a way that the reader is not deluded about the distinction between representation and reality.

Consider a situation in which a person directly witnesses a man named Sherlock Holmes searching a room for clues. Her construal of this scene is organized by conceptual frames for the activities of a *search* and of *detecting*, in which certain objects may have significance as the *object of a search* and a *clue* with respect to the *solution* of some *mystery*. Similarly, it is within these frames that Holmes' particular actions may be understood as *searching* and as a *detective*, and so on. But all of the elements that figure as values for these roles are directly susceptible to the actual senses of our witness, and the scenario may be represented in a single mental space, pictured in Figure 1. In a scenario in which these events are being reported to the conceptualizer by a third party, the relatively simple witnessing scene from Figure 1 emerges again, this time as the result of an imaginative blend. As with any case of understanding representation – for example, recognizing a photograph of myself as 'me' – one input corresponds to the represented events, and the other to the elements representing them. In this case, the latter input is a discourse event in which the conceptualizer is reading or hearing linguistic descriptions of people and events. In the blend, these representational mappings between the represented and the representing are compressed, and elements from the reported events and the real discourse space are projected into a single scene with the emergent structure in which there is a witness to these events, namely the addressee/conceptualizer.

The conceptual content of a blend is that of the entire blending network, not only the contents of the blended space, and so although the bottom line of

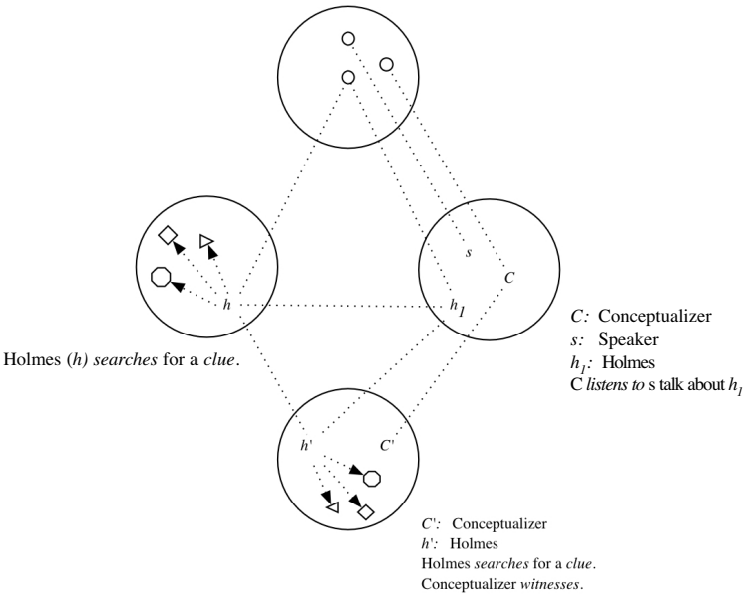

Figure 2 The immersive experience of narrative

running this blend is indistinguishable from the conceptualization in Figure 1, the two are worlds apart. The thinker in the second case is under no overwhelming illusion that she is in the circumstances of the first case. Yet at the same time she is licensed to use the same kind of sentences to refer to the antics in question, and her emotional responses and even the action of her visual cortex will bear a striking resemblance to what they would be if she were in fact witnessing the events that she knows full well she is not. Just as the integration network suggests, the immersive witnessing scenario is neither inaccessible nor unavoidable.

However, this analysis still does not account for the difference between a reader who believes the narrative she is reading refers to real events and the one who believes it is fictional. In some respects, the difference is slight. A person reading the text as a fiction will still allow many kinds of projection from the fictional blend backwards into her conceptions of the world in which it was written and in which it is read. She will likely assume that technical details about diseases, machines, and laws are accurate; she may put the words of a character into the mouth of the author (‘as Robert Frost said, “Good fences make good neighbors”’); she may also assume that author and protagonist share any number of character traits. Yet there is still a substantial difference of kind between her understanding of the book and the understanding of the reader who categorizes it as non-fiction.

In the interpretive experience as shown in Figure 2, the discourse situation is represented very simply: the conceptualizer listens to some speaker describe the actions of one Sherlock Holmes. But as we have seen, this conceptualization of a

discourse situation is itself an act of sophisticated conceptual integration. When we categorize, or frame, a piece of discourse, we have at our disposal all kinds of schematic information that we can use to organize our conceptualization of the elements of that discourse. By recognizing a Sherlock Holmes story as an example of written detective fiction, a reader gets, among other things, a set of roles she will use to structure her understanding of the participants in the discourse involved: not just Watson, but *fictional narrator Watson*, and so on.

The 'naïve believer' of the Sherlock Holmes stories exists in both apocryphal and verifiable forms. On the less empirically supportable side are the reports of this sort of reader in the London *Times*, which tended to attribute these quaint beliefs primarily to foreigners (Green, 1986; Saler, 2003): Turks, Danes, and other people in 'certain backward countries'. These reports have a distinct flavor of the urban legend about them – similar stories crop up many times in different guises, with vague sourcing at best ('we have heard. . .'). While they may be rooted in real incidents, the details of these accounts reveal more about the biases and preoccupations of the cognoscenti than about the naïve believers themselves.

It appears from the existing documentary evidence that the largest source of true naïve believers in the early 20th century, at least, happened to be the ranks of the British working classes, whose literacy and resultant participation in the reading public had been on the rise since the Education Act of 1871. These readers were enthusiastic consumers of the weekly *Tit-Bits*, where publisher George Newnes reprinted the Holmes stories after their publication in his more middlebrow magazine *The Strand*. Sorting fact from fiction in this environment could be more difficult than one might expect. The editorial material surrounding the stories included letters and squibs that referred to Holmes as if he were a real person, or were coy about the question, as in this passage from 1892:

> As a matter of fact we have not made the personal acquaintance of Mr. Sherlock Holmes, but we have read so much of his doings that we have made up our minds that if ever there is a mystery in connection with this office we shall endeavour to find out the whereabouts of Mr. Sherlock Holmes and employ him to investigate it, and if when that time comes we should find that no such person is in existence we shall then be very much disappointed indeed. (Quoted in Green, 1986: 64)

Furthermore, the literary training that many of these readers received failed to outfit them with all or even many of the conventions of fiction. It did, however, frequently equip them with a well-reinforced alternate template for interpretation. While the naïve readers of myth – the conventional, quaintly ignorant figures of fun to be found in the pages of the London *Times* – were simply too dim to make any distinctions between fact and fiction, the historical credulous readers were actively engaged in framing the texts that they read.

The historian Jonathan Rose, who has made a detailed study of the reading habits and intellectual cultures of Great Britain during the 18th and 19th

centuries, reports the ubiquity of these naïve readerly beliefs among working-class adult readers in this period. He cites memoirs and diaries that describe again and again the experience of reading and believing even the most fantastic tales 'as ripping yarns, but also as gospel truth' (2001: 95). There are two important elements to this habit of reading. First, Rose argues, 'there is something powerfully compelling in a new and unfamiliar medium of communication. Its dazzling and novel capacities for transmitting information may so impress an audience that they must learn all over again how it can be manipulated' (2001: 99). The limited range of texts to which these readers were exposed could have a powerful and lasting effect on the way they interpreted new ones. Most importantly, working-class readers in the 19th century, especially those outside of large cities, might easily encounter few books other than the Bible, which they were taught to read as 'gospel' truth, a frame whose entrenchment is evident in linguistic forms like the one in this very sentence. Those other texts that they did encounter during their early reading experiences did not tend to cast doubt on one another's veracity. As a primary and heavily reinforced experience of the reading activity, the 'gospel truth' cultural blend provided a template that many of these readers then applied to the next texts that they encountered, resulting the interpretive patterns that Rose catalogues.

Given the striking similarities between the end results of the naïve believers' interpretive blends and those of their Sherlockian counterparts, one might expect that the latter group was explicitly echoing or mimicking the strategies of the first, such as those outlined above. Michael Saler (2003: 606) suggests that these so-called 'ironic believers' were 'not so much willingly suspending their disbelief in a fictional character as willingly believing in him with the double-minded awareness that they were engaged in pretence'. This characterization would suggest that they were in fact self-consciously enacting the processes that naïve believers performed spontaneously. For Saler, a literary historian making an argument about the way that these strategies illustrate Holmes' importance as a vector for 're-enchant[ing] the modern world' (2003: 616), this description usefully highlights two things: the playfulness of the first Sherlockians, and the way that playfulness is facilitated by various features of the stories themselves that are also perhaps responsible for fooling those readers who end up mistaking them for factual accounts. But as it happens, the development of the Sherlockian stance among its practitioners tells a story in which the historical practices of naïvely credulous readers are marginal at the start, and curiously more and more closely approximated even as direct reference to them becomes increasingly attenuated.

4 The Sherlockian stance: novel and entrenched

Sherlockians are fans of the Holmes stories who have been inspired to come together into an offbeat interpretive community where they collectively and

protractedly treat the characters as real, writing playful and resolutely deadpan essays regarding the 'truth' of various matters described or alluded to in the tales. Aficionados of this literary game are historians of the canon (or Canon, as the works of Arthur Conan Doyle are called in their terminology), and for its purposes pretend that Watson was the living chronicler of the adventures of a living Sherlock Holmes. Doyle is by convention explained away as merely Watson's literary agent, a figure of little consequence.

The task of the Sherlockian is to adopt a mixture of the methods of Sherlock Holmes and those of an academic historian to analyze the stories. Inconsistencies, omissions, and offhand remarks provide the grounds for their investigations, the goal of which is to determine the 'facts' of Holmes' life and related fictional matters. Popular topics include the question of what college Holmes attended, the name and number of Watson's wives, the details of Holmes' drug use, the events of the period during which Holmes was in hiding after the events of 'The Final Problem', and the location of Watson's war-wound. To the uninitiated reader, the resulting essays can be difficult to distinguish from sincere confusion over the veracity of the tales. The final blend in both cases features a Watson and Holmes who live in the real world, where Watson is the author of factual reports about their adventures together, and so on. But the ironic Sherlockian stance involves a different integration network as a whole, with inputs to which the naïve reader has no access.

In 21st-century popular culture, with its multitude of fan communities for all kinds of novels, television shows, comic books, and the like, many of which produce reams of material in a similar mode, this kind of readerly stance is relatively common. In the first half of the 20th century, however, it was far less familiar, and its conventions were quite new. The spectacle of supposedly rational adults engaging in such play was distasteful to many. Edmund Wilson (1967: 290), for example, called it 'infantile', while Clive James (1975: 17–18), who was more jaded about such matters, termed it 'drainingly inconsequential', 'interminable', 'coy' and 'depressing'. But the first Sherlockian essays fit clearly into a genre that was well within the bounds of appropriate behavior for sophisticated readers: the academic parody.

A famous early example, widely cited in today's Sherlockian community as the seminal work in the genre, is Ronald Knox's 1911 lecture 'Studies in the Literature of Sherlock Holmes' (1968), which is widely considered the seminal work in the tradition, though it does not conform to all of the eventual conventions of the form. Knox's essay is primarily a parody of the analytical style it adopts, that of the Biblical 'higher criticism' associated with David Friedrich Strauss, Ferdinand Christian Baur, and Ludwig Feuerbach, among others. This approach to theological criticism sought to apply Hegelian theories of history to biblical criticism, with such goals as determining the sources of, authenticating, or discrediting the various books of the Old and New Testaments. The amusement value of Knox's essay lies largely in the satirical substitution of such a frivolous subject as Sherlock Holmes for such elevated theological objects

of study. While Knox certainly knew his Canon, later Sherlockian writings put far less, if any, emphasis on spoofing the preoccupations and stylistic mannerisms of academic prose, and far more on the particulars of the Holmes texts.

'Studies in the Literature of Sherlock Holmes' presents a novel blend to its audience. In service of its novelty, and in order to coordinate this framing effectively in the common ground between the author and the expected readers, it makes liberal use of explicit signals regarding its ironic status. These are widespread conventional signifiers of what Haiman (1998: 28) calls 'the metamessage "I don't mean this"'. Two kinds of sarcastive markers are particularly prelevant in the Knox article:

(a) *Hyperformality* in the use of formal diction, syntax, and gratuitous scholarly jargon, particularly in contexts highlighting a clash between formality and subject matter: 'To this criticism I assent: I cannot assent, however, to the theory of the deutero-Watson' (1968: 153); 'A more serious question is that of Watson's breakfast-hour.' (1968: 157). Orthographic honorifics fall into this category as well: 'Yet this error gave the original impetus to Backnecke's theory of the Deutero-Watson' (1968: 148).
(b) Represented *intonational exaggeration* in the use of italics and exclamation points in a manner incongruous with the subject matter and the norms of academic discourse: 'As if we had forgotten that it was in a blue dressing-gown that Holmes smoked an ounce of shag tobacco at a sitting, while he unraveled the dark complication of the Man with the Twisted Lip!' (1968: 153).

Knox's methodological preoccupations also work to highlight the parodic and ironic elements of the adopted, proto-Sherlockian stance, by frequently drawing attention to the ways that the expressed content of the article contrasts with elements of the world outside the discourse:

(a) All cited sources are patent fictions, with humorous names and invented quotes: 'thus M. Piff-Pouff represents it as an old dodge of the thaumaturgist. . . In fact, M. Piff-Pouff's verdict is thus expressed: "Sherlockolmes has not at all fallen from the Reichenbach, it is Vatson who has fallen from the pinnacle of his mendacity"' (1968: 150).
(b) The points of dispute – assessing the relative authenticity of different Holmes stories and dating the texts 'so far as it can be determined by internal evidence' (1968: 155) – are selected for their resemblance to the arguments that preoccupy the higher criticism. They are introduced as a pretext for further parodic riffs, rather than raised out of an independent interest in their resolution.

The use of such markers indicates that the sarcastic or parodic aspect of the discourse situation is prominent in the blend as it is invoked here. This is a

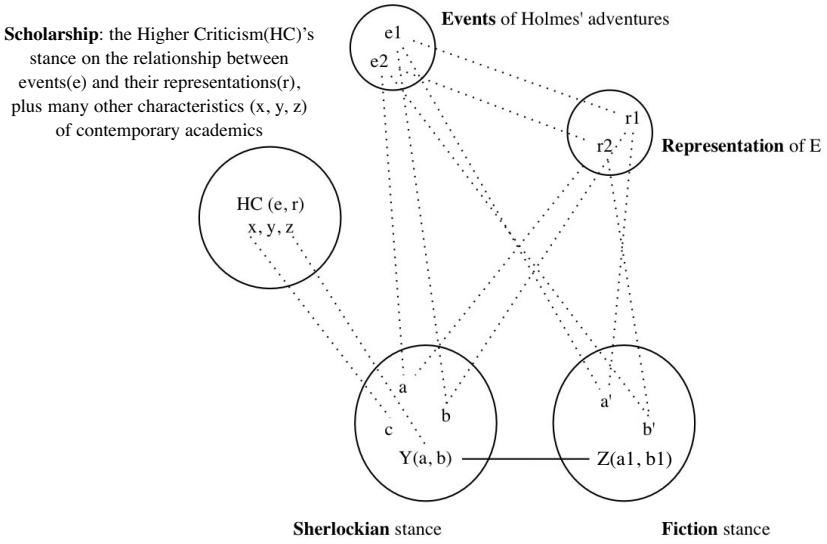

Figure 3 The Sherlockian blend in Knox (1968). Interpretive frames and other rich content are projected from the scholarship input space to create a blend in which the historical status of Holmes with respect to the Conan Doyle texts is humorously contrasted with the standard fiction view. The exaggeration and absurdity in the blend project backward to provide satiric commentary on both the stories and the scholarship.

straightforward and highly productive blend in which one input contains the represented events of the Sherlock Holmes stories, the same input to be found in either a fictional or a non-fictional construal of the tales, as outlined in section 3 of this article. Another input is the domain of serious scholarship current at the time of Knox's writing, including a wealth of detail about the tropes of and participants in particular fields of inquiry within that domain. Importantly, the naïve-believer scenario itself is not one of the inputs to this blend. Instead, the 'believing' stance is part of the emergent structure of the blend, arising from the projection of relationships from the Higher Criticism frame, in which the goal of all commentators is to sift through documents written by the fallible hands of mankind in order to find the true facts of the events described therein. Knox thus plays the part of a stereotypical Higher Critic, and the text of the stories is taken to hold the same problematic relationship to the 'true' represented events. At the same time, the canonical understanding of the stories as fiction must also be available for the sake of recognizing the humorous contrast.

In this blend (see Figure 3), the 'scholarship' input space is rich with detail and contributes prominently to the final blend; analogies and disanalogies with respect to this input are central to the parodic effect. Furthermore, this space and its abundant contents are subject to what Fauconnier and Turner (2002: 49, 308) call *backward projection*. Inferences about various scholarly strategies can be projected onto the original Higher Criticism, its adherents and the institutions

that support them. This kind of projection back onto the input domains contributing to the blend is what enables the kind of social criticism associated with many successful satires – a parody or satire is not merely an amusement in itself but a commentary upon the original.

In later Sherlockian products, however, the blend is both more entrenched and more immersive, so that this element is less overt. More and more references are internal to the extended discourse within the Sherlockian community, and markers of non-seriousness are far less frequent. All of these features point to increasing routinization of the blend. For example, a typical recent article in the *Baker Street Journal*, Darak (2000) focuses on the question of what Holmes got up to in the period between his retirement in 1903 and the publication of 'The Problem of Thor Bridge' in 1922. This subject is not a means of targeting some object of parody, as were the arguments of 'Studies in the Literature of Sherlock Holmes'. Instead, it is more importantly connected to an ongoing discussion of the canonical *fabula* taking place within the Sherlockian community. The author gives credit for competing theories among his fellow Sherlockians, and all citations are of the stories themselves or of other analyses published in the pages of the BSJ.

Furthermore, there are no striking formal indices of non-seriousness in these articles. Compare the patently humorous snippets from Knox above with this characteristic passage from Darak (2000: 29):

> Lellenberg says that Holmes, a well-known amateur, is not the kind of person the British government would be sending out into the enemy's country on a dangerous mission. This ignores the fact that Holmes had already just accomplished a dangerous mission over a long period of time, presumably often working with enemies who would not shrink from killing a spy.

The difference in tone is, I think, evident, and it is characteristic of the shift of attitude that had obtained for this stance over the course of the 20th century. In the routinized blend, the specific and detailed input space referencing many particulars of individual works of serious scholarship, assumed to be common ground between Knox and his readers, is replaced by one populated by the conventions manifest in earlier essays produced within the Sherlockian discourse community. The blend involved now typically involves little more than invoking an unusual but conventional frame for the discourse.

This increasing seriousness, in which the original motivating parodic context for the blend is partially bleached away, makes sense within the history of the increasing institutionalization of the stance and the discourse community where it might be indulged. Originally, the community of Sherlockians was small and intimate, and the earliest Sherlockian essays were published in settings where a sizeable portion of the audience was likely to be unfamiliar with the form. The Knox article was published at Oxford as a one-off spoof; essays by the original small cohort of the Baker Street Irregulars, in the 1930s, were often published in the pages of the Saturday Review of Literature, where the founder of the club,

Christopher Morley, was an editor. Under these circumstances, there was limited opportunity for the stance to get heavily routinized outside of a small circle, continually in the position of enacting it for audiences who would find it novel. The society had only moderate institutional reality. In the 1940s, however, Edgar W. Smith took over the leadership of the Baker Street Irregulars and began the publication of the *Baker Street Journal*, which has been publishing continuously since.[4]

Today there are dozens of societies dedicated to this particular mode of Holmes appreciation. This institutionalization directly supports the entrenchment of the blend; once a discourse community and its interpretive frames are established and reified in this way, there is a pre-existing framework in which all Sherlockian writing makes sense; it doesn't have to be a joke in order to avoid being cast out as an error. For its practitioners, the stance has become unremarkable, and need not be accompanied by any markers of a sarcastic or otherwise unserious attitude on the writer's part; indeed, there is no requirement of facetiousness for current practitioners of the form. The stance can be non-literal without being unserious.

The case of the 'ironic believers' of the Holmes stories illustrates one way that a set of interpretive blends can develop and disseminate through a culture. The texts produced by this community of readers invoke an elaborated integration network in which the organization of the blended space has a great deal in common with the results of the simplex blend described in the stance of the naïve believer, but the decompressions involved in the two interpretive stances are distinctly different. Through its development and refinement within the Sherlockian community, this framing of the stories has undergone a kind of ritualization within the discourse community, with the result that elements of the original blending network have become less accessible and vital as it has been recruited repeatedly over time.

Like the imaginative immersion involved in private reading, these creations of the members of Sherlockian societies such as the Baker Street Irregulars in the USA and the Sherlock Holmes Society in the UK do represent a protracted and elaborated engagement with the text at an 'immersed' level, where the reader's focus is on the story world of the text, rather than the discourse setting in which that world is being represented. However, the Sherlockian stance criterially retains an ironic distance and self-awareness with respect to that immersion. But much as an immersed reader may pay little attention to the foundational layers of the discourse situation associated with, for example, the implied author, today's members of the Baker Street Irregulars do not necessarily focus on the ironic and self-conscious dimension of their Sherlockian adventures. Once the form has been repeated and conventionalized, it becomes closer to ritual. Once again, practitioners of the blend can 'live inside' it. As the expression or enactment of the blend becomes routinized, various formal elements associated with its expression may persist while elements of the blend that originally motivated them are de-emphasized or abandoned entirely.

5 Conclusion

Fauconnier and Turner (2002: 393) write: 'Culture elaborates blends that are complex and hard to discover but relatively easy to manipulate and learn'. Once we have learned a blend, it tends to seem 'simple and inevitable' (2002: 211). The historical examples I have examined here illustrate some of the processes that obtain in the course of the cultural elaboration of blends. On the one hand, these blends can be overextended as people feel their way towards new understandings. The case of the 'naïve readers' demonstrates that the process of fitting new experiences to old frames, with its attendant revisions and shifts in conceptualization, is not always effortless and automatic. Meanwhile, the evolution of the Sherlockian stance demonstrates some ways in which blends are not merely elaborated, but ritualized. These complex frames for discourse structure turn out to have much the same capacity for, and many of the same symptoms of, entrenchment and semantic change as any grammatical construction. I hope, in addition, to have made a case for the notion that cognitive studies and reception history have a great deal to say to one another. The kinds of detailed portraits of historical reading communities and the different reading practices that arise within those communities that reception history can give us make for a rich source of observations about language users in the world. These observations can enrich and challenge the theoretical claims of cognitive science, which in its turn can help to explain the processes that literary historians observe.

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Notes

1 My use of 'setting' in this passage follows Clark (1996: 3–11), which itself draws on Hymes (1974).
2 See Fauconnier and Turner (2002: 210–11) for an overview of the complex and fundamental integration networks humans must master in order to become proficient readers and writers.
3 The circumstances of the Hamlet scenario are of course themselves complicated by the fact that the speaker of Hamlet's lines is not also the author of those utterances. For a classic discussion of the internal structure of the canonical speaker role, see Goffman (1981), particularly pages 144–46.
4 This history of the Baker Street Irregulars is drawn from the society's own collections of personal reminiscences, society artifacts, and letters published in Lellenberg (1990 and 1991).

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