



MOLDING THE IMAGE

William Gillette as Sherlock Holmes

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**MOLDING THE IMAGE:
WILLIAM GILLETTE AS SHERLOCK HOLMES**

an exhibit

illustrative of the profound impact
of the American actor on past and
present conceptions of Sherlock Holmes

from the

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William Hooker Gillette is a major figure in the history of American theater, and he would be remembered today had he never played Sherlock Holmes. Though it is true that the role of the great detective became his most well-known one, and the one upon which he built the major part of his fame and fortune, on balance Gillette contributed more to the Sherlock Holmes legend than he took from it. His influence on his contemporaries' conceptions of Sherlock Holmes was profound, and that influence is still with us today though in more subtle ways.

Gillette was born at Nook Farm on the outskirts of Hartford, Connecticut on July 24th, 1853. The farm and several houses making up this little, insular community had been founded by his father Francis Gillette, a gentleman farmer and reformist politician noted for his championship of abolition, temperance, and public education. On his mother's side Gillette was descended from the Puritan leader the Rev. Thomas Hooker. The Nook Farm area became a literary and intellectual center of sorts, and boasted such illustrious residents as Mark Twain and Harriet Beecher Stowe.

It was something of a shock to his family when Gillette decided, in 1873, to forgo college and enter the professional theater. He had demonstrated considerable talent at oratory, amateur drama, and mechanical invention as a boy, which would serve him well in his chosen occupation, but such a life was considered to be beneath someone of Gillette's genteel background.

Gillette played hundreds of roles in a career which spanned nearly sixty-four years until his death on April 29th, 1937. However, his primary objective was to write, direct, and act in his own plays. Showing a preference for farce and melodrama, he is credited with thirteen original plays, seven adaptations, and several collaborations. His first play was *The Professor* (1881), and among his best known works are *The Private Secretary* (1884), *Held by the Enemy* (1886), *Too Much Johnson* (1894), and *Secret Service* (1896). It was thought at the time that the latter play, a Civil War drama about the Union spy Captain Thorne posing as a newspaper correspondent, Lewis Dumont, would become Gillette's most lasting work. It has been estimated that Gillette made well over \$3 million from the theater, most of it in royalties from his own plays.

Gillette is credited with several more general contributions to the American theater. He helped make it an acceptable form of entertainment for both the rising middle class and his own sort of people, owing to his personal involvement. He played an important part in the movement toward realism through devising a number of clever devices to manipulate lighting, sound, and scenery. Perhaps even more important for achieving a realistic effect was his characteristic way of delivering his lines, which he came to call "The Illusion of the First Time in Acting." Through a series of pauses and other rhetorical tricks, he created the impression that he was saying his lines for the first time on each occasion he enacted the part, instead of reciting a memorized speech. Even so, Gillette would never let anyone forget whom they were watching. He was well aware of his strong stage presence, and would incorporate long scenes of pantomime in his plays to demonstrate his hold over an audience.



Gillette as Captain Thorne
in *Secret Service*.



Through the production of various of his plays in New York, Gillette came into association with Charles Frohman, a rising young producer making a name for himself by exporting successful American plays to England and bringing the hits of the British stage to the United States. Several of Gillette's plays had already been sent over with varying success when, in May 1897, Gillette himself first appeared on the London stage at the Adelphi Theatre in *Secret Service*. The play was warmly received, and Gillette was lionized by London society while helping to dispel the then current British prejudice against American plays. Gillette was already a leading star of the American stage, with a newly established international reputation, when Sherlock Holmes entered his life.

Conan Doyle, meanwhile, thought Holmes was out of *his* life. In Doyle's 1893 short story "The Final Problem," Holmes was said to have plunged to his death at the bottom of the Reichenbach Falls in the grip of his nemesis, Professor Moriarty. By 1897, in need of money for a new house, Doyle was having second thoughts; he decided not to bring the character back to life, but rather to feature him in a play. He offered the play to Beerbohm Tree, who liked it but wanted to alter it to conform to his personal idiosyncracies. Doyle still had sufficient respect for the integrity of Holmes to reject these proposals, and began to have doubts about putting the character on the stage at all. But the play was sent by A.P. Watt, Doyle's literary agent, to Charles Frohman, to whom somebody had already suggested that a Sherlock Holmes play might be done featuring Gillette.

According to contemporary newspaper accounts, Doyle had seen Gillette in *Secret Service* and thought that the actor would make the perfect stage realization of Holmes. Regardless of the truth of this statement, Frohman did manage to secure the dramatic rights to Holmes while visiting England, and sent the project to Gillette back in the United States. Gillette, too, wanted to make some changes, the most important of which was the introduction of a love interest in the play for Holmes. This time Doyle was more cooperative, and recalled in his autobiography that when Gillette cabled the request, "May I marry Holmes?" he wired back, "You may marry or murder or do what you like with him."

Gillette got to work on the script while in San Francisco for an engagement in *Secret Service*. The play was primarily based on two of Doyle's stories, "A Scandal in Bohemia" and "The Final Problem," but also included elements from others such as *A Study in Scarlet*, *The Sign of the Four*, and "The Adventure of the Greek Interpreter." The only copy of the first version of Gillette's script was destroyed in a fire, but he quickly rewrote it from memory. Doyle's own manuscript has not survived, and today it is not known how much of his original play may be reflected in Gillette's. Gillette brought the play, which now bore the full title *Sherlock Holmes: Being a Hitherto Unpublished Episode in the Career of the Great Detective and Showing His Connection with the Strange Case of Miss Faulkner*, to England in May 1899 to



Gillette as Sherlock Holmes.

show to Doyle. This was their first meeting, and Doyle was so impressed by Gillette's personal appearance and gentlemanly bearing that he approved the play. It was thus given a copyright performance at the Duke of York's Theatre in London on June 12th, 1899 and Gillette returned to the United States to begin work on the American production.

After tryouts in Buffalo, Rochester, Syracuse, Scranton, and Wilkes-Barre *Sherlock Holmes* opened at the Garrick Theatre in New York on November 6th, 1899. The play was a hit from the first, and Doyle was cabled about the "splendid success" in which "Gillette scored success of his career." Especially noted was the Stepney gas chamber scene in which Holmes smashes the only lamp with a chair, plunging the theater into total darkness. The play closed at the Garrick after 256 performances on June 16th, 1900, and Gillette toured the eastern part of the country with it between October 8th of that year and March 30th, 1901. Another company, with Cuyler Hastings as Holmes, had begun a tour on September 24th, 1900 generally restricted to the smaller cities that Gillette had missed. Hastings, who was subsequently to play the role in Australia, took over Gillette's company at the end of March 1901, while Gillette began to prepare for the British production.

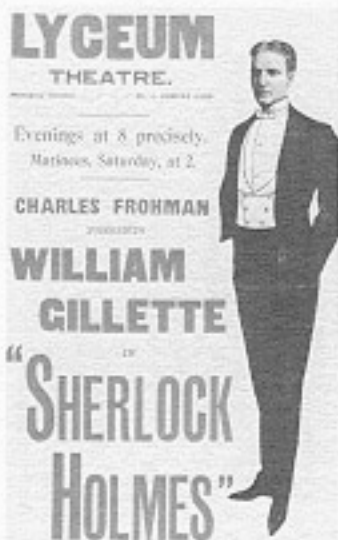
Sherlock Holmes was previewed in Liverpool the week of September 2nd-8th, 1901 before moving on to the Lyceum Theatre in London on September 9th. Despite an initially cool reception from the critics, it was a huge popular success, and the initial twelve-week run was extended to a full season, the play closing after 216 performances on April 12th, 1902. Gillette then toured the principal cities of northern England, Scotland, and Ireland, returning for one last performance in Liverpool on May 26th before going back to the United States.

By this time, four other touring companies were presenting *Sherlock Holmes* in the British provinces. It was in Charles Frohman's North Company, when it began its second tour in July 1903, that Charles Chaplin got one of his first legitimate engagements of any kind: he was given the role of Billy, and would later remember with gratitude this initial step away from the crushing poverty of his childhood. These and other touring companies kept the play in circulation throughout England, with few breaks, for the next three decades: the thousands of performances which this must have entailed attests to its enormous success.

Among the actors who became associated with the role of Holmes during these tours two stand out. H. A. Saintsbury (who had given Chaplin his job in Frohman's North Company) performed the title role in Gillette's play 936 times between March 1902 and June 1905, and toured in the drama again in 1929. He also starred as Holmes in Conan Doyle's own very popular play *The Speckled Band* (first produced in 1910, with subsequent tours and revivals), and in 1916 appeared in a *Sherlock Holmes* film. Saintsbury was the only actor who could ever challenge seriously Gillette's position as the supreme portrayer of Holmes on the stage, though his fame was limited to England. H. Hamilton Stewart had appeared in the part of James Larrabee in a 1902 Australian production of *Sherlock Holmes*, but between September 1906 and 1918 took the part of Holmes as he toured with the play in his own company. It is estimated that he performed the role 2,000 times, far more even than Gillette, but since these tours



Program for the first performance of *Sherlock Holmes*.



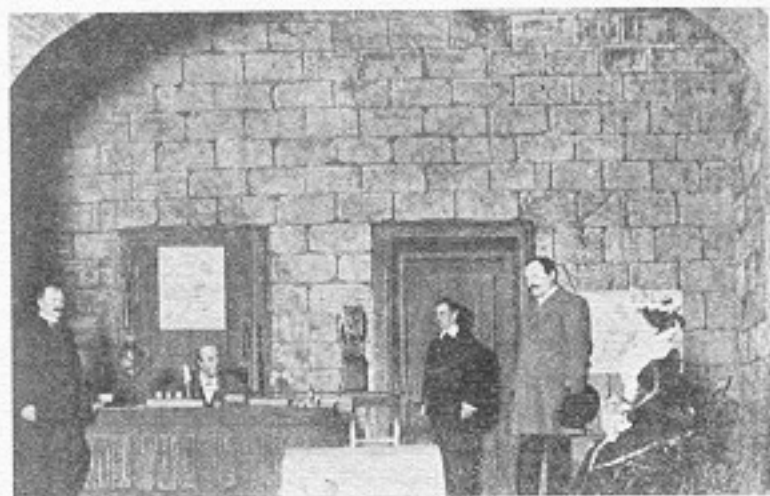
Poster for the run of *Sherlock Holmes* at the Lyceum Theatre in London.

were limited to the provinces he is little remembered today.

Back in the United States, Gillette toured in the play for the 1902-1903 season, as did other companies with various actors in the role of Holmes. Foreign productions were mounted as well, some of them unauthorized. The Danish author Walter Christmas had seen the play in New York and when he found Frohman's asking price for the rights too high he took notes on his cuff during several performances and wrote his own version. This premiered in Copenhagen on December 26th, 1901 and ran for five months, then was kept in the theater's repertoire for three years. The Christmas version was later translated into Swedish and on one night in 1902 was performed simultaneously in three different Stockholm theaters. These productions tended to diminish the impact of the legitimate version of the play when it did arrive. To publicize the 1904-1905 season of the play, Frohman issued an elaborate postcard including a record of the number of performances it had enjoyed through June 25th, 1904: 880 by Gillette, 769 by other companies in America, 1,306 in England, 168 in Holland, 204 in Sweden, 130 in Russia, 198 in Belgium, 102 in Austria, 95 in Denmark, 204 in South Africa, and 401 in Australia. It is not clear if these figures included the unauthorized versions.



Holmes (Firmin Gémier) confronts Moriarty (Harry Baur) in Decourcelle's French version of *Sherlock Holmes*.



1902 postcard with a scene from the Dutch production of *Sherlock Holmes*.

This card was issued too early to take account of one of the most successful foreign productions, an adaptation (with one act added based on Doyle's short story "The Adventure of the Empty House") done by Pierre Decourcelle in 1907. First produced at the Théâtre Antoine in Paris on December 20th, 1907, it ran for 335 performances and was one of the greatest triumphs in the career of the French actor Firmin Gémier, who played Holmes. Though details are sketchy on these various foreign productions and adaptations, whether authorized or not, it is evident that the play was nearly as successful in foreign lands as it was in England and the United States, with new productions and revivals appearing for years.



Throughout the early productions of *Sherlock Holmes*, Gillette and his play had caught the fancy of the press. The actor became a favorite subject of caricaturists, and photographs of him and prominent members of his cast were widely published. The Gillette image was kept current through the issue of souvenir post cards and elaborate programs for the play.

Less agreeable to Gillette were some other indications of the melodrama's popularity. Charles Frohman's lawyers were kept busy on both sides of the Atlantic in attempts, which sometimes failed, to quash the various burlesques of the play, as well as unrelated plays which attempted to capitalize on its success by using the name "Sherlock Holmes" in their titles. Among the earliest and most successful of these was one written by two English drama critics, Malcolm Watson and Edward F. Spence, the latter under his pseudonym Edward La Serre. Their *Sheerluck Jones: or, Why D'Gillette Him Off* ran at Terry's Theatre in London between October 29th, 1901 and February 1st, 1902, and then was pirated itself for a tour of the provinces. Clarence Blakiston as Jones was said to bear a remarkable resemblance to Gillette, and able to imitate him quite well. Writing in 1930, Spence recalled that some parts of the stage business in *Sherlock Holmes* at the Lyceum had to be altered because people who had already seen it geyed in *Sheerluck Jones* would laugh at it.



Clarence Blakiston as Sheerluck Jones.

More trouble was caused in January 1902 when John Lawson's *An Adventure in the Life of Sherlock Holmes: a Sketch in Two Episodes* began to make the rounds of the London music halls, even though Lawson advertised in his playbill that the sketch was "not from the Lyceum Theatre." Some accommodation was apparently reached, for in May of that year Lawson was presenting an expanded version of the sketch which even included a humorous version of the famous gas chamber scene in the Gillette play.

Nor did the Gillette play escape similar treatment in the United States. Clay M. Greene wrote two burlesques of it, *The Remarkable Pipe Dream of Mr. Shylock Holmes* and *Surelock Holmes*, which were performed in New York in 1900 and 1902 respectively. Fred A. Stone and David Montgomery enacted a

parody of a Gillette scene in *The Red Mill*, a musical play by Henry Blossom and Victor Herbert, which ran for three seasons, starting in 1906.

There were other lampoons and sketches, and it is likely that our record of them is incomplete. Gillette himself was responsible for one of the weakest of these burlesques. In 1905, while appearing in a revival of *Sherlock Holmes* and several of his other plays at the Empire Theatre in New York, he wrote a brief sketch which was first given as part of two benefit performances. Known under the alternate titles of *The Fearful*, *The Harrowing*, and *The Painful Predicament of Sherlock Holmes*, the skit concerns a young woman who visits Baker Street uninvited, and proceeds to nearly demolish the apartment while babbling a nonstop stream of nonsense. Gillette as Holmes does not utter a word throughout, but instead scribbles a note which Billy takes away, to return with two uniformed attendants who take the young woman back to the asylum from which Holmes had correctly deduced she had escaped. Gillette used the skit again as a curtain raiser for his sentimental drama *Clarice* which appeared in London in September and October 1905, with Chaplin called in again to play Billy. *Clarice* was a failure at the box office, so Gillette revived *Sherlock Holmes* to take its place, keeping Chaplin on as Billy.



It is not known how prominent a factor the success of the Gillette play was in persuading Doyle to revive Sherlock Holmes once and for all. He had already relented to some extent with his *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, which began serialization in *The Strand Magazine* in 1901, but this was described as having occurred before Holmes's supposed death. However, princely offers from the American publisher P.F. Collier and his English counterpart George Newnes of *The Strand Magazine* are generally credited with turning the tide, and surely they were watching the reception of the play closely.

The revival brought about what may have been Gillette's most significant contribution to the Sherlock Holmes legend: he gave his face to Holmes and, to a lesser extent, showed us how he should dress as well. When the thirteen stories making up the series known as *The Return of Sherlock Holmes* began to appear in the American periodical *Collier's Weekly Magazine* in 1903, the artist Frederic Dorr Steele was commissioned to do the illustrations. Steele has put on record that he realized Gillette had become the accepted image of Holmes, and said that though he did not see the play himself until 1905 he used stage photographs of Gillette as his model. Steele is particularly known for the striking covers he drew for the *Return* series in *Collier's*, several of which are virtually identical to photographs of Gillette. Steele supplied illustrations for most of the subsequent Sherlock Holmes stories in their initial American periodical appearances, and his work was reprinted in newspapers and even in translations, thereby extending the Gillette image as Holmes to millions. The artist's association with Gillette and Holmes was to continue for some years: he did some of the publicity work for Gillette's

Collier's

Household Number for January



Stage photograph of Gillette as Holmes and Steele's rendition of it for *Collier's*.

farewell tour in *Sherlock Holmes*, provided illustrations for the first trade edition of the play, had his work included in later book editions of the Holmes stories, and supplied representations of a Gillette-like Holmes for some of the early publications of the Baker Street Irregulars.

The influence of Gillette and Steele has been traced to other early American illustrators, and Steele himself has suggested that some of the English artists too may have been affected. But Gillette's lasting impact on illustrators may be more subtle. The English artist Sidney Paget had introduced the deerstalker cap in the 1890s, but it was seldom a prominent aspect of his illustrations; Gillette adopted it as a regular part of his stage costume, with Steele and many of the artists who followed him making it standard. The garish dressing gown was another Gillette trademark, and though well established before Gillette, none wore it so well or did more to impress it upon the public consciousness. It is a stage legend that Gillette adopted a curved pipe while playing Holmes, instead of using one of the straight pipes described by Doyle, so as not to obscure his handsome profile. The reason may be apocryphal, but such pipes are now the most recognizable part of Holmes's smoking apparatus. Gillette also helped popularize other of Holmes's attributes, such as taking cocaine and playing the violin, and these too became integral parts of the modern conception of Holmes, influencing artists and actors alike. Many artists today draw Sherlock Holmes little realizing that they owe as much, if not more, to William Gillette as to Conan Doyle.

The various reprint editions of the Sherlock Holmes books published during the early productions of the play also reflected the Gillette influence. In England, George Newnes issued a Souvenir Edition of three of the Holmes volumes; it is not known precisely what this edition was meant to commemorate, but Newnes did take advantage of the play's run at the Lyceum by advertising the books in the playbill. Several of the Sherlock Holmes stories had first been published before international copyright and could be reprinted at will in the United States; a number of such volumes appeared using photographs of Gillette and scenes from his play as illustrations. P.F. Collier & Son had retained the rights to the Steele illustrations, and would use these and photographs of Gillette in their various editions of the Holmes tales.

As Gillette's career progressed, he found *Sherlock Holmes* to be his most enduring play. Among intermittent productions by other companies, he revived the play for runs of varying length in 1905, 1906, 1910, 1915, and 1923. In 1929, at the age of seventy-six, he was persuaded to come out of retirement for a "Farewell to the Stage" tour in his most beloved role. The tour began in Springfield, Massachusetts on November 15th, 1929, and though originally planned only for the 1929-1930 season, the demand was such that it was extended (with breaks) until March 19th, 1932, the final performance given in Wilmington, Delaware. Gillette would occasionally complain of unresponsive houses, but the tour as a whole has been accurately described as a "royal progress." After more than 1,300 performances as Holmes, Gillette was an institution beyond criticism.

A highlight of the tour was the celebration surrounding the first night of its run at the New Amsterdam Theatre in New York on November 25th, 1929. During the ceremony, Gillette was



Reprint edition of Sherlock Holmes stories, illustrated with scenes from the play.



Steele poster for the farewell tour of *Sherlock Holmes*.



Gillette with Peg Entwistle as Alice Faulkner in the farewell tour of *Sherlock Holmes*.

presented with a volume in which were bound congratulatory letters from some sixty eminent persons. In his tribute, Doyle called Gillette's return in *Sherlock Holmes* a "source of personal gratification," and said that his only complaint was that Gillette made "the poor hero of the anaemic printed page a very limp object as compared with the glamour of your own personality which you infuse into his stage presentment." Former president Calvin Coolidge referred to the revival as "a real public service." The most eloquent and frequently quoted tribute was that of Booth Tarkington who said: "Your return to the stage is a noble and delightful event, and speaking for myself, I would rather see you play Sherlock Holmes than be a child again on Christmas morning."



There have been several adaptations of the Gillette play for the movies and radio. Gillette himself starred in the first of these in 1916, a seven-reel silent film produced by the Essanay Film Manufacturing Co. The film is now lost, and known only from contemporary reviews and surviving stills. Six years later, Goldwyn Pictures released another silent film version; its *Sherlock Holmes*, which starred John Barrymore, also included some non-Gillette scenes about Holmes's early life in college. At a chance meeting after the film was finished, Barrymore greatly pleased Frederic Dorr Steele by telling him that they had used Steele's illustrations to guide them on the sets. This film, unavailable for years, has recently been restored. A film version even further afield from the original play came from the Fox Film Corp. in 1932 with Clive Brooks as Holmes; in addition to Gillette, the movie drew upon "The Red-Headed League," Doyle's own play *The Speckled Band*, and included a number of original elements.



Capture of Moriarty from the 1916 silent film version of *Sherlock Holmes*.

On November 18th, 1935 Gillette was heard in a fifty-minute radio dramatization of "Sherlock Holmes," adapted by Edith Meiser and broadcast over WABC in New York as part of the Lux Radio Theatre. A reviewer in *The New York Times* remarked that Gillette, though eighty-two at the time, was still a master at the role; all the old nuances were there and he even improvised from time to time. Earlier, on October 20th, 1930, Gillette had made history by doing the first radio dramatization of a Holmes tale, for which Meiser had also done the adaptation: "The Adventure of the Speckled Band" was broadcast over WEAJ-NBC in New York, and was used by the sponsoring G. Washington Coffee Co. to usher in three seasons of Sherlockian radio plays starring Richard Gordon and Leigh Lovell as Holmes and Watson. Meiser wrote hundreds of scripts for this series and several others featuring different actors, and had a distinguished acting career of her own in the theater.

Another radio adaptation of the play was done by Orson Welles and his The Mercury Theatre on the Air on September 25th, 1938. In a pre-performance speech, Welles paid tribute to Gillette, and consciously tried to imitate Gillette's manner of speaking during his own portrayal of Holmes. Still another version, adapted by Raymond Raikes and starring Carleton Hobbs as Holmes and Norman Shelly as Watson, was first broadcast over the BBC Home Service on January 3rd, 1953. Hobbs and Shelly were already veterans of Sherlockian radio plays, and did many more of them in the years which followed. Raikes also adapted several scenes from the play for inclusion as part of the first experimental stereophonic program broadcast over the BBC on November 15th, 1958; Gillette's *Sherlock Holmes*, or at least part of it, thus became the first radio drama to be broadcast in stereo in England.

Following Gillette's death in 1937, interest in his play diminished, though there was the occasional production, for the most part in small college or community theaters. All that changed in 1974 when the Royal Shakespeare Company revived the melodrama, in perhaps its most lavish production to date. The revival of the play, substantially intact, was a prominent part of the so-called "Sherlock Holmes boom" of the 1970s, though as cause or effect it would be difficult to say. It ran in England between January 1st and August 31st, 1974, with John Wood well received in the role of Holmes. Its American premier was at the Eisenhower Theatre in Kennedy Center on October 7th, 1974; after four weeks there it moved on for a run of 471 performances at New York's Broadhurst Theater between November 12th, 1974 and January 4th, 1976. During this run the part of Holmes was taken over by Patrick Horgan, John Neville, and finally Robert Stephens, as the cast of the RSC withdrew to be replaced by various American actors. With Stephens and the American cast the play moved on to the O'Keefe Centre in Toronto for the rest of January, before touring some of the larger cities in America between February and June with Leonard Nimoy playing Holmes. A production derived from that of the Royal Shakespeare Company, under the management of the Columbia Artists Theatrical Corp., then toured other parts of the country between December 31st, 1976 and May 3rd, 1977, this time with John Michalski as Holmes.

The attention generated by this revival and its associated tours



John Wood as Sherlock Holmes from the 1974 revival.

has given the play new life, particularly in the United States, and a number of productions have been mounted since in a variety of theaters and as part of theater festivals. The trend is likely to continue. Gillette's drama even entered the modern video age in a production done especially for Home Box Office and first broadcast by them in November 1981, with several repetitions since. Frank Langella starred as Holmes (he had appeared on the stage in the role also, in 1977 during the Williamstown Theatre Festival), and with continued rebroadcasts this production may prove to be the most widely seen of them all.

It would be all but impossible to assess the impact of Gillette and his play on subsequent portrayals of Holmes on the stage, or, for that matter, on film or radio. There are, however, several plays which owe a clear debt to Gillette. Two people have adapted the play so that it might be produced by modest sized casts and companies. G. W. Oakley's *Sherlock Holmes* (1976) has been performed in Colorado and St. Louis. Tim Kelly has several Sherlockian plays to his credit: his version of the Gillette play, also entitled *Sherlock Holmes*, was published in 1977, and was performed by the Anchorage Children's Theatre in Kentucky in February 1980.

Several other playwrights have written substantially new plays, while using some of the characters and situations of the Gillette drama. Among the most notable of these is that of Minneapolis playwright John Fenn whose *Sherlock Holmes and the Affair of the Amorous Regent* was first produced at the Theatre-in-the-Round in Minneapolis in July 1972. Fenn substituted Irene Adler for Alice Faulkner, and emphasized the game-like aspects of the conflict between Holmes and Moriarty. The play was revived at the Theatre-in-the-Round in February 1983, after productions in several small theaters throughout the country.

Others which might be mentioned include Thomas Hinton's *Sherlock Holmes: a New Adventure*, which has enjoyed several productions since 1973; despite the title it is partly Gillette. Ken Letner's *Sherlock Holmes in Scandal in Bohemia* (performed at the Virginia Museum Theatre, November 14th-29th, 1975) also has a somewhat deceptive title, for it includes as characters Moriarty and Gillette's own Craigin. More tenuous connections can be traced to Gene Mackey's *Sherlock Holmes* (1978), John Charles Nassivera's *The Penultimate Problem of Sherlock Holmes* (1978), and Ronald Newcomer's *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*, (1975), all of which follow Gillette by combining elements of "A Scandal in Bohemia" and "The Final Problem," though the second two introduce characters from other Sherlock Holmes stories as well.

Most lavish of the plays which may be said to fall within the Gillette tradition of merging the plots of "A Scandal in Bohemia" and "The Final Problem" is Jerome Coopersmith, Marian Grudeff, and Raymond Jessel's *Baker Street: a Musical Adventure of Sherlock Holmes*, which had over 300 performances in Boston, Toronto, and New York in 1964 and 1965. The most expensive Sherlock Holmes play produced up to that time, it lost money despite initial box office records and an excellent score and lyrics when a waning interest was not enough to sustain it. In the early 1970s it was produced on a much smaller scale in various community theaters.



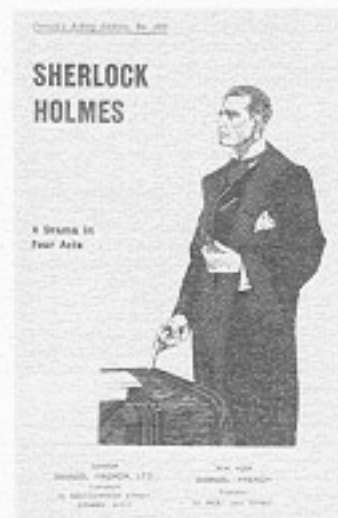
Program for the original production of John Fenn's play.



Sherlockians, of course, have done their part to keep the memory of Gillette green. The actor was invited to the second official meeting of the Baker Street Irregulars on December 7th, 1934 as recalled by a slightly inebriated Vincent Starrett: "I snoozed gently between [Christopher] Morley and Frederic Dorr Steele . . . until perhaps nine. At that time there was a commotion in the corridor and I came out of my coma with what novelists describe as a start. The door was flung swiftly open and in the aperture stood Sherlock Holmes himself. . . . It was Gillette of course, and when the uproar had died away the dinner went forward as planned." And every year since 1954, the William Gillette Memorial Luncheon has been held in New York on the same day as the annual Baker Street Irregulars' birthday celebration for Sherlock Holmes.

Gillette and his work have even been the subjects of fiction. In 1902, while the play was being produced in Amsterdam, the Dutch writer Owen Glens adapted it into a novel with the title *Sherlock Holmes in Doodsgevaar* (Sherlock Holmes in Peril of Death). Part of Edith Kellogg Dunton's *Betty Wales, Freshman* (1904), one of a series of girls books about the plucky college student and her tedious friends, describes an all-female production of *Sherlock Holmes*. Much more recently, Miriam Lynch used as the central character in her gothic novel *Creighton's Castle* (1975) a famous actor who had made his name playing Sherlock Holmes, obviously patterned after Gillette. On a higher plane than these examples, and in the form most suitable to Gillette, is Kenneth Ludwig's new play *Dramatic License* which received its initial production at the American Stage Festival in Milford, New Hampshire, July 5th-16th, 1983. The play is set in the living room of Gillette Castle in 1922, where Gillette has invited the cast of his play for a weekend holiday which turns into a mystery concerning a number of attempts on his life.

Gillette was a firm believer that a play should be seen and not read, but some mention should be made of the various editions of his *Sherlock Holmes* which have been issued over the years. The play was first published in an acting edition by Samuel French in 1922, based on the revised version of the drama which had been prepared for its revival in 1923. This version forms the basis of the play's text as included in Jack Tracy's compilation *Sherlock Holmes: the Published Apocrypha* (1980). A trade edition of the play was published in 1935 by Doubleday, Doran & Co., based on a collation of the varying texts by Vincent Starrett and introduced by him, including also a depreciatory preface by William Gillette, and "Reminiscent Notes" and several illustrations by Frederic Dorr Steele. A facsimile of this edition was issued by Helan Halbach in 1974 limited to 1,000 copies, the first 250 of which were numbered and included an extra set of Steele illustrations. The play was also included in the collection compiled by Van H. Cartmell and Bennett Cerf, *Famous Plays of Crime and Detection: from Sherlock Holmes to Angel Street* (1946). The text for the 1974 revival of *Sherlock Holmes* is now available from French, in a 1977 trade edition from Doubleday & Co., and was included in volume 44 of *Plays of the Year* (1975) edited by J.C.



First edition of *Sherlock Holmes*, published by Samuel French in 1922.

Trewin. *The Painful Predicament of Sherlock Holmes* was first published in a limited edition by Ben Abramson of Chicago in 1955, and also can be found in Tracy's *The Published Apocrypha* and in another compilation assembled by Peter Haining, *The Final Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* (1981).



Gillette Castle.

Gillette has been fittingly memorialized in the area in which he was born and grew up, and there are several institutions with resources for the study of his life and career. In 1938, the Connecticut State Park and Forest Commission took over Seventh Sister, the house Gillette had built after the pattern of a medieval Rhenish fortress and filled with memorabilia and clever mechanizations of his own invention. Located at Hadlyme, Connecticut it, along with the 115 acres within which it stands, has been renamed Gillette Castle State Park, and is maintained as a permanent Gillette museum and recreational area, attracting nearly one hundred thousand visitors annually.

The largest collection of Gillette letters, scripts, and photographs (including many relating to *Sherlock Holmes*) can be found in The Stowe-Day Library in Hartford. The Library was founded under the auspices of The Stowe-Day Foundation to preserve the collections of Gillette and other notable Nook Farm residents, and it has since expanded its scope to embrace broader aspects of nineteenth-century Americana. Between October 16th, 1970 and January 31st, 1971 the foundation sponsored a major William Gillette exhibit at the Nook Farm Visitors' Center and published a catalog, *The Curtain is Up on the William Gillette Exhibit*.

Other important Gillette-related holdings are in the Connecticut Historical Society, the Connecticut State Library, the Museum of the City of New York, the Theatre Collection at Lincoln Center and the Berg Collection of the New York Public Library, the Arthur and Elizabeth Schlesinger Library on the History of Woman in America at Radcliffe College, and in the Enthoven Theatre Collection of the Victoria and Albert Museum in London. It is likely that other institutions have significant Gillette resources which have yet to be adequately exploited, and a number of such materials are still held by private individuals.

The Gillette materials in the Hench Collection of the University of Minnesota Library are relatively small in number but distinguished. They are particularly strong for the play *Sherlock Holmes* and include Gillette's personal scrapbooks tracing the earliest productions and tours of the play, playbills and programs, photographs and memorabilia, and a collection of stills from the lost 1916 silent-film version of the drama.

William Gillette and his career have been extensively, if unevenly treated by scholars and journalists. There were numerous articles printed about him during his lifetime, which are still useful today though occasionally inaccurate, repetitive, or adulatory in nature. Information on Gillette can be found in many of the standard histories and reference works relating to the American theater, and in recent years several articles about the actor have

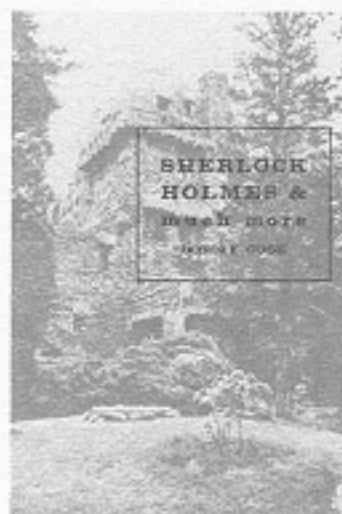
appeared in the scholarly journals of the field. Gillette has been the subject of theses and dissertations as well, including H. Dennis Sherk's "William Gillette: His Life and Works" (1961), Catherine Maxwell Mark's "William Gillette and the Stage of Enterprise" (1974), and Charles Bernard LaBorde's "Sherlock Holmes on the Stage" (1973), this latter work placing Gillette within the context of other portrayals of Holmes before the footlights. Sherk is now expanding his dissertation into a full-length biography. Another short but excellent biography by Doris E. Cook, *Sherlock Holmes and Much More*, was published in 1970. An entertaining summary of Gillette's association with the great detective is provided by Fred Van Name's *William Gillette... as Sherlock Holmes: a Master Craftsman in His Greatest Role* (1972).

Sherlockians have contributed a great deal to this scholarship. Prominent among their works have been the several articles by the distinguished Gillette collectors James Keddie, Jr., and the late P.M. Stone. Michael Pointer's *The Public Life of Sherlock Holmes* (1975) includes a good chapter on Gillette and extensive information about various productions, adaptations, and burlesques of his play. Walter Klinefelter, in his *Sherlock Holmes in Portrait and Profile* (1963; reprt. 1975), discusses Gillette's influence on the iconographic tradition of Holmes as represented by Steele and other artists. Among the various histories of Sherlock Holmes films, Robert W. Pohle and Douglas C. Hart's *Sherlock Holmes on the Screen* (1977) contains the most satisfactory chapters on the movie versions of the Gillette play; Chris Steinbrunner and Norman Michaels's *The Films of Sherlock Holmes* (1978) is also invaluable. Pointer's *The Sherlock Holmes File* (1976) furnishes additional insight into Gillette's impact on the conceptualizations of Holmes in the various visual media. A number of interesting photographs of and articles about Gillette are reprinted in Bill Blackbeard's 1981 compilation *Sherlock Holmes in America*, which also includes a generous selection of beautifully reproduced Frederic Dorr Steele illustrations (including all those the artist did for *The Return of Sherlock Holmes* series in *Collier's*). The issue of *Baker Street Miscellanea* for Spring 1982 was devoted to Gillette, and contains several useful articles.

Listings for much of this scholarship, whether in Sherlockian or in more general publications, can be found in Ronald De Waal's two bibliographies: *The World Bibliography of Sherlock Holmes and Doctor Watson* (1974), and *The International Sherlock Holmes* (1980). De Waal also supplies comprehensive information about the numerous productions, adaptations, and burlesques of *Sherlock Holmes*, as well as particulars for the various plays derived from it. Both of De Waal's bibliographies and many of these books and articles are available for consultation in the Hensch Collection, Special Collections and Rare Books, University of Minnesota Library.

The materials displayed in this exhibit have been selected from the Mary Kahler and Philip S. Hensch Arthur Conan Doyle Collection, which was donated to the University of Minnesota Library by Mary Kahler Hensch in December 1978. This, combined with the smaller James C. Iraldi Collection purchased by the Library in 1974, now constitutes the largest institutional Arthur Conan Doyle and Sherlock Holmes collection in the United States.

Gillette's play is, by a wide margin, the most frequently



Doris E. Cook's biography of Gillette.

performed of all the numerous Sherlock Holmes dramas. Phenomenally successful in its day, it has returned to entrance a new generation of theater goers. Gillette's influence on subsequent portrayers of Holmes, and on playwrights who tried their hands at putting the great detective on the stage, is beyond measure. He determined, in the United States at least, the way we came to think Sherlock Holmes *should* look and act, regardless of what Arthur Conan Doyle's original conception of the character may have been.

Gillette is gone in the flesh, but his spirit pervades nearly everything we know and love about Sherlock Holmes. In some ways, his influence is now several steps removed, and it is not always easy to tell just what we owe to Gillette, and what to Conan Doyle and the others who became associated with the Sherlock Holmes legend. Gillette always played the part of Holmes as if he were doing it for the first time. The impression he created is so permanent that, in a sense, he will never play it for the last time.

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Special Collections



Special Collections
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