

Possible topics for Speckled Band papers – ENGL 1158.107 - Lennon

- As with Poe's "Rue Morgue," this story opens with a characterization of an unusual friendship, that between the mercurial and energetic Holmes, and the soberer, more hesitant Watson. Why is Watson, not Holmes, the narrator of this, and most other, Holmes stories? You could compare this relationship to the one in Poe's story; you could also talk more generally about the Holmes-Watson collaboration, using outside sources. You might also read the two Holmes stories narrated, peculiarly, by Holmes himself, and compare them to the ones Watson narrates.

- Unlike Poe's Dupin stories, Conan Doyle's have been revisited over and over since their original publication, most notably on television and in the movies. How has the Holmes character changed over time? How do these changes relate to the societies that embraced them? Check out this Wikipedia page for a list of adaptations:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Adaptations_of_Sherlock_Holmes

- Holmes is so skilled at his trade that he sometimes seems superhuman. His perceptive ability, strength, and dexterity are, ultimately, highly implausible. You might write a paper comparing him to other unlikely larger-than-life genre-fiction heroes, including superheroes.

- The Roylott mansion is depicted here as a dwelling in disrepair, with only one wing "alive," and the rest shuttered and falling apart. Houses figure prominently in crime fiction, and often serve as powerful metaphors for the lives being lived in them. This theme isn't enough to support an essay on this story alone, but consider the role of houses in other crime and horror stories, as well, including Poe's "Rue Morgue."

- Like Poe's story, this one involves misunderstood words ("the speckled band!") and dangerous animals. Compare the authors' use of one or both of these motifs. Draw from other stories and novels, if you can.

- Crime fiction often considers the boundaries between sanity and madness, between acceptable and antisocial behavior, and in the two stories we've read, between man and beast. Both Dupin and Holmes are eccentric and behave in an unbecoming manner in society; this is something they have in common with the criminals (and animals) they pursue. Consider this parallel. Does it take an outsider to catch an outsider? Can man's animal instincts be as useful as they can be evil?

- Watson tells us that Holmes works "for the love of his art," and he dismisses Miss Stoner's difficulty in paying him with barely a thought. Indeed, we never do see Holmes get paid. Show how Conan Doyle (and/or Poe, or any crime writer, for that matter) draw parallels between the detective and the artist, and why?

- Holmes and Dupin imply narratives through tiny details. How is this like the act of fiction writing?

- At its heart, "The Speckled Band" is a locked room mystery. Does Conan Doyle employ this device in the same way Poe does? Or the way any number of crime writers do?