The Adventure of the Stradivarius: Violins in the Work of Arthur Conan Doyle and William Crawford Honeyman

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ABSTRACT

The violin, despite its fleeting appearances in the stories of Sherlock Holmes, has become prominently associated with the character of Sherlock in modern TV and film adaptions. While the violin is never investigated by Holmes in the stories, it is represented in more depth in a precursory detective story by William Crawford Honeyman: a Scottish author-musician, whose work appears to have influenced Arthur Conan Doyle's tales of Sherlock Holmes. Honeyman's short story *The Romance of a Real Cremona* of 1884 follows detective James McGovan as he traces and returns a stolen Stradivari violin and unravels its complex provenance. The importance of the violin's inclusion in fictional works has been little discussed in scholarship. Here, the texts of Doyle and Honeyman serve as a lens through which to analyse the meaning of the violin during the Victorian era. By analysing the violin from an organological perspective, this article examines the violin's prominence in nineteenth-century British domestic music-making, both as a fiscally and culturally valuable object. The final section of the article explores the meaning attached to, and created by, the violin in the stories of Doyle and Honeyman.

The Adventure of the Stradivarius: Violins in the Work of Arthur Conan Doyle and William Crawford Honeyman

We first learn of Sherlock Holmes's interest in violins and his ability to play in the first story, *A Study in Scarlet* (1887). It is not until *The Adventure of the Cardboard Box* (1893) that Sherlock Holmes tells John Watson that he purchased a Stradivarius violin from a pawnbroker's shop for just 55 shillings but that it was said to be worth 500 guineas.[1] The violin, despite its fleeting appearances in the stories of Sherlock Holmes, has become prominently associated with the character of Sherlock in modern TV and film adaptions.[2] This association is much akin to the deerstalker hat and clay pipe which, through the lasting influence of Sidney Paget's illustrations, have become attached to the modern image of Holmes.[3] Elaine Freedgood posits that Sherlock Holmes 'inhabits' Victorian thing culture through his interaction with, and analysis of, objects while searching for their 'metonymic connections'.[4] While the violin is never an object investigated by Holmes in the stories, it is investigated and represented in more depth in a precursory detective story by William Crawford Honeyman: a Scottish author-musician, whose work appears to have influenced Arthur Conan Doyle's tales of Sherlock Holmes. Honeyman's

[1] Arthur Conan Doyle, 'The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes: XIV – The Adventure of the Cardboard Box,' *Strand magazine* (Jan 1893), pp. 61–73. 'The Adventure of the Cardboard Box' was not included in *The Memoirs of Sherlock Holmes*.

[2] Francesca Battaglia, 'Consonant but Dissonant to the (S)core: The Neo-Victorian "Afterings" of Sherlock Holmes's Violin and Issues of Genre in the Sherlock Holmes Films by Guy Ritchie', *Moravian Journal of Literature & Film* 7 (2016), 59–80.

[3] Stephen Joyce, 'Authentic in Authenticity: The Evolution of Sherlock Holmes on Screen', *Journal of Popular Film and Television* 45:2 (2017), 79–80 (p.80).

[4] Elaine Freedgood, *The Idea in Things: Fugitive Meaning in the Victorian Novel* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2010), p.150.

short story *The Romance of a Real Cremona* of 1884 follows detective James McGovan as he traces and returns a stolen Stradivari violin and unravels its complex provenance.[5]

The importance of the violin's inclusion in fictional works has been little discussed in scholarship, in contrast to a relatively buoyant field of research concerning the piano in literature. In this article, the texts of Doyle and Honeyman, which both deploy the violin in relation to a fictional detective, serve as a lens through which to study the significance of the violin during the Victorian era. The inclusion of violin collecting, amateur and professional players, pawnbrokers, the highly recognisable Stradivari make of violin, and the emotion expressed towards and extracted from the inanimate violin, all tap into the violin's complex relationship with the Victorians and Victorian culture. By analysing the violin from an organological perspective, I outline here the violin's prominence in nineteenth-century British domestic music-making, both as a fiscally and culturally valuable object which was often subject to forgery. Then, I offer an interpretation of the meaning attached to, and created by, the violin in the stories of Doyle and Honeyman.[6]

THE VIOLIN IN THE WORKS OF DOYLE AND HONEYMAN

In *A Study in Scarlet* (1887)*,* Holmes divulges his interest in violins with a discussion about the differences between Stradivarius and Amati instruments,[7] and later in *The Adventure of*

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[5] James McGovan (William Crawford Honeyman), 'The Romance of a Real Cremona', in *Traced and Tracked, or, Memoirs of a City Detective* (Edinburgh: John Menzies & Company, 1886), pp. 79–103. First published in 1884.

[6] Claire Pettitt summarises the approaches to 'thing' culture by Elaine Freedgood and Bill Brown. Freedgood, in her *The Idea of Things* (2010), is concerned with the ideas *already attached to* objects and what they bring to the text. Brown, in his *A Sense of Things*: *The Object Matter of American Literature* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2003), considers the ideas *produced by* the objects. See Clare Pettitt, 'On Stuff', *19: Interdisciplinary Studies in the Long Nineteenth Century* 6 (2008).

[7] Arthur Conan Doyle, *A Study in Scarlet* (London: Ward, Lock, Bowden, and Co., 1892), p. 38. First published 1887.

the Cardboard Box (1893) Watson documents that Holmes 'had purchased his own Stradivarius, which was worth at least five hundred guineas, at a Jew broker's in Tottenham Court Road for fifty-five shillings."[8] Despite the violin's relatively minor role, the specificity of a violin with a recognisable label was likely a carefully chosen addition to the environment and characterisation of Holmes. The 1886 notes for *A Study in Scarlet* reveal Doyle's original intentions, naming his original protagonists *Sherrinford Holmes* and *Ormond Sacker*, and pairing Holmes with a valuable violin:

> Sleepy eyed young man – philosopher – Collector of rare Violins
>
> An Amati – Chemical laboratory.[9]

The importance of furnishing Holmes specifically with a recognisable fine violin – an Amati – was not realized until *The Adventure of the Cardboard Box* when the violin is instead identified as a Stradivarius. Why did Doyle change the violin from an Amati to a Stradivarius? Doyle changed many details from his original notes, not just the central characters' names: the description of Holmes as 'a sleepy eyed young man' was countered early in *A Study in Scarlet* when Watson noted 'his eyes were sharp and piercing,'[10] and his knowledge of philosophy progresses little beyond 'nil' until towards the end of the canon. While a few fine Italian makers' names were known by the general public, the proliferation of the Stradivarius name in popular culture, as discussed below, may go some way to explaining Doyle's switch from Amati.

It may be that Doyle was influenced by a slightly earlier work by a Scottish writer of short detective fiction. William Crawford Honeyman – a violinist and successful writer of both short fiction and music tutor books – published his *The Romance of a Real Cremona*, contained

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[8] Doyle, *Cardboard Box*, p. 67.

[9] Original notes for *A Study in Scarlet* made in 1886. Held by the estate of Anna Conan Doyle, and was part of the *Sherlock Holmes* exhibit at the Museum of London, 17th October 2014–12th April 2015.

[10] Doyle, *A Study*, p. 18.

within *Traced and Tracked, or, Memoirs of a City Detective*, in 1884.[11] The short story concerns the theft of a Stradivarius violin from a musician performing in a stately home near Edinburgh. Mr Cleffton, the complainant, recounts the purchase of the instrument, explaining to McGovan that he purchased it for £40 but that it was worth £400.[12] 'If the fiddle is worth £400, and you got it at a tenth of that price, you must have got a great bargain?' McGovan observed.[13] Prior to Cleffton's ownership, the violin had been purchased for five shillings at auction, and then sold for three pounds in a pawnbroker's shop in Edinburgh. This is similar to *The Adventure of the Cardboard Box* scenario, whereby a violin's purchase value is significantly inflated in response to its purported provenance.

The reality of *The Romance of a Real Cremona* is surprisingly accurate, informed by the author's own expertise on the subject of violins and work as a performer and teacher. Honeyman worked very successfully as both a violinist and writer, writing fiction and factual pieces for the Dundee-based *The People's Friend* and *The People's Journal*, becoming the fiction editor of the latter.[14] His short and serialized stories were reprinted in a variety of British publications, with

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[11] The popularity of the McGovan series by the time of *Traced and Tracked* is exhibited in a newspaper review: 'it is almost superfluous at this time of day to re-recommend to the public Mr M'Govan's productions. Those who have read his former works need nothing further than a simple intimation of the fact that another volume has been issued to make them eager to renew the author's acquaintance. Those who have never dabbled in this sort of literature have only to dip into "Tracked and Traced" *[sic]* to realise what an amount of thrilling reading they have been missing. Mr M'Govan is possessed of marked literary skill, exhibiting keen insight into human nature and tender pity for the depraved classes.' See *Edinburgh Evening News*, 2nd October 1884.

[12] It can be suggested that the character's surname is a play on their career, merging the musical terms *clef* and *tone*.

[13] McGovan, *Cremona,* p. 85.

[14] David Baptie, *Musical Scotland: Past and Present* (Paisley: J. and R. Parlane, 1894), p. 83. Ian Campbell highlights the similarities in the titles of the stories of both Doyle and Honeyman/McGovan. See Ian Campbell, 'Disorientation of Place, Time and 'Scottishness': Conan Doyle, Linklater, Gunn, Mackay Brown and Elphinstone', in *The Edinburgh*

For Fame being serially published concurrently in both the *Daily Gazette* of Middlesbrough,[15] and the *Burnley Express* in 1890,[16] having first been published in *The People's Friend* in 1878.[17] The popularity of these works earned Honeyman the credit of 'the Dickens of Scotland,'[18] with many of his works being published in Australia by Adelaide-based *The South Australian Advertiser*, perhaps in reflection of the growing Scottish immigrant population.

Intriguingly, Honeyman also worked as an author of short detective fiction under the nom de plume James McGovan, stylized as M'Govan. His first book of short stories, *Brought to Bay, or, Experiences of a City Detective*, was published in 1878 by the Edinburgh Publishing Company as a selection of short stories originally featured in *The People's Friend*, followed by a further four collections during his lifetime, with each featuring McGovan writing in the first person as the detective protagonist investigating crimes local to Edinburgh. A first edition of *Brought to Bay* owned by Ellery Queen was reputedly inscribed 'To David L. Cromb this collection of good lies is given by the author, Wm C. Honeyman,' indicating that Honeyman and McGovan were one and the same.[19] This appears to have become common knowledge by the time of his death in 1919,[20] but for the first few years the hoax of McGovan 'the Edinburgh

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History of Scottish Literature: Modern Transformations - New Identities (from 1918) ed. by Ian Brown (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), pp. 106–13 (p. 107).

[15] Published from Monday 14th April 1890 until Saturday 7th June 1890.

[16] Published from Saturday 19th April 1890 until Saturday 8th November 1890.

[17] *The Evening Telegraph* (Dundee), Wednesday 2nd January 1878.

[18] As bestowed by *The South Australian Advertiser*, quoted in *The Evening Telegraph* (Dundee), Thursday July 21st 1881 as part of an advertisement for a new short story titled 'Not Proven' to be featured in *The People's Journal*.

[19] Ellery Queen, *Queen's Quorum* (New York: Biblio and Tannen, 1969), pp. 21–22.

[20] A short obituary for 'James M'Govan' links the two names in a non-revelatory way. Honeyman is described as 'tender-hearted, yet a caustic critic' and a pioneer of the detective story. See *Dundee Courier*, 14th April 1919.

detective' was upheld and generally believed.[21] The veracity of Honeyman's writing through the use of a first-person narrative, em-dashes to obscure names, and snippets of local dialect to help localize the work,[22] undoubtedly led to their exceptional popularity: the fifth edition of *Brought to Bay* was printed in 1879, noted as 'within eighteen months' of the first edition.[23]

During the initial literary reception of the McGovan tales, Doyle was a medical student at The University of Edinburgh. He was a keen reader of fiction, confirmed by his account of purchasing books from a second-hand bookshop with his lunch allowance during his assistantship in Aston, Birmingham.[24] He was also familiar with the works of Gaboriau and Poe, citing Poe's Dupin as a hero of his since childhood.[25] It is therefore unsurprising, given Doyle's obvious love of detective fiction and connections to Edinburgh, that he would be familiar with the works of Honeyman, as admitted in a conversation with the journalist Norval Scrymgeour:

> One of my cherished recollections is of a conversation with Conan Doyle … He told me that when a student at Edinburgh University he read with zest the detective stories of James M'Govan, and, although he did not say so, I took it that these then immensely popular sensations, as much as the queer foible of his teacher, the eccentric Bell, influenced him towards evolving the logical processes that in time flowered in the Sherlock Holmes series.

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[21] See advert for the next James M'Govan book, *The Mysteries of Crime*, in *The Evening Telegraph* (*Dundee Courier*, Wednesday 2nd January 1878), where the advert is framed to imply that M'Govan was the author; of note, works by Honeyman (*For Fame* and *The Man O' The Muirs*) are advertised directly above as part of the same advert.

[22] As per the embellished real-life accounts of James McLevy almost a generation earlier. McLevy was Edinburgh's first police detective, and published a series of books in the 1860s documenting some of his cases.

[23] See 'Preface to the Fifth Edition' in the ninth edition of McGovan's *Brought to Bay, or, Experiences of a City Detective* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh Publishing Company, 1884).

[24] Arthur Conan Doyle, *Memories and Adventures* (London: Hodder and Stoughton Limited, 1924), p. 29.

[25] Doyle, *Memories*, p. 74.

> I told Conan Doyle that I had known intimately the man who had made famous James M'Govan, the Edinburgh detective. I felt that he regarded me as somebody. I sensed his sudden respect.[26]

I propose that Doyle took inspiration from Honeyman's *The Romance of a Real Cremona* on account of the similarities in the instrument's valuation and movement through a pawnbroker, a theory supported by Doyle's enthusiastic reading of the McGovan tales: a connection not yet acknowledged in scholarship. Working from the principal that these works, if not directly related, share several key commonalities – viz. short detective fiction of the nineteenth century, spawned from the works of McLevy, Gaboriau and Poe earlier in the century, and written for initial publication in periodicals before being published as very successful collections of stories – they form a suitable case study for the examination of the violin in Victorian writing, and how the violin was understood in Victorian culture.

THE VIOLIN IN VICTORIAN CULTURE

The violin's history and development proved to be a fascinating subject in the nineteenth century, inspiring several books and numerous newspaper and periodical articles. First published in 1836, *The Violin, being an Account of that leading Instrument and its most eminent Professors, &c.* by George Dubourg serves as a broad discourse on the players of the violin, particularly Niccolò Paganini, and contains a chapter dedicated to famous violin makers.[27] George Hart's *The Violin: Its Famous Makers and Their Imitators* of 1875 focuses more on the physical object, and is rich with images of valuable violins. These publications tend towards focussing on the maker of the violin rather than just a generic violin, pedalling the notion that an Italian, and specifically a Cremonese

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[26] Norval Scrymgeour, 'A Scottish Sherlock Holmes', *Scots Magazine* 14.2 (November 1930), pp. 144–6 (p. 144).

[27] George Dubourg, *The Violin, being an Account of that leading Instrument and its most eminent Professors, from its earliest date to the present time: including hints to amateurs, anecdotes, &c* (London: H. Colburn, 1836).

violin is the most desirable and valuable to own, a belief which was echoed by many articles in periodicals and by the general public. The following decade Edward Heron-Allen published *Violin-Making As It Was and Is* (1884), being an expansion of a serialised guide to violin-making published in *Amateur Work Illustrated* in 1883.[28] The book served as a guide for amateur violin makers and is complemented with a significant historical account of the violin. Notably, Heron-Allen argues that modern instruments are superior to old Italian violins but that it 'is very difficult to hammer into the heads of amateurs and others, who either possess or *crave* for the possession of a masterpiece of Cremona'.[29] Honeyman, in his capacity as a teacher and performer of the violin, published several short works on the violin, most notably including *The Violin: How to Choose One* (1890), and *Scottish Violin Makers: Past and Present* (1899).[30] *The Violin: How to Choose One* written 'by a professional player', was there to serve the everyday player in the place of hiring an expensive violin expert to advise them. Honeyman provides honest appraisal of the different makers of Italian violins, going so far as to brand the work of the Amati family as 'a mistake' that Stradivari attempted to rectify, but his work, too, was imperfect and the task of improving the violin fell to Guarneri.[31] Such a blunt appraisal of instruments by the most eminent makers was surely a surprise to the readers who were likely unaware of the differences, and the possibility of something so expensive and renowned being anything short of perfect.

The books by Dubourg, Hart, Heron-Allen, Honeyman and others sit against the backdrop of the early music revival movement: a period of rediscovery and reinterpretation of music from the Renaissance and Baroque eras. The early music revival sought to republish forgotten historical music, and reconstruct performances using historical instruments and

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[28] Edward Heron-Allen, *Violin-Making: As It Was and Is* (London: Ward, Lock, & Co., Limited, 1884), p.vii.

[29] Heron-Allen, *Violin-Making*, p. 19.

[30] William Crawford Honeyman, *The Violin: How to Choose One* (Edinburgh: E. Köhler & Son, 1890); *Scottish Violin Makers: Past and Present* (Edinburgh: E. Köhler & Son, 1899).

[31] Honeyman, *The Violin*, p. 15.

performance techniques. It is likely that this movement did much to foster the fascination with the historic violin as an instrument widely recognised by the general public, and served as a familiar link to the unfamiliar music of the past. While Baroque instruments like the viol family and harpsichord had fallen out of use, or the woodwind and brass families had considerably evolved in construction and capabilities, the violin family had remained largely unaltered in both construction and playing technique.[32] It is this uninterrupted organological lineage, coupled with the violin's prominent role in contemporary performance, that likely supported the market for a significant number of books and articles specifically on the subject of the violin's history.

Despite the clear historical fascination with the violin during the nineteenth century, little has been written on the violin's position in society, or the ideas attached to violin ownership and performance. By contrast, the piano has received increased attention in recent years, particularly in literary studies. Fortunately for this study, it is directly comparable to the violin. The piano brought the music of the concert halls into the home through transcriptions and piano reductions, and stood up to the advent of recording well into the following century.[33] Pianos were initially the preserve of the wealthy in the early nineteenth century, and the purchase or receipt of one was 'a marker of [the family's] position and accomplishment'[34] – the square piano in Jane Austen's *Emma* (1816) was gifted by a wealthy admirer.[35] Industrialisation and changes in construction (from a wooden frame to one of cast-iron) and the introduction of the upright piano led to greater affordability later in the century, assisted by hire purchase schemes.

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[32] Changes to the violin family during this time largely concern the angle of the neck and material of the strings. Such changes are relatively minor in comparison to the developments in woodwind and brass.

[33] Julia Kursell, 'Visualising Piano Playing, 1890–1930', *Grey Room* 43 (2011), pp. 66–87,(pp. 66–67).

[34] Richard Leppert, *The Sign of Sound* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), p. 153.

[35] Jodi Lustig, 'The Piano's Progress: The Piano in Play in the Victorian Novel' in *The Idea of Music in Victorian Fiction,* ed. by Sophie Fuller and Nicky Losseff, (Abingdon: Routledge, 2004), pp. 83–104 (p. 83).

Consequently, the piano was devalued both financially and in social status;[36] in Thomas Hardy's *Far from the Maddening Crowd* (1874), Bathsheba Everdene is told, 'you shall have a piano in a year or two – farmer's wives are getting to have pianos now.'[37]

The piano's masculine mechanical construction made it an instrument for ladies to play,[38] as attested to by the many advertisements for the instruments and their female players in the Victorian press,[39] and their association with one another in Victorian literature.[40] The idea of femininity was attached to piano playing, with the exception of the professional musician.[41] This feminine gendering of keyboard instruments was not a new development of the nineteenth century. At the end of the seventeenth century, Roger North famously declared that men could play the violin and viol, and that women should instead play the harpsichord as it promoted a better posture than the lute or English guittar 'which tends to make them crooked,'[42] assertions

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[36] Paula Gillett, *Musical Women in England, 1870–1914: Encroaching on All Man's Privileges* (New York, BY: St Martin's Press, 2000), p. 4.

[37] Lustig, 'Piano's Progress', p. 97.

[38] Žarko Cvejić, *The Virtuoso as Subject: The Reception of Instrumental Virtuosity, c.1815–c.1850* (Newcastle Upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2016), pp. 219–20.

[39] Adverts by Brinsmead and Sons Pianos in London newspapers often depicted a young, elegant woman playing a piano, with one popular advert showing the woman playing an upright piano surrounded by older men gazing at her as she played (for an example, see *The Illustrated London News*, 29th September 1888, p. 383). Of note, Brinsmead advertised regularly in *The Strand*, including many of the editions containing the work of Doyle (see *The Strand*, January 1893, p. xiii for a typical advert).

[40] For detailed examples, see Mary Burgan, 'Heroines at the Piano: Women and Music in Nineteenth-Century Fiction', *Victorian Studies*, 30.1 (1986), 51–76.

[41] As observed by Mrs C. S. Peel, gentlemen could sing but not play the piano 'that being considered a task only fit for ladies and professional musicians'. See Burgan, *Heroines*, p. 59.

[42] Roger North, *Roger North on Music: Being a Selection from His Essays Written During the Years c. 1695–1728,* ed. John Wilson (London: Novello, 1959), p. 16. Unfortunately for North, the English guittar became an exceptionally

which were more about the visual spectacle of performance than technical ability. North's claim that the violin was a male instrument prevailed into the Victorian era, where few British women publicly performed on the violin until towards the end of the century,[43] but for reasons not entirely clear at the time.[44] The violin was therefore the opposite of the masculine piano: the feminine curves and dulcet tones of the violin created a heterosexual relationship between performer and instrument.[45]

Commercially, the violin followed a similar trajectory to the piano by becoming affordable through mass production, allowing a kit instrument, complete with case and bow, to be purchased relatively cheaply.[46] Violins were explicitly marketed at amateur musicians based on their price and value, both in affluent cities and rural market towns[47]. Towards the end of the

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popular instrument for women to play in the eighteenth century, regarded as an elegant instrument that could accompany the voice, and acting as a metaphor for enlightenment ideals; this British enthusiasm for the instrument is mirrored in Dutch fiction, where the English guittar is a common feature in some of the most popular literature of the century. See Jelma van Amersfoort 'Miss Sara Burgerhart's English Guittar: The 'guitarre Angloise' in Enlightenment Holland', *Tijdschrift van de Koninklijke Vereniging voor Nederlandse Muziekgeschiedenis*, 64.1 (2014), pp. 76–102.

[43] Gillett, 'Musical Women', pp.81–82.

[44] J. Y. Taylor commented in 1892 that 'the violin has been by custom, until recently, practically interdicted to one of the sexes', and that within the last decade it had been discovered that the violin was 'pre-eminently "a lady's instrument"'. On women playing the violin, Taylor wrote 'there is nothing ungraceful about [the correct performance of the violin by a lady]; quite the contrary'. J. Y. Taylor, 'The Violin for Women', *Lippincott's Magazine* 10.2 (June 1892), p. 259.

[45] Cvejić, *Virtuoso as Subject*, p. 219.

[46] In 1895, an advert was placed for Monk's Student Violin, being a violin complete with bow, case and rosin for £2 2s. See *The Musical Standard,* 27th April 1895, p. 326.

[47] For example, W. E. Hill and Sons advertised an affordable 'one guinea' violin available from their London shop alongside an advert by Campbell & Co of Glasgow for a '25s complete violin outfit'. See *Musical Opinion and Music*

nineteenth century a small number of adverts are for mute violins of various forms – typically a full-size violin without a resonant cavity – which were marketed at anyone wishing to practise without disturbing others, or those seeking an instrument to accompany them while travelling.[48] The near-obsession with Cremonese violins is also evident in the marketing of new instruments, with 'English Cremona Violins' being made by 'an Englishman' in Surrey,[49] and 'Cremona violins' made by Otto Migge in London claimed to be comparable to 'any Stradivari or other old Italian Violins'.[50] The fetishization of Cremonese products was harnessed by A. A. Squire & Longson piano makers, who capitalised on the association between Cremona and quality with their 'Cremona Piano'. The piano was advertised as having been awarded the prize medal at the International Inventions Exhibition in 1885 and, perhaps wary of their competitors, warned that consumers should 'beware of spurious imitations'.[51] Developments in marketing, namely the nineteenth-century launch of music periodicals and trade magazines and their dedicated advertisement sections, enabled targeted nationwide marketing not as easily achieved through newspapers, a change that likely encouraged such competitive promoting of products.[52] This national enthusiasm for violins supported a booming market for new violins, accessories and

Trade Review 19: 220 (Jan 1896), p. 223. In the market town of Jedburgh, Scotland, Walter Easton advertised cheap violins for 4s alongside cheap melodeons (*Jedburgh Gazette*, 23rd November 1889), to which cheap concertinas and violin fittings and strings were added the following year (*Jedburgh Gazette*, 8th November 1890).

[48] A late short article on the mute violin is accompanied by a photograph of an instrument by Joseph Chanot. See Alain Nicholson, 'A Mute Violin', *The Cremona* 1.11 (Oct 1907), pp. 120–21.

[49] *Musical Times and Singing Class Circular* 28.534 (Aug 1887), p. 454.

[50] *The Violin Times*, 6.67 (May 1899), p. 135.

[51] See *Musical Opinion and Music Trade Review* 19.220 (Jan 1896), p. 212.

[52] Very little has been written on British music periodicals, however, for a discussion focussed on two music trade publications see James Coover, 'Victorian Periodicals for the Music Trade', *Notes* 46.3 (1990), pp. 609–21, and for analysis of Macmillan's Magazine see Ruth A. Solie, *Music in Other Words: Victorian Conversations* (Berkley: University of California Press, 2004).

sheet music, but it was the rare antique Cremonese instruments that remained out of reach for the majority. While several families of makers operated in Cremona from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries, such as Amati, Guarneri, Rugeri and Bergonzi, none captured the imagination of the Victorians as much as Antonio Stradivari.

THE ALLURE OF STRADIVARI

Long regarded as the touchstone of the string instrument world, the reputation of the instruments from Antonio Stradivari's (c.1649–1737) Cremona workshop have a firmly established place in cultural consciousness.[53] The name Stradivari, or the Latinized Stradivarius as it is more commonly known, has become synonymous with bowed string instruments, particularly violins. Commanding prices at auctions to rival paintings of the old masters, surviving Stradivarius violins exist as both objects of sound and sound investments: the *Lady Blunt* violin (1721) was purchased for over $10 million in 2008, to later be sold for almost $16 million in 2011.[54] The finite nature of these instruments – there are reputedly around 600 surviving instruments by Stradivari – and increased interest from Asia, Russia and the Middle East has pushed prices exponentially skyward.[55] Rarity, coupled with the long-standing mystique surrounding their tone, has created a halo effect specifically around the violins; blind tests have shown that modern instruments can rival those by Stradivari in timbre when in the hands of

[53] The birth year of Stradivari still remains unclear. See Stewart Pollens, *Stradivari* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 13–5.

[54] See Voichite Bucur, *Handbook of Materials for String Musical Instruments* (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2016), p. 944.

[55] See Pollens, *Stradivari*, p.41 for discussion of surviving Stradivarius instruments in relation to the number made.

professional musicians.[56] In addition, the celebrity of the instruments has led them to be characterized by their sobriquets, derived from past owners, players, or more abstract associations; it is notable that few other instruments are known in such affectionate, personified terms. Adoration of Stradivarius instruments during Antonio's lifetime resulted in a strong market for his instruments;[57] it is widely acknowledged that the long working life, and shrewd business sense of Stradivari directly contributed to his success.[58] The fascination with the instruments then continued following Antonio's death. In 1791, Reverend Thomas Twining wrote to Charles Burney, commenting that he 'had a sort of fiddle mania' upon him by trying to compare different violins:

> I believe I have got possession of a sweet Straduarius *[sic]*, which I play upon with much more pleasure than my Stainer; partly because the tone is sweeter, mellower, rounder, and partly because the stop is longer. My Stainer is undersized; and on that account less valuable, though the tone is as bright, piercing, and full, as of any Stainer I ever heard. Yet when I take it up after the Straduarius, it sets my teeth on edge. The tone comes out plump, all at once. There is a comfortable reserve of tone in the Straduarius, and it bears pressure, and you may draw upon it for almost as much tone as you please. […] 'Tis a battered, shattered, cracky, resinous old blackguard. But if every bow that ever crossed its strings from its birth had been sugared instead of resined, more sweetness could not come out of its belly.[59]

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[56] Claudia Fritz et al., 'Soloist Evaluations of Six Old Italian and Six New Violins', *PNAS*, 111.20 (2014), pp. 7224–9.

[57] See Pollens, *Stradivari*, pp. 50–52 for a contemporary account of Stradivari's commissions across Europe, and discussion of his reception as a maker.

[58] See Pollens, *Stradivari*, pp. 42–44 for discussion of his income.

[59] Richard Twining, *Recreations and Studies of a Country Clergyman of the Eighteenth Century* (London: John Murray, 1882), p. 149.

Twining compares his Stradivarius to his other undersized and less valuable violin by Jacob Stainer: a maker from Absam near Innsbruck, Austria, who was regarded as 'the father of German violin makers'.[60] Twining's commentary illustrates the increasing public enthusiasm for Stradivarius violins, and it is of little surprise that they quickly became one of the most expensive musical commodities available to purchase: the brand provided a sense of individuality in a mass-produced marketplace.

In response to the increased awareness and worth of violins by Stradivari, some authors took to include them prominently in their work. For example, George MacDonald's *Robert Falconer* (1868), later retitled *The Musician's Quest*, features a beloved violin suggested to be a Stradivari by Robert's fiddle teacher and the local shoemaker, Dooble Sanny:

> "The crater maun be a Cry Moany! Hear till her!" [Dooble Sanny] added, drawing another long note […] "She's a Straddle Vawrious at least! Hear till her! I never had sic a combination o' timmer and catgut atween my cleuks (*claws*) afore."
>
> As to it being a Stradivarious, or even a Cremona at all, the testimony of Dooble Sanny was not worth much on the point. But the shoemaker's admiration roused in [Robert's] mind a reverence for the individual instrument which he never lost.[61]

The fleeting suggestion of the instrument being a Stradivarius may allude to the instrument's value *to Robert*, but the doubt of its authenticity cast by the narrator serves as a reminder of Robert's relative poverty. The shoemaker's awareness of Cremona and the Stradivarius name further implies the wider understanding of valuable violins in rural areas such as Aberdeenshire in North East Scotland. In 1873, George Eliot penned her poem *Stradivarius*. Eliot compares the

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[60] 'Foreign Notes', *Musical Times and Singing Class Circular*, 37.637 (1896), p. 174.

[61] George MacDonald, *Robert Falconer*, 3 vols (London: Hurst and Blackett, 1868), I, p. 101. The Scots text reads: "The creature must be a Cry Moany! Listen to her!..."She's a Straddle Vawrious at least! Listen to her! I never had such a combination of timber and catgut between my fingers before".

instruments of Stradivari to the music of J. S. Bach, and the performance of the nineteenth-century violinist Joseph Joachim, and declares Stradivari a servant appointed by God to make violins: '[God] could not make / Antonio Stradivari's violins / Without Antonio'.[62] John Mead Faulkener's *The Lost Stradivarius* (1895) follows the discovery of a violin by Sir John Maltravers behind the bookcase in his Oxford room, and unites the violin and the supernatural when the protagonist falls victim to a brain-fever said to be caused by the ghost of Adrian Temple, the violin's original owner and ancestor of Maltraver's fiancée.[63] The association of the violin with the supernatural was partly inspired by the famous Italian violinist, Niccolò Paganini (1782–1840), who was often said to be in league with the devil on account of his talent and unusual appearance.[64] Faulkner's novel was published 20 years after Camille Saint-Saëns *Danse Macabre, Op.40* (1874), which famously paired the violin with the tritone, known as the devil's interval. The work was poorly received on account of its unusual sound, and use of the unfamiliar timbre of the orchestral xylophone which made its first appearance in *Danse Macabre*.[65]

FAKES AND FORGERIES

The problem with a rare and desirable item such as a violin by Stradivari is its prohibitively expensive cost. In 1886, the disposal of the estate of the Marquis de St. Senoch of

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[62] George Eliot, *The Legend of Jubal and Other Poems* (Edinburgh and London: William Blackwood and Sons, 1874), pp. 223–31.

[63] For a brief discussion of the 'brain-fever' mentioned in *The Lost Stradivarius* see Theodore Dalrymple, 'Victorian Values', *BMJ* 337.7676 (2008), p. 1001.

[64] Mia Kawabata, *Paganini: The 'Demonic' Virtuoso* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2013).

[65] A report of a concert in Vienna in 1876 commented that the work 'gave rise to one of those incidental storms', with 'the demonstration…chiefly directed against an instrument entitled a xylophone, which was introduced by the author with a view of imparting an additional weirdness to a very weird conception'. See 'Foreign Musical Intelligence', *Musical Standard* 9.588 (Nov 1875), p.310.

Paris, saw the sale of the *Chant du Cygne* violin as part of a quartet of Stradivarius instruments.[66] The sale achieved a price of 15,100 francs, calculated by the Hill family as around £604.[67] This is not too far removed from the values of the violins given in both *The Romance of a Real Cremona* (1884), where Mr Cleffton had paid £40 for a violin said to be worth £400, and *The Adventure of the Cardboard Box* (1893) where Sherlock Holmes valued his violin as being worth 500 guineas, despite only paying 50 shillings for it. While the guinea had been replaced by the sovereign coin in 1814, the term *guinea* continued to colloquially refer to 21 shillings, making Holmes's Stradivarius worth 10,500 shillings, or £525. The limited availability of an historic artefact contributed to the high premium demanded for rare violins, but was not unique to the instrument trade, and was a hurdle faced by anyone seeking to collect and curate something of historic value.

The nineteenth century is widely regarded as one of the "'great" or "golden" ages of faking',[68] driven by increased demand for artefacts such as rare violins, and a rise in the price of premium collectables which widening the gulf between middle- and upper-class purchasing power. The collection of curios became a fashionable way to represent the wider world to which the British public were now exposed,[69] the object serving as a symbol of 'human and cultural endeavour',[70] and was fuelled by events such as The Great Exhibition of 1851, and the

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[66] The violin was so named as Antonio Stradivari died shortly after completion of the instrument.

[67] W.H. Hill, Arthur F. Hill, and Alfred E. Hill, *Antonio Stradivari: His Life and Works (1644–1737)* (London: Macmillan and Co., Limited, 1909), p. 292.

[68] Aviva Briefel, *The Deceivers: Art Forgery and Identity in the Nineteenth Century* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2006), p. 3.

[69] See Jacqueline Yallop, *Magpies, Squirrels and Thieves: How the Victorians Collected the World* (London: Atlantic Books, 2011) for an account of Victorian collecting.

[70] Thomas Richards, *The Commodity Culture of Victorian England: Advertising and Spectacle, 1851–1914* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), p. 17.

establishment of the modern museums and galleries across Britain.[71] In Edinburgh, the new Reid School of Music at The University of Edinburgh was opened in 1859 with a musical instrument museum to display the private collection of Professor John Donaldson, being the first purpose-built museum for music in Europe, and reflects the move towards viewing musical instruments as an object in itself and not just a tool of the musician. The museums served as valuable sources of information for the forgers,[72] who capitalised on the lack of genuine artefacts for public sale, the public's unfamiliarity with the items, and the shifts in purchasing power to demand more affordable goods. Many objects of questionable authenticity are still being uncovered in private and museum collections today.[73]

The century also bore witness to the rise of collecting mania. The collection of china, or Old Blue, was a decidedly effeminate pastime, and dubbed by the press *Chinamania*.[74] Bibliomania (or book-madness), too, was ostensibly likened to a disease, and bore from the increase in book printing in the eighteenth century, in part driven by the end of perpetual copyright in 1774, and influenced by high profile sales of valuable old books.[75] In *The Romance of*

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[71] Such as the Victorian and Albert Museum in London (1852) and the Royal Museum in Edinburgh (1861). The Royal Museum is now part of the National Museums of Scotland.

[72] Briefel, *Deceivers*, p. 4.

[73] Of relevance to this study, the Piltdown Man case from the early twentieth century long held Arthur Conan Doyle in suspicion of the forging of the skull. Recent research by the National History Museum and Liverpool John Moores University has now proven that the skull, and separate *discovery* of a tooth, were by the same forger, believed to be Charles Dawson. See Isabelle De Groote et al., 'New Genetic and Morphological Evidence Suggests a Single Hoaxer Created Piltdown Man', *Royal Society Open Science*, 3 (2016), 1–14.

[74] See Anne Anderson 'Chinamania: collecting Old Blue for the House Beautiful, c. 1860–1900,' in *Material Cultures, 1740–1920: The Meanings and Pleasures of Collecting*, ed. by John Potvin and Alla Myzelev (London and New York: Routledge, 2016), pp. 109–28.

[75] Philip Connell, 'Bibliomania: Book Collecting, Cultural Politics, and the Rise of Literary Heritage in Romantic Britain', *Representations* 71 (2000), 24–47.

a Real Cremona, McGovan travels to inspect the violin collection of Mr Turner as he attempted to locate the missing Strad. Described as 'half-daft' with a 'craze for buying fiddles',[76] Turner was an enthusiastic but essentially clueless collector of an instrument he could not play. This mania is, like China- and Bibliomania, likened to a mental condition when Cleffton informs McGovan that Turner was said to have spent some time in an asylum; 'and I could believe it', said Cleffton, 'for none but a daft man would give the prices he has given for the fiddles he has'.[77] McGovan concluded later in the tale that Turner was in the same vein as a bibliomaniac 'who would sell his soul to get hold of some old musty volume not worth reading, simply because it happened to be the only copy in existence';[78] it later transpires that Turner was in possession of 'a *Strad*…but it's only a copy, and a very poor one'.[79] Turner wasn't the first violin collector in literature: E.T.A Hoffman's *Rat Krespel* of 1819 is another eccentric collector of fine violins, who sets out to discover the secrets of their construction by dismantling them.[80] A full English translation of *Rat Krespel* featured in *Reynold's Miscellany* of 1852 under the title *The Charmed Violin*,[81] although it is impossible to discern whether or not Honeyman was aware of the tale. The parallels between Honeyman and Hoffman, as author-musicians, are also worthy of note.[82] Holmes, too, was

[76] McGovan, *Cremona*, p. 87.

[77] McGovan, *Cremona*, p. 88.

[78] McGovan, *Cremona*, p. 92.

[79] McGovan, *Cremona*, p. 93.

[80] This story is contained within the four-volume *Die Serapionsbrüder* (1819–21). The popularity of Hoffman's tales led to translations in both Britain and North America: Alex Ewing's *The Serapion Brethren* (London: George Bell & Sons, 1908), and John Bealby's *Weird Tales* (New York: Charles Scibner's Sons, 1885).

[81] 'The Charmed Violin', *Reynold's Miscellany of Romance, General Literature, Science, and Art*, 1st May 1852, pp. 228–230.

[82] Of interest, the Barcarolle from Offenbach's *Tales of Hoffman* is prominently featured in *The Mazarin Stone* (1921) as a means of deceiving the suspects.

originally destined to be a collector of violins as noted by Doyle in his 1886 sketches for *A Study in Scarlet*.

Forgeries were endemic of the nineteenth-century violin market. The instrument forgers of the time worked creatively to deceive unwitting consumers. While many forgers would stick to the well-known Cremonese makers of Stradivari and Amati, some would attempt to deceive with less commonly-known makers. Some would even go as far as conjuring a family of makers by using a recognisable surname: the fame of the prized instruments of Lorenzo Storioni led to instruments being made by his supposed son, Carlos Storioni, labelled and antiqued to appear as early nineteenth-century Italian violins. Violins were even advertised to the trade as imitations, with one advert from 1910 promoting 'Old Finish Violins – Perfect Imitation of Genuine Old Instruments Containing Labels, that are Fac-similies of the Originals.'[83]

The labels of string musical instruments are generally affixed to the inner back, and are viewable through the sound holes. With a steady hand, an old label can be removed from one instrument and glued into another, passing the new host off as a valuable antique. For example, the widely-publicized Hodges vs Chanot case of 1882 exposed Georges Chanot II – violin maker and dealer, and son of the famous Parisian maker, Georges Chanot I – as falsely presenting a violin by the eminent Carlo Bergonzi of Cremona, dated 1742. According to newspaper reports of the trial, Chanot admitted to removing the Bergonzi label from a mandolin and placing it into the violin while it was being repaired, justifying his actions by explaining that 'people will not buy a violin without a name upon it,' and that within his workshop he had 'some fifty [labels] of one kind and another' including by makers such as Stradivari and Amati.[84] In 1890, David Lawrie,

[83] See Brian W. Harvey, *Violin Fraud: Deception, Forgery, Theft, and the Law* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), p. 67.

[84] See Edward Heron-Allen, *De Fidivulis Opusculum II: Hodges Against Chanot* (London: Mitchell and Hughes, 1883), p. 34.

'dealer in Italian and other stringed instruments' from Glasgow,[85] was brought before the Court of Sessions in Edinburgh, accused by a customer of selling a forged Stradivarius to them in 1883 for £460.[86] On 2nd April 1890, Lawrie's dealings were debated in the House of Commons when, on 25th March, a violin consigned to him from Paris – labelled as 'Antonious Stradivarius,' dated 1696, and valued at £800 – was stopped by Customs at Dover. Customs stated that the instrument was stopped as consignees of instruments purportedly by classic makers were required to state if the instrument was for their own use or for sale: the latter would require proof of accuracy of the date and name on the instrument's label, in an effort to stem the flow of forged instruments from continental Europe. Lawrie claimed the instrument was for his own personal use, and the instrument was released.[87]

Evidence of violin fraud contemporary with Honeyman and Doyle can be found in the Victorian press, where many dubious adverts were placed. In January 1882, a letter to the editor of *The Sporting Times* contested the suspicions of a Mr Labouchère, who had earlier queried the repeated placement of an advert in *The Daily Telegraph*:

> VIOLIN for SALE; magnificent solo tone; suitable for / orchestral or chamber music; labelled "Antonious / Stradivari, faciebat Cremona, 1721," with box and bow: / price only 30s.; cash needed; sent on approval; useful present. – Miss –

Labouchère queried whether 'Miss – [had] only *one* violin for sale,' and the validity of advertising a 30-shilling violin at a cost of 'four or five shillings a day for months together.' The correspondent, L.O. Browning, wished to 'inform [Labouchère] that he will not be troubled any more by the offending advertisement, as it has been purchased by his humble servant, who is

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[85] Lawrie is most likely David Laurie, author of *Reminisces of a Fiddle Dealer* (London: T. Werner Laurie, 1925).

[86] See *The Magazine of Music: For the Student and the Million* (April 1890), pp. 77–8.

[87] See *The Magazine of Music: For the Student and the Million* (May 1890), pp. 98–9.

very well satisfied with the bargain he has contracted.'[88] However, Labouchère's suspicions were certainly not without foundation: a near-identical advert resurfaced in *Funny Folks* four months later,[89] and it is likely that Browning's servant was duped by a fake instrument. It is here that we meet Honeyman again who, under his birth name instead of his nom de plume, is best known for his discourse on the violin; his instructional publications cover the key aspects of violin ownership, from selecting an instrument to tuition and performance,[90] and include several warnings about forged instruments and the type of advert featured in the press:

> *VIOLIN FOR SALE. – Rich Solo Tone, appears to be very old, after and labelled "Antonius Stradivarius, faciebat Cremona, A.D. 1721." Splendid instrument, and in perfect preservation. Suit Young Lady or Professor. With good Bow, Case, and Self-Tutor, only 25s. Sent on approval.*
>
> To these are generally appended a private address, with "Mrs Something" for the leading bait, as if the seller were a poor, ignorant, and unprotected widow, whom it would be easy to cheat, and who can know nothing of the enormous value of the article she is willing to sell so cheaply.[91]

The similarity between Honeyman's example and the advert for a 30-shilling Stradivarius presented in the Labouchère-Browning case of 1882 further illustrates the widespread awareness of forgery in the nineteenth-century British violin trade.

In *The Romance of a Real Cremona*, McGovan tracks and retrieves a stolen violin belonging to a Mr Cleffton. The violin had a convoluted provenance, as the story unravels to reveal that it had been owned by another violinist who had lost it while travelling, for it to have eventually

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[88] *The Sporting Times*, 958 (28th January 1882), p. 3.

[89] *Funny Folks*, 387 (29th April 1882), p. 135.

[90] For example, David Hurwitz commented on the detail presented by Honeyman when exploring Victorian vibrato technique. See David Hurwitz, 'W.C. Honeyman: Vibrato Detective', *Context,* 37 (2012), 107–21.

[91] William C. Honeyman, *The Secrets of Violin Playing* (Edinburgh: E Köhler & Son, c.1890), p. 51.

passed through a pawnbroker shop in Edinburgh. By contrast, Holmes's violin's history can only be traced as far back as the pawnbrokers, and no further information as to its provenance is given. The provenance of the Stradivari violins in *The Romance of a Real Cremona* and *The Adventure of the Cardboard Box* is therefore tied to the pawnbrokers and the less salubrious undertones such an establishment injects into the text.

In 1846 there were 1,671 licenced pawnbrokers in Britain, but this rapidly increased to 4,443 by 1889/90.[92] By 1854, there were 361 licenced pawnbrokers in London, but an estimated 500 to 600 further unlicensed premises within the poorer London districts,[93] a balance that is likely to have been repeated in other large cities. While licenced pawnbrokers were governed by legislation, unlicensed shops proved to be magnets for crime, processing stolen goods with no questions asked, and charging extortionate rates of interest on loans. Charles Dickens wrote of the London pawnbrokers for the *Evening Standard* in 1835, latterly collected within *Sketches by Boz*, where he notes in amongst the window display 'two or three flutes' and 'a few fiddles,'[94] probably of questionable quality or origin. The movement of violins through pawnbrokers was common knowledge during the Victorian era, resulting in warnings being posted in newspapers and periodicals: an article in the *Musical Standard* of 1878 cautioned the reader of the typical scenario of an instrument being sold for significantly more than it was worth.[95] In 1893, the Western Mail of Cardiff, Wales, printed a short article on the case of London pawnbrokers being fooled into lending against 'bogus violins' made by two 'swindlers'.[96] Curiously, in *The Romance of a Real Cremona* the pawnbroker is named as Patrick Finnigan and is referred to as 'an honest man'

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[92] A. L. Minkes, 'The Decline of Pawnbroking', *Economica*, 20.77 (1953), 10–23 (p.18).

[93] A. Keeson, *Monts De Piete and Pawnbroking* (London: Jackson and Keeson, 1854), pp. 317, 330.

[94] Charles Dickens, *Sketches by Boz: Illustrative of Every-Day Life and Every-Day People Volume II* (London: John Macrone, 1836), p. 145.

[95] 'The Pawnbroker's Fiddle', *Musical Standard*, 15.729 (20th July 1878), p. 30.

[96] *Western Mail*, 5th December 1893.

by McGovan. This is contrary to the persistent negative view of both the pawnbroker's shop and pawnbroker themselves. The short stories of a high-class pawnbroker by Paul Seton in 1893 countered the 'poor man's banker' portrayal by instead describing an establishment in the West End of London, loaning large sums of money, and mingling with the well-heeled.[97] Pawnbroker's shops did occasionally obtain an instrument of notable repute. The 1894 theft of the 1725 *Duke of Cambridge* Stradivarius violin from the eminent violinist Jean Joseph Bott in New York is one such case, where the instrument was sold by the thief to a pawnbroker for just four dollars. The violin then passed through two further owners, the identity of the instrument unbeknownst to them, until coincidence led to its discovery in 1900 and eventual reunion with the Bott family.[98] The passing of the violins through a pawnbroker's in both *A Study in Scarlet* and *The Romance of a Real Cremona* draws attention to, and invites the reader to question, the instruments' provenance.

READING THE VIOLINS OF CLEFFTON AND HOLMES

By viewing the writings of Honeyman as influential on that of Doyle, I propose that the treatment of the violin by both authors shares a commonality rooted in the late-nineteenth century view of the violin-playing gentleman, of collecting culture, and of the violin as a fiscally and culturally valuable object. Sherlock Holmes was depicted by Doyle as an appreciator of music, attending concerts featuring well-known music and performers of the era. Holmes attended concerts featuring the music of Wagner (*The Red Circle*), Meyerbeer's opera *Les Huguenots* (*Hound of the Baskervilles*), and played Offenbach's *Barcarole* on his violin and then used a

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[97] Paul Seton, 'Revelations of a London Pawnbroker', *The Ludgate Monthly* (May 1893), 385–396, 497–509, 630–641.

[98] A summary of the story can be found in a feature by Eugene Polonaski, 'The Case of the Bott Stradivarius', *The Violin Times*, 9.108 (1902), 170–171. Case documentation can be found in both North American and British periodicals, 1894–1902. Of particular note, the North American author Arthur Cheney Train based his *The Lost Stradivarius* short detection story on the Bott Stradivarius theft, see *True Stories of Crime from the District Attorney's Office* (New York, NY: C. Schribner's Sons, 1908).

recording of it to trick the diamond thief in *The Mazarin Stone*.[99] The works of these composers were frequently performed in concert halls across Britain, being a mainstay of British popular concert repertoire during the period in question. Of particular note, the real-life violinists Pablo de Sarasate (1844–1908) and Wilma Norman-Neruda (1838–1911) are mentioned as playing in concerts Holmes wished to attend, although the programme of the concerts is not detailed in the stories.[100] The compliments made regarding Norman-Neruda's playing ('her attack and her bowing are splendid'),[101] as one of the first celebrated female violinists, also go some way to illustrate the changing opinions regarding the appropriateness of women playing the violin.

As a musician, the abilities of Holmes are conveyed to the reader through the judgement of the narrator, Watson. In *A Study in Scarlet,* Watson describes Holmes's violin playing as 'very remarkable, but as eccentric as all his other accomplishments,' and indicated that he was a capable player, playing what Watson described as 'difficult pieces,' naming Mendelssohn's *Lieder* as one such example.[102] On his own, Holmes appeared to be a different musician, not playing music that Watson recognized or even identified as music: 'he would close his eyes and scrape carelessly at the fiddle which was thrown across his knee.'[103] Watson's opinion of Holmes's playing is therefore mixed, expressing delight at the familiar, but sometimes denouncing music or improvisations he did not recognize. Watson's comments on Holmes's improvisations improve by *The Sign of Four*, when we are told that 'he had a remarkable gift for

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[99] 'The Adventure of the Red Circle' of 1911, in *His Last Bow* (1917), p. 129; *The Hound of the Baskervilles* (1902), p. 359; 'The Adventure of the Mazarin Stone' of 1921, in *The Case-Book of Sherlock Holmes* (1927).

[100] 'The Red-Headed League' in *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* (1892), p. 44; and *A Study*, p. 58.

[101] Doyle, *A Study*, p. 67.

[102] This is possibly one of Mendelssohn's *Lieder ohne Worte*, which were particularly popular during the nineteenth century. See Karl Klindworth, 'Review: Mendelssohn's Songs without Words', *The Musical Times* 39.669 (1898), 720–23.

[103] Doyle, *A Study*, p. 22.

improvisation.'[104] The use of the term 'scrape' reappears a little later in *A Study in Scarlet*.[105] Observations of nineteenth-century commentary reveal that the term 'scrape' was often associated with the violin-playing Victorian gentleman. In a satirical piece, 'Men of the Period' that appeared in the periodical *The City Jackdaw* in 1879, the 'Musical Man' is described as 'one who knows a little of every musical instrument but is a master of none' and who can 'generally scrape a few excruciating discords on the violin.'[106] Watson's references to Holmes's playing as 'scrape' are less an indication of his criticism of Holmes's musical ability than of his apparent exasperation with the seemingly eccentric behaviour of his friend, who at times seems incomprehensible to the staid and conventionally masculine Watson. Indeed, Holmes's musicality is used to convey a sense of a hidden intellectual and emotional world. Irene Morra has argued that the association of music and musicality with an intellectual character, and specifically Sherlock Holmes, alludes to their capacity for 'intuition, deception and control.'[107] Holmes's conventional mastery of the violin, combined with an apparent taste for weird and even discordant sounds, expressed both his intuitive understanding of the conventional world, and his ability to move outside it. Within the text, the evocation of the violin also allows Doyle to project and amplify the reader's sense of Holmes's emotional state. In *The Second Stain*, Holmes is found 'playing snatches on his violin' during a period of restlessness.[108] There is less to be read of the relationship between Holmes and his violin. He 'prattled away about Cremona

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[104] Arthur Conon Doyle, *The Sign of Four* (London: Spencer Blackett, 1890), p. 160.

[105] 'Holmes was engaged in his favourite occupation of scraping upon his violin', *A Study*, p. 73

[106] 'Men of the Period', *The City Jackdaw*, 11th July 1879, p. 274.

[107] Irene Morra, 'Singing Like a Music Box: Musical Detection and Novelistic Tradition' in *The Idea of Music in Victorian Fiction,* ed. by Sophie Fuller and Nicky Losseff (Abingdon: Routledge, 2004), 151–70 (p. 163).

[108] 'The Adventure of the Second Stain' of 1904, in *The Return of Sherlock Holmes*, p. 364. 'Snatches' is commonly used to describe short sections of melodies or songs in the nineteenth century.

fiddles, and the difference between a Stradivarius and an Amati' in *A Study in Scarlet*,[109] and spoke about 'Stradivarius violins' amongst other things in *Sign of the Four* as if 'he had made a special study of it'.[110] It therefore appears that Holmes's interest in his violin is pragmatically concerned with the object and its history rather than a more abstract, emotional connection; an indifference much in character with the 'inhuman' cerebral protagonist whose emotional capacity was likened by Doyle to that of 'Babbage's Calculating Machine'.[111] The placement of the violin in the hands of Holmes, and the music in the stories, works to reinforce his class identity, marking Holmes as a middle-class amateur musician and appreciator of music – but his varied use of the instrument, sometimes melodic but sometimes sparse and discordant, also reinforces his position outside the conventional middle-class world.

This is in contrast to the passion displayed by Cleffton for his lost Stradivari, who appears to be captivated by a similar 'fiddle mania' to Twining in 1791. At the start of the story, Cleffton travels to McGovan's residence to wake him in the middle of the night to alert him to the robbery:

> "My lovely Cremona! my beautiful *Strad!* Spirited away—stolen from under my very eyes! Good heavens, what am I do to? What is to become of me if you don't trace out the thief?"

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[109] Doyle, *A Study*, p. 38.

[110] Arthur Conan Doyle, *The Sign of Four* (London: Spencer Blackett, 1890), p.185.

[111] In a letter to Dr Joseph Bell (1892), said to be the inspiration for Sherlock Holmes's analytical approach, Doyle wrote that 'Holmes is as inhuman as a Babbage's Calculating Machine and just about as likely to fall in love'. See Anissa M. Graham and Jennifer C. Garlen, 'Sex and the Single Sleuth', in *Sherlock Holmes for the 21st Century: Essays on New Adaptations,* ed. by Lynnette Porter (Jefferson, NC. And London: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2012), pp. 24–34 (p.24).

> "Strad! Strad! Who is she?" [McGovan] vacantly asked, thinking from the man's tears that he must mean some young and beautiful maiden, violently abducted from her home and friends.[112]

McGovan's confusion works to achieve two things. Firstly, he interprets Cleffton's distress as the loss of a person instead of a thing. As the tale of loss continues, Cleffton's language is similarly emotive, declaring that he would 'rather have had a leg broken, or lost [his] head' than the violin, as if sacrificing himself in the place of a loved one. The violin is referred to elsewhere as Cleffton's 'darling instrument',[113] 'a beauty',[114] and, at the end when Cleffton is reunited with his violin, 'he fairly hugged it, and kissed it as fervently as…mothers embrace their lost children'.[115] This personification of the violin, further enforced as something to be valued by the repeated referral to it as the Cremona or Strad, is inverse to the way 'human beings are "thinged"' in the works of Dickens when they are 'described by nonhuman attributes':[116] the violin becomes a missing person, bound up in affection, and, as 'the best fiddle in the world',[117] is irreplaceable.

Secondly, the confusion places distance between the protagonist and the author. Honeyman authored his detective fiction behind his nom de plume, and much of his violin writing was initially published anonymously. Reasons for this are not forthcoming in his unpublished autobiography, but it can be gleaned that upon advice from his editor, it was

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[112] McGovan, *Cremona*, p. 84.

[113] McGovan, *Cremona*, p. 82.

[114] McGovan, *Cremona*, p. 85.

[115] McGovan, *Cremona*, p. 103.

[116] Freedgood, *Idea in Things*, p. 141 quoting Dorothy Van Ghent, *The English Novel: Form and Function* (New York: Rinehart, 1953), p.129.

[117] McGovan, *Cremona*, p. 84.

deemed beneficial to keep the two sides of his professional life separate.[118] When McGovan voiced concern about his ability to identify the missing violin — "Fiddles, of course, are all alike to me" — the difference between him and Honeyman was clearly established.[119] Later, McGovan 'groaned, and resigned…to listen' to the tale of how the violin was lost by the first owner,[120] and 'smiled pityingly at the spectacle' of an emotional Cleffton being reunited with his violin at the end of the story.[121] The enthusiasm for violins evident in the wider writings of Honeyman is in stark contrast to the lack of interest written into McGovan's character. Instead, the voice of Honeyman the violinist is heard through Cleffton where, albeit teasingly, Honeyman paces through the imagined distress and relief of losing and retrieving one of his own beloved instruments.

The story works to discern between informed professional and uninformed amateur players, potentially as a jibe by Honeyman at what he witnessed in the violin trade at the time. When McGovan is tasked with travelling to visit Mr Turner, the violin collector, he is accompanied by Cleffton's unnamed desk partner who had 'a perfect knowledge of all the peculiarities of such valuable instruments' like the missing violin,[122] and whose expertise is affirmed by his identification of one of Mr Turner's violins as copy rather than a genuine Stradivarius.[123] In contrast, John Mackintosh the pawnbroker is described by Cleffton as 'a wretched scraper, who would be as happy with a twelve-and-sixpenny German fiddle' as he

[118] Unpublished autobiography. With thanks to David and Val Leith of the Honeyman family for granting me access to Honeyman's archives.

[119] McGovan, *Cremona*, p. 90.

[120] McGovan, *Cremona*, p. 91.

[121] McGovan, *Cremona,* p. 103.

[122] McGovan, *Cremona*, p. 90.

[123] McGovan, *Cremona*, p. 93.

would be with the Stradivarius at the centre of the story,[124] and Mr Turner, the collector, had paid £180 for a 'child's sixpenny toy'.[125] Cleffton also alludes to the differences in buying power between professionals and amateurs, commenting that the latter 'with lots of money' can afford a fine instrument but the professional player cannot.[126]

The violin therefore serves to convey an emotional dimension in both the Sherlock Holmes canon and Honeyman's *The Romance of a Real Cremona*, but in two distinct ways. Holmes's intellectual interest in his violin is tied to its provenance. Instead, Holmes's emotion is located in the music produced by the violin and performer.[127] His violin is almost empathetic, permitting him to express his decidedly *human* state of mind when it would otherwise not be verbalised by the *inhuman machine*. Holmes's understanding of the power of music is alluded to in his discussion of Darwin's theory about music existing before speech, and which he concludes 'perhaps…[that is] why we are so subtly influenced by it'.[128] In *The Romance of a Real Cremona*, the emotion is expressed towards the object itself, almost anthropomorphised through the grief and love expressed by Cleffton. This is starkly contrasted with McGovan's indifference. The emotional connection between Cleffton and his violin is not just confined to the pages of the story, and likely afforded the author a way to imaginatively explore his own emotions towards the violin to which he had devoted most of his life. Hidden behind his nom de plume, only those close to Honeyman would understand the significance of *The Romance of a Real Cremona* functioning as a way to draw his two passions briefly together.

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[124] McGovan, *Cremona*, p. 86.

[125] McGovan, *Cremona*, p. 88.

[126] McGovan, *Cremona*, p. 86.

[127] Joanne Begiato suggests that sound should be viewed as an emotional object in the same way as a physical object. See Joanne Begiato, 'Moving Objects' in *Feeling Things: Objects and Emotions Through History*, ed. by Stephanie Downes, Sally Holloway, and Sarah Randles (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), pp. 229–242 (p. 235).

[128] Doyle, *A Study*, p. 70

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The violin in both the Sherlock Holmes canon and *The Romance of a Real Cremona* is used as a device to help contextualise the works in their Victorian surroundings. The inclusion of the violin allowed Honeyman to imaginatively explore the loss and retrieval of one of his own violins, poke fun at the emotional professional musician, and distance himself from his detective and nom de plume, James McGovan. For Doyle, the use of the violin may have been inspired by Honeyman's stories, or may have been coincidentally drawn from the wider Victorian fascination with the instrument and its history. Whatever the impetus, the inclusion of Holmes's musicality allowed Doyle to write some more human traits into an otherwise machine-like character.

The brief study presented here only scratches the surface of the violin's use in literature and position in Victorian music-making. It identifies an obsession with Cremonese instruments, and particularly those from the Stradivari workshop. As a result of the Victorian desire to own a valuable piece of musical history, the violin became a particularly contested object due to the very real potential for fraud, an issue still witnessed today in the abundance of often poorly made and fraudulently labelled nineteenth-century instruments. This study therefore indicates a much wider call for Victorian thing culture studies to engage with organology. Further work into the multifarious writings of Honeyman is much needed to advance our understanding of early Scottish detection fiction and music tuition books written to capitalize on the booming domestic market. The relationship between Doyle and Honeyman also calls for further investigation.