

## ABSTRACT

**DISSERTATION/THESIS/RESEARCH PAPER/CREATIVE PROJECT:**

The (Re)Mystification of London: Revelations of Contested Space, Concealed Identity, and Moving Menace in Late-Victorian Gothic Fiction

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This project asserts that much of the cultural anxiety found in Gothic-infused late-Victorian fiction derives from literary revelations of the nested spaces, shifting identities, and spontaneous connections inherent to the late-Victorian metropolis. The three literary texts studied here – *The Hound of the Baskervilles* by Arthur Conan Doyle, *Raffles: The Amateur Cracksman* by E.W. Hornung, and *The Thirty-Nine Steps* by John Buchan – all depict London as fundamentally suitable for those who seek to evade the disciplinary gaze and to pursue menacing schemes of criminality and invasion. Doyle's text illustrates the interconnectedness of the spaces within London as well as the passable threshold between London and the English countryside; both the villain Stapleton and the hero Sherlock Holmes use these connections to attack and defend, respectively, the city and its inhabitants. Hornung's stories depict the machinations employed by the gentleman-thief Raffles as he alters his identity and his codes of behaviour in order to

free himself to pursue criminal ends and thus as he challenges cultural barriers. Buchan's text, building on the others, explores the dissolution of cultural boundaries and identities incumbent upon the spontaneous connections made between those who attack English culture and those, like Richard Hannay, who defend it. There emerges in these texts a vision of London (and by extension Great Britain) as a swirling vortex of motion, an unknowable labyrinth perpetually threatened by menacing agents from without and within. I have employed Victor Turner's theories of liminality and *communitas* to describe how criminal agents, and their equally menacing "good-guy" pursuers, separate themselves from structured society in order to move freely and to gain access to the contested thresholds they seek to infiltrate. I also invoke theories of the Gothic, surveillance, and travel, as well as Jeffrey Cohen's monster theory, to characterize the anxiety embedded in such invasions.