Illustrated Everyman: Sherlock Holmes and Professional Class Identity in *The Strand Magazine*

**Abstract**

Using first editions of *The Strand Magazine* from the Newberry Library's C.F. Kittle Collection of Doyleana, this analysis reexamines the visual and written characterization of Sherlock Holmes within the physical context of *The Strand* itself. *The Strand Magazine*, first published in 1891, targeted an upper middle class audience of professionals. This social and economic group had only recently skyrocketed in number and influence in late-Victorian London, and was in the midst of establishing and self-fashioning a social identity for the group. Those involved in the production of *The Strand Magazine* were themselves members of this professional class. This historical and cultural lens gives a new perspective to the publication's ideological importance in professional class self-fashioning and identity formation.

Through a comparative analysis of the magazine's treatment of true-to-life celebrities from within the professional class and the fictional celebrity of Sherlock Holmes, a pattern emerges in written and visual similarities. These similarities enabled *The Strand Magazine* to identify cultivated skill and expertise as the defining traits of professional class identity and membership. These similarities also set up the character of Sherlock Holmes as a representative, identifiable symbol of the social group who shares traits and qualities with every professional field or subgroup. This understanding of Holmes' character as a symbol of class ideology and identity is grounded both in the physical context of *The Strand Magazine*’s pages, as well as in the social and cultural context of contemporary, late-Victorian London. While a modern reader might well interpret Holmes’ character as a solitary genius, a contemporary reader would have understood him to be at the very heart of the professional class group identity.