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Grado en Estudios Ingleses

TRABAJO DE FIN DE GRADO

INDIA IN THE VICTORIAN POPULAR FICTION, ANALYSIS OF
ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE'S "THE SIGN OF FOUR".

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2016/2017

ABSTRACT

Colonialist ideologies, the effects of colonization and the colonial relations between two countries may be apparently hidden in a literary work. Nevertheless, the contrapuntal and post-colonial reading of a literary work can reveal all these matters. Arthur Conan Doyle's novella *The Sign of Four* includes colonialist ideologies and the colonial process of India in the second half of the nineteenth century. This novel acted as a double mechanism that diffused a colonialist ideology to the British population and, at the same time, reflected an India that was not entirely 'real'. This happens through Orientalism, a discourse of the construction of the 'other', a form of authority and a phenomenon constructed by intellectuals, artists and writers, among others, constructed by the naturalizing of a wide range of Orientalist assumptions and stereotypes.

Key words: Colonialism, post-colonialism, Arthur Conan Doyle, *The Sign of Four*, Sherlock Holmes, India, Great Britain.

RESUMEN

Las ideologías coloniales, los efectos de la colonización y las relaciones coloniales entre dos países pueden estar aparentemente ocultas en una obra literaria. Sin embargo, la lectura contrapuntal y post-colonial de una obra literaria nos permite revelar estas cuestiones. *El Signo de los Cuatro* de Arthur Conan Doyle tiene presente el imperialismo y el proceso colonial británico en la India en la segunda mitad del siglo XIX. Esta novela actuó como un doble mecanismo que difundía una ideología colonialista a la población británica, y al mismo tiempo reflejaba una India que no era del todo 'real'. Esto ocurre a través del orientalismo, el cual es un discurso de construcción de 'lo otro', una forma de autoridad y un fenómeno que es construido por intelectuales, artistas y escritores, entre otros, por la naturalización de un conjunto de suposiciones y estereotipos orientalistas.

Palabras clave: Colonialismo, post-colonialismo, Arthur Conan Doyle, *El Signo de los Cuatro*, Sherlock Holmes, India, Gran Bretaña.

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Introduction

This dissertation aims to do a contrapuntal reading¹ of Arthur Conan Doyle's *The Sign of Four* to disclose its implication in imperialism and the colonial process of India in the second half of the nineteenth century. It is so-called contrapuntal reading because the term contrapuntal implies a reading that provides a counterpoint to the text, showing colonial implications that remain hidden in the text. What is said and represented in literary texts can be analysed to understand the various ideological practices of colonialism. British society was influenced by the way the East was represented in the British culture and literature and this influence contributes to establishing the frame of reference for the political forms of colonialism.

Similarly, this dissertation pretends to make a post-colonial reading of Arthur Conan Doyle's *The Sign of Four*. Post-colonial reading involves reading texts from colonial cultures to highlight the effects of colonization on literary production. Post-colonial reading is a deconstructive reading that attempts to reveal the colonialist ideologies of literary works. A post-colonial reading of English literature would entail paying much more attention to colonial relations between Great Britain and India and the effects of these historical relations on literary production. It would involve reconsidering English literary production as a series of changes and progressions of national inspiration that emanate from the imperial process as well. In this case, it can be argued that Arthur Conan Doyle's *The Sign of Four* is the result of colonialist propaganda about India, its society and customs and, at the same time, this novel served

¹ Contrapuntal reading: term coined by Edward Said to describe a way of reading the texts of English literature so as to reveal their deep implication in imperialism and the colonial process. (Ashcroft 49)

as a means to transmit the colonialist ideology to the population taking into account the importance and recognition of Arthur Conan Doyle as a writer, especially his Sherlock Holmes novels. Colonialist ideologies appearing in a Victorian popular novella written for the great public that is still read nowadays is a crucial factor to consider this novel influential in people's imagination about India. The population of Great Britain at that time was especially attracted to everything that happened in India, books containing information about India were enormously demanded and literature influenced the idea of people about India and its population.

This dissertation begins with a first chapter explaining what happened during the most important Indian-British conflict, the Indian rebellion of 1857, conflict through which the plot of *The Sign of Four* develops. The second chapter explains how India came to Great Britain through literature, an influential factor in the perception of India by the British, and what was the consequent reaction of the British to this conflict. In the third chapter is placed the analysis of Arthur Conan Doyle's *The Sign of Four* after a contrapuntal and postcolonial reading. A series of colonialist concepts that appear in the novel will be shown; most of these concepts are shown mostly through attitudes, dialogues and actions of the characters, in addition to their characterization and how they are described, extracting the colonialist concepts, attitudes, actions and ideologies of the novel.

1. Chapter 1: Indian Rebellion of 1857

1.1. Indian-British Conflict: Development and consequences

The Sign of Four, one of the famous detective novels written by Arthur Conan Doyle about his outstanding character Sherlock Holmes, explores the context of the Indian Rebellion of 1857, a conflict which broke out 160 years ago, and “is acknowledged to have been the greatest challenge to any European power in the nineteenth century” (Ramesh). This rebellion hides plentiful uncertainty; while for the British it was understood as a mutiny, for the native Indians it meant the beginning of the Indian independence movement, a story of a people rising to throw off the imperial yoke, but the truth is that it cost hundreds of thousands of lives. The Rebellion of 1857, also known as "The Rebellion of the Sepoys²", began on May 10, 1857, and immediately spread into a rebellion. This rebellion, which began violently and was severely appeased by the British, supposed a considerable threat to British power throughout the region and prestige in the world. It influenced the way in which India was seen in Great Britain, and its end involved major political changes for both India and the British Empire.

The British East India Company, which was one of several mercantile companies set out to exploit the wealth of the east, created an empire in India between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In 1600, Queen Elizabeth I of England decided to create a company with the aim of increasing shipping and boosting commerce in Great Britain. England soon realized that there was great deal of economic opportunities in India. India was a huge source of income, and to sustain it, the company recruited regiments of Indian soldiers known as sepoy. With such an armed force under its

² Sepoys (from the Hindustani ‘sipahi=soldier): the Indian soldiers belonging to the army of the British Indian East Company.

charge, the company was willing to use it to increase its territories, and thus its revenues. During the year 1763 the British East India Company obtained most of the power in the region, among them the three presidential capitals, Madras, Bombay and Calcutta (Lázaro 70).

However, when the development of the British in India really increased, it was when they obtained the power of Bengal. During that time the most astute, both British and Indian, were enriched by the use of taxes, licenses, commercial privileges, mortgages, landings and bribes. It was then when rumours of corruption by the British began to appear. The first British governor of Bengal was accused of corruption and oppression against the natives (Rawding 6-8).

This was only the beginning of the discontent of the native Indians with the British. The sepoys began to be dissatisfied with the British East India Company as well. Some regiments of sepoys were dissolved due to their refusal of being transported by sea, since their religion and beliefs forbade them to leave India. But this was not the only reason for their discontent, the salary of the sepoys was low (about six rupees a month³) and there was a suspension of payments for services abroad, for which the sepoys should be paid an extra salary. The mutineers were punished with great severity. However, the British seemed not to be aware of the discomforts they were causing (Moreland 23).

According to Rawding, the British set out to improve and modernize Indian society and the Indian natives were affected by the fact that the British wanted to impose these improvements because as they created a more efficient administration, the

³ 1 rupee = 0,0121497 pound sterling

traditional customs of the Indian people were lost. The British sometimes exaggerated the bad government of the Indian princes to annex new territories. In addition, the English suppressed some Hindu traditions as they were crimes to the eyes of the English. In fact, in the British parliament it was discussed the necessity of establishing Christianity in India, reason why the Hindus began to suspect about British intentions. For all these reasons, many Indians decided to remain faithful to their traditional beliefs and customs (15).

The mutiny began in Meerut, north of Delhi, where eighty-five members of a cavalry regiment refused to use the cartridges of discord. Inside this new cartridges created by the British there was the gunpowder and the bullet covered by a greased paper to conserve its content. However, the grease of the cartridge was made from a mixture of beef and pork grease. As it is popularly known, the cow is a sacred animal for Hindus and the pig is forbidden in the Muslim religion, reason why this was really offensive for Hindus and Muslim sepoys and they refused to use it. The following day the sepoys declared the rebellion and killed some British officers along with their families. All the mutineers were heading to Delhi. The sepoys did not agree on the strategy they had to take and they were changing leaders in succession. Finally, and after a series of hard attacks, the British troops managed to reconquer Delhi and then they indiscriminately murdered the Indian population.

The sepoys mutinied in most of the garrisons of northern India. However, most of the riots were quickly extinguished. One of the bloodiest battles took place in the Ganges area, where some sepoys were disarmed and killed. This caused a great stir and for this reason, the sepoys assassinated their officers. The response of the British was to burn the villages in their way indiscriminately. The revenge of the sepoys took place in

Cawnpore, where British officers, their wives and children were trapped and finally killed. From that moment the British began a campaign of hatred and revenge in which a lot of innocent people suffered. Meanwhile, in Oudh the military mutiny began to take on proportions of a national uprising. Finally, the Cawnpore-Lucknow area was liberated by the British. By mid-1858 the British had already appeased most of the revolts, which ended practically with the rebellion. During the end of the rebellion, the Hindus had to face the English reprisals and the prisoners were tortured (Goetz 41).

The reason that the British used to disqualify the Indians with the reasons of the rebellion was the refusal of the sepoys to the introduction of the greased cartridges. The religious rhetoric was frequently used to justify opposition to what was seen as a corrupt moral order. However, the deepest cause was the birth of an Indian nationalist sentiment (Metcalf 133).

This rebellion involved major political changes for India. In Britain it was taken the decision to manage India without the East India Company although it worked economically and commercially. Finally, in 1858, Queen Victoria signed the “Government Act of India” by which the British crown assumed the government of India. In addition, the Hindu princes were restored their rights and privileges and a royal proclamation was made that guaranteed the amnesty to the ‘rebels’ and guaranteed their religious freedom. Thereafter it was shown more concern for the well-being of Indian citizens and the administration of justice was improved to prevent corruption. Finally, in 1876 Queen Victoria assumed the title of Empress of India (Rawding 42-46).

1.2. Controversy: Indian Mutiny vs Indian Great Revolution

There were clear disagreements among historians about whether to call rebellion, revolt or mutiny to what happened in India in 1857. The clearest evidence of the difficulty of interpreting the rebellion lays in the fact that there was a debate because whereas the critics of the British East India Company claimed it was a great revolution, the supporters tried to hide the Indian Rebellion by calling it a simple mutiny. For instance, the *Chambers History of the Indian Revolt*, an account of the Indian Mutiny of 1857, argued that “the outbreak was a military revolt rather than a national insurrection; there was almost a total absence of anything like nationality in the motions of the insurgents” (Chakravarty 24). In Arthur Conan Doyle’s *The Sign of Four* the Indian rebellion is described as a great mutiny that appeared without notice of complaints by the Indian population:

Well, I was never in luck’s way long. Suddenly, without a note of warning, the great mutiny broke upon us. One month India lay as still and peaceful, to all appearance, as Surrey or Kent; the next there were two hundred thousand black devils let loose, and the country was a perfect hell. (Doyle 43)

Other supporters of the British did recognize it was more than a mutiny, nevertheless tried to deny that the rebellion was a national discontent, thereby denying the existence of Indian nationalism as shown in the testimony of Charles Raikes, a writer living on India who entered the Bengal civil service in 1830, who declares:

I attribute the existing disturbances in India to a mutiny in the Bengal army, and to that cause alone; I mean that the exciting and immediate cause of the revolution is to be found in the mutiny. That we have in many parts of the

country drifted from the mutiny into rebellion, is all too true; but I repeat my assertion, that we have to deal now with a revolt caused by a mutiny, not with a mutiny growing out of a national discontent. (Chakravarty 23)

Nevertheless, there were people who claimed that the rebellion was more than a military mutiny. The writer George Bruce Malleson claims in *The Mutiny of the Bengal Army* that what began as a military mutiny speedily changed its atmosphere and became a national insurrection (Chakravarty 24). Apparently, the British wanted to hide that it was more than a simple military mutiny because it was considered that “by its extent and duration, astonished the whole civilized world . . . and threatened seriously to affect the prestige of a flag that during the past century and a half has waved in proud supremacy over the fortresses and cities of India” (Chakravarty 24).

On many occasions, it was very difficult to know exactly what happened, especially because of the fact that there was too much propaganda. As a consequence it is difficult to classify the event as rebellion, revolt or mutiny. For the British, who tried to subtract gravity to maintain its importance and image of triumphal, invincible and racially superiority in the rest of Europe, it was not a rebellion but a mass of riots and mutinies that occurred at the same time but were pacified before it could be considered a true rebellion. For the native Indians, however, it was not a simple riot, not even a set of them but the Great Rebellion that later triggered the first war of independence of India. It is especially important to correctly name what happened in India in 1857, since it is not the same to define it as a great rebellion rather than as a simple mutiny. To find a correct term to designate what occurred in India we must consult the definitions of rebellion, revolt and mutiny. We often use the terms revolt, mutiny, rebellion, and

revolution to refer to any type of uprising or conflict. However, these terms have different meaning and have different causes, characteristics and consequences.

According to the Oxford English Dictionary, both mutiny and revolt and rebellion can be used as synonyms but each term has its own particularities. A mutiny is a disorderly movement of a group of people that revolt against the established authority or order. Unlike rebellion or revolt, the mutiny takes place in a limited area, such as a prison or military barracks and it supposes the disobedience to the command and the hierarchical order. A revolt is an alteration at the social level. It is a social movement that opposes power or a measure created by the government and it is often violent. Usually the revolts arise spontaneously due to a conflict of social, economic or political nature, among others. Sometimes the revolt originates a more organized movement to achieve a major social or political change. A rebellion means to resist, rebel or lack obedience. A rebellion is a rejection of authority that ranges from civil disobedience to armed resistance and constitutes a crime against public order. Both mutiny and revolt are less serious than rebellion. In the army, those who do not abide by the orders of their superiors are considered rebels. Usually rebellion comes as a reaction to oppression.

From my point of view, the term that represents in the most appropriate way what happened in India in 1857 is rebellion, thus I refer to this event as a rebellion throughout the entire dissertation. A revolt is a spontaneous and short-lived protest, so it usually does not have a certain plan. In contrast, the rebellion of India of 1857 began as a riot of sepoys but it quickly turned into a rebellion as it begun in a violent way, and although it was appeased, it entailed a considerable threat for the British power in India. The riot was the beginning of what became a more organized and massive protests, in addition to an armed uprising with clear political objectives that lasted about two years.

Additionally, this rebellion caused great political changes for India, the British company of the East Indies was dissolved and the British crown assumed the government of India by the Government of India Act, this event forced the financial system and the administration of India were affected as well.

2. Second chapter: India in the British imagination

Generally, people's imagination considerably increases when facing rumours about an unknown place, especially if that place is highly exotic, mysterious and interesting. This was what happened in Great Britain with India during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Britain's colonial domination reached its peak at the end of the nineteenth century. Although commerce and economy were the main reason to colonize other places, there were many other factors such as civilize the most barbaric regions of the world. In the end, Great Britain became a great colonizing power; as a result, British writers felt the need to write about new places and cultures, and the written texts about India are among the most common. Afterwards, this literature about India has been crucial to understand the relationship between Great Britain and India.

2.1. British perception of India

Literature on Indian subjects began to appear in Great Britain during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, especially in the form of drama and, above all, fiction. India and its colonization captivated the British and their imagination since it was a very exotic and profitable country for Great Britain since it was a huge economic asset, “the loss of which would have severely affected British industry, finances and geopolitical edge” (Chakravarty 35). Popular writers wrote about Indian issues because India was appealing in the British popular imagination. The degree of interest of British society in India was so great that such a significant writer as Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, who never visited India, decided to explore the context of the Indian Rebellion of 1857 in one of the Sherlock Holmes stories, *The Sign of Four*.

The East has been built and continues to be built on European mentality and imagination through Orientalism. Orientalism was widespread in European thought. Orientalism was not only a form of academic discourse but it was a style of thought based on “the ontological and epistemological distinction between the Orient and the Occident” as well (Said 1978: 10). Said discusses Orientalism as the corporate institution for dealing with the Orient: “dealing with it by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it: in short, Orientalism as a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient” (1978: 11). Orientalism is a discourse of the construction of the ‘other’, a form of authority and a phenomenon constructed by intellectuals, artists, commentators, writers, politicians, and constructed by the naturalizing of a wide range of Orientalist assumptions and stereotypes. The relationship between East and West is a relationship of power, of domination, of varying degrees of a complex hegemony. Consequently, according to Said, orientalist discourse is more valuable as a sign of power exerted by the West over the East than a ‘true’ discourse about the East (1978: 13).

Orientalism is a distribution of geopolitical awareness into aesthetic, scholarly, economic, sociological, historical and philological texts; it is an elaboration not only of a basic geographical distinction . . . but also of a whole series of ‘interests’ which . . . it not only created but maintains. It is, rather than expresses, a certain will or intention to understand, in some cases to control, manipulate, even incorporate, what is a manifestly different world. (Said 1978: 20)

Thus Orientalism is an academic discourse that has influence on population and literature. Colonialism and Orientalist theories determined what was said and thought about the East, nonetheless, according to Said, “there is an authentic ‘Orient’ out there that is actively being misrepresented” (1994: 83). Additionally, Richard King, affirms that “Orientalism discourses censure attempts to analyse the West in a self-critical and comparative manner, by misrepresenting both Asian and Western culture” (85). Orientalism is a relationship of power and cultural domination as well as a system of apparent knowledge about the East but it is a system in which 'the other' that is the East is never allowed to decide, the East is rather an object of fantasy.

In the literature from the eighteenth century to the twentieth century, the East was seen as a colonial fantasy; according to Chakravarty, a significant proportion of what happened in India came to the British through: “a mass of heterogeneous primary material comprising letters, diaries, memoirs, newspaper reports, telegrams, civil and military despatches, parliamentary debates and, sometimes, rumour, and so preparing the ground for history writing in subsequent decades” (20). These types of writings in particular, were the earliest writings by which the Indian Rebellion was propagated and they conveyed a stereotyped image of India in the mind of the British population.

Besides, the events of the Indian Rebellion had a great impact on public opinion, not only in Britain but also in the rest of Europe and even in the United States. In light of Keith Booker, literature was fundamental in the persuasion of people. This strategy involved “both a conditioning of public opinion in Britain and engineering of Indian attitudes toward their British rulers . . . The British sought to supplement their control of their Indian empire through a complex of hegemonic practices involving subtle strategies of cultural manipulation” (5-6). In addition, British fiction about India and

other colonies can be seen as an epistemological technique and as an attempt to better know, and therefore, better control the foreign peoples and places under the British colonial rule (Booker 6). Thus, “both Western and non-western people are manipulated and subjugated through the ‘same project of control and exploitation’” (King 85).

Literature played a crucial role since it became a source of information and the large number of writings published about India increased the curiosity of the English-speaking population (Sencourt). In the words of Chakravarty, “when newspapers such as *The Times*, the *Daily News*, the *Daily Telegraph* and the *Daily Mail* published about European and colonial conflicts there was a growth of the reading public” (33), who was very interested about what happened in the colonies under British rule, for this reason it was published about the Indian colonization and rebellion. Colonial conflicts produced “sophisticated forms of metropolitan counter-mobilisation structured around themes of race, religion, ‘pacification’, imperial identity and a forthright binary of civilization-savagery” (33).

There were two main channels for the propagation of the imperial idea at home and in India. Of these the first comprises . . . learned histories, commentaries and travel-writing, besides periodicals such as *The times* . . . While the opinions and controversies appearing in these media were largely of the elite circles, . . . the technological developments in print media and the growth of the reading public over the second half of the nineteenth century created conditions for mass circulation of non-elite newspapers, magazines . . . along with popular print culture constitutes the second channel for the propagation of British overseas expansion. The need to ensure sales in a fickle market . . . found a profitable solution in uplifting, swashbuckling accounts of national character and history . .

. drawing empire out from elite circles, handed it over to popular interest.
(Chakravarty 33)

The Sign of Four belongs to this second channel stated by Chakravarty principally because it is popular print culture, it is a popular novel addressed to the great public instead of only the elite circle of the British society.

According to Metcalf in most fiction books, British presence in India is seen as a positive influence for the Indian population, especially due to the British civilizing mission through Christianity. Towards the end of the eighteenth century there were several novels dealing with India. In most novels, India is presented as an exotic place, a country rich in valuable materials that were scarce in Great Britain (70). The modern consumer had an insatiable desire for luxury goods from the tropical world (Moreland 23). Arthur Conan Doyle's novella represents this idea about India as an exotic, remote and extraordinary country. Doyle's linkage of India with the exotic suggests that British society was very fascinated with Oriental products.⁴

All these oriental products in addition to the popular rumour that the British who went to India became wealthy increased the curiosity of the European people. British colonies were associated with luxury and wealth, which was a reality. Bengal, a region located in the northeast of the Indian Subcontinent, was an inexhaustible stream of wealth. It is no coincidence that India was related with riches, jewels and pearls, an image that remained in the British imagination about India. (Metcalf 78) This economic prosperity made imperialism attractive to the British population. Exoticism and wealth are nineteenth century popular conceptions about India since many writers and artists used oriental places and their valuable products and materials to captivate their readers.

⁴ Further analysis in Chapter 3: Analysis of Arthur Conan Doyle's *The Sign of Four*, pages 28-30

2.2.Reception and Reaction to the Indian Rebellion in Great Britain

The Indian rebellion was accompanied by a public debate in Anglo-India and Great Britain. The principal consequences of the news on the rebellion of India in 1857 was the loss of support of a part of the British population to imperialism as a result of the battles between Indians and British, which aroused the creation of prejudices and negative stereotypes in the mind of the British about the Indian population.

The initial receptions of the news in Britain and in Anglo-India were confusing and contradictory. News about shootings and massacres of the British during the Indian rebellion of 1857 began to be published in Great Britain. Newspaper reports were considerably dramatic and exaggerated over scenes of violence, criticizing the ‘rebel’ brutalities and omitting the British ones (Chakravarty 35-36).

As a general rule, Western newspapers reported a warlike history with clear sympathy for the British and criticism towards the Indians. There is no mention about the unequal power relationship between British and Indians, the oppression of the Indian population or British errors and brutality against the Indians. It seems that most British never tried to make the effort of understanding Indian inhabitants and the rebellion of 1857 was the reaction of many people who felt that their way of life and customs were being seriously threatened (Moreland 245). John McBratney seems to agree with this when he says: “most Britons viewed the Revolt as an expression of Indian anger with perceived attacks upon their social and religious customs” (151).

All the news about the rebels and the massacres happening during the Indian Rebellion created fear and repulsion in Britain. British population started to feel

insecure and they felt that the Indian Rebellion caused a breakdown of the British power and prestige. In the early nineteenth century, Great Britain was a nation that was characterized by its territorial expansion; they imposed the British culture to the indigenous populations. British imperialism encouraged Britain's popular confidence as a powerful nation. However, the Indian Rebellion of 1857 or the Indian broke the streak of international achievements by the British colonial government.

As maintained by Chakravarty, British society continued to regard colonies as exotic possessions (35-36), nevertheless *The Sign of Four* suggests that The Indian Rebellion created concern and fear in British society towards India and its population. Arthur Conan Doyle recognizes India's exotic and economic appeal in *The Sign of Four*, but also acknowledges that society is afraid of sepoy's revolts and how these may affect their welfare as a nation. The Indian rebellion undermined British confidence because of its rapid expansion and massacres against the British. This mutiny weakened Great Britain so much that Doyle tried to describe the situation that was lived in India during the rebellion:

From where I stood I could see hundreds of the black fiends, with their red coats still on their backs, dancing and howling round the burning house. Some of them pointed at me, and a couple of bullets sang past my head; so I broke away across the paddy-fields, and found myself late at night safe within the walls at Agra. As it proved, however, there was no great safety there, either. The whole country was up like a swarm of bees [. . .] From every point on the compass there was nothing but torture and murder and outrage. The city of Agra is a great place, swarming with fanatics and fierce devil-worshippers of all sorts. (Doyle 43)

While India conveyed good feelings because of its exoticism and the economic benefits that provided to Great Britain, native revolts against the British Empire created fear and mistrust in the British population. British safety was seriously questioned; as a consequence, this led to the decay of popular support for the territorial expansion of Great Britain.

After the Indian rebellion, the British associated the oriental cultures with savagery and barbarism and Indians began to be negatively portrayed. Previously the Indians were seen as subordinate and weak but then observed their behaviour and began to think that they were fierce and criminal. *The Sign of Four* recreates society's fear of foreign people; racism is present in the novel, which shows the stereotypes created by the Victorian society of Eastern culture⁵ and how nineteenth-century British society perceived the power and imperialism of their nation and how it directly influenced their lives.

British literature instilled and created certain prejudices against India, its culture, its various religions and its population. Colonial literature can be considered as part of political propaganda, which created racial superiority and justified colonization. In this case, literature acted as a defence for the British presence in India. In the nineteenth century, we can find marginal references of India in English fiction where Indians are described as barbarians, cannibals and beasts, and their religion was attacked as well as their customs. There was a tendency to racist attitudes towards India from the early 1830s which evolved to intolerance towards indigenous cultures (Chakravarty 95).

The reaction to the news of the Indian rebellion in Britain created xenophobia accompanied with revenge, especially circulated by popular newspapers and journals

⁵ Further analysis in Chapter 3: Analysis of Arthur Conan Doyle's *The Sign of Four*, pages 21-27

such as *The Times* and the *Anglo-Indian Calcutta Review* but also by popular writers. From that particular moment, society started to be more interested than usual in issues such as race, religion, pacification and imperial identity (Chakravarty 33-34).

The image of India depicted in Victorian British literature is the result of a conservative and imperialist perception. The British writers created their own vision of India for those people in Great Britain who had no close contact with India. India was described as exotic, unknown, mysterious, remote and unexplored, rich in treasures and precious stones, but also the fanatically religious India was depicted, a country with archaic traditions, obsolete, savage and uncivilized. The image of India presented by the British writers caused the British population to create stereotypes that conditioned the perception of reality.

Orientalism believes that cultural construction can be historically decisive. It should be borne in mind that texts can create not only knowledge but also affect the reality they seem to describe. The British perception of India was determined by the literature about an imaginary India. As a result of the subjective information conveyed by different sources, a British image of India was created, which was determinant in the way in which India was seen in the rest of Europe.

3. Chapter 3: Analysis of Arthur Conan Doyle's *The Sign of Four*⁶

In this chapter is placed the analysis of Arthur Conan Doyle's *The Sign of Four*. A series of colonial concepts that appear in the novel will be shown; most of these concepts are shown mostly through attitudes, dialogues and actions of the characters, in addition to their characterization and how they are described. The colonialist ideology is appreciated in the way in which India is described, and what was the situation lived in India during the rebellion of 1857, as well as how the religions of India and its inhabitants are portrayed and how the Indian elements of cultural attraction for Great Britain are shown. In the first instance, the colonial concepts will be introduced with their definition and origin, according to Bill Ashcroft's *Post-colonial studies: the key concepts*, and eventually those colonial concepts will be demonstrated with examples that appear in the novel.

3.1. Racism

Racism comes from the word "race," which is a term that is used for the classification of humans taking in consideration of their distinctive physical characteristics or phenotypic traits. In addition, the term implies that certain behaviours of human beings are related to racial origin, such as personality, ideas and individual abilities (Ashcroft 180). In colonialism the meaning of race is of particular importance as colonialist powers took advantage of the division of humans into races to consider their own race superior and the rest of races were considered inferior and thus the 'superior races' dominated the societies they considered of an 'inferior race'.

⁶ See annex I (Summary and main characters of *The Sign of Four*)

Racism is a way of thinking that considers that the physical characteristics of people are directly and causally linked to the intellectual characteristics. For this reason, people are classified as "superior" and "inferior" depending to the racial groups they belong, which often leads to discrimination against those who are thought to be inferior (Ashcroft 180).

The division of races based on the colour of the skin was later replaced by Darwin's theory of natural selection. From then on the colonizers found in Social Darwinism a justification for the domination and even the extinction of the inferior races. Besides, the concept of racial improvement coincided with the "civilizing mission", considering the lower races as savage, bestial, cannibal, child-like and primitive, as they are qualified in *The Sign of Four*:

Racial thought and colonialism feel the need to establish binary distinctions, such as that between "civilized" and "primitive" and thus justify the need to colonize and hierarchize the population. European racial thought initiated a hierarchy of human variation that has been difficult to banish. Although race is not specifically an invention of imperialism, it quickly became one of the most common concepts of imperialism, since the idea of superiority made possible the notion of domination. In the colonial situation between Great Britain and India there was mistrust, incomprehension, grudges, hatred and contempt between dominators and dominated. While the British showed good manners, refined tastes, elegance, and were polite people, the natives were silent, enigmatic, untrustworthy, and seem to hide something. In fact, in *The Sign of Four* appears the generalization that all people of Orient are suspicious:

When the rajah put his jewels into the hands of Achmet he did it because he knew that he was a trusty man. They are suspicious folk in the East, however: so what does

this rajah do but take a second even more trusty servant and set him to play the spy upon the first? (Doyle 47)

The mistrust between British and Indians is reflected in the book when Jonathan Small is threatened by two indigenous Sikhs called Mahomet Singh and Abdullah Khan when he was protecting Agra Fort. Small suspected that they were allied with the rebels or sepoys because they were silent and acted suspiciously. Instead of speaking with Small they communicated among themselves in Sikh dialect. Even though Small tried to engage in conversation with them, they were elusive and distant. Finally the Sikhs attacked Small while he was distracted. Mahomet Singh and Abdullah Khan were not allied with the rebels but they wanted the treasure that was inside the fort. The treasure belonged to a very rich Raja who hid there a chest full of pearls and precious stones. Small was threatened; if he did not agree to share the treasure with them they would kill him. At first Small refused, even though this decision meant his death, demonstrating British honour and loyalty. However, he finally succumbed and the Indians are accused of inciting a British to commit a crime, as they stole the chest and killed a man to get the treasure. This event tried to show how the Indian natives acted. They attacked and threatened to kill Jonathan Small although he was kind with them, they were distant, distrustful and aggressive with the British:

They are a fierce, morose, and intractable people, though capable of forming most devoted friendships when their confidence has once been gained . . . They are naturally hideous, having large, misshapen heads, small, fierce eyes, and distorted features . . . so intractable and fierce are they that all the efforts of the British official have failed to win them over in any degree. They have always been a terror to shipwrecked crews, braining the survivors with their stone-

headed clubs, or shooting them with their poisoned arrows. These massacres are invariably concluded by a cannibal feast. (Doyle 30)

Some passages of the work are a good reminder of the prejudices that the British had with the Indians. They had the mentality of settlers and justified the colonial occupation. In the *Sign of Four* Indians are described as uncivilized. Uncivilized is defined as ‘pertaining to or characteristic of savages’ and the notion of civilizing cultures or people is defined as ‘to make civil, to bring out a state of barbarism; to instruct in the arts of life; to enlighten and refine.’ The term savage has been widely used in Eurocentric and imperial ideologies. The British describe their culture as the civilized culture against the primitiveness of India.

“‘A savage!’ I exclaimed. ‘Perhaps one of those Indians who were the associates of Jonathan Small’” (Doyle 30).

“Now, then, where are we to find our savage? . . . They were tall, fierce-looking chaps” (Doyle 30).

Native Indians were frequently described as primitives, implying they were wild because of their customs and lifestyle. European traditions and morals were used to establish the norms of the civilized. The primitivism of India was opposed to the modernism of the Western world, reinforcing the multitude of differences between orient and occident and thus the binary pair of the primitive (savage) and the modern (civilized). It was widely thought that the Indian natives belonged to a less developed culture that required the help of the British to become modern and civilized. Terms as cannibal and primitive were maintained in the colonial discourse to keep the relation of power of the British over the Indians (Ashcroft 26-27). As a result, these pejorative

adjectives used to represent the native Indians caused an effect in the European consciousness, thus identifying the Indian population with the wild and primitivism. European traditions and morals were used to establish the norms of the civilized.

Nonetheless, one of the terms that has more pejorative meaning is that of cannibals. The term cannibalism has been used with special interest in colonial studies to differentiate between western and eastern people. Cannibal is defined as ‘a man (esp. a savage) that eats human flesh; a man-eater, an anthropophagite. Originally proper name of the man-eating Caribs of the Antilles’ (Hulme 16). This definition is a sample of what is intended to do with colonial discourse: separating the civilized from the wild and the definition of cannibal helps to consolidate this distinction.

““It is a romance!” cried Mrs. Forrester. "An injured lady, half a million in treasure, a black cannibal, and a wooden-legged ruffian. They take the place of the conventional dragon or wicked earl!”” (Doyle 31).

“It is a dreary, fever-stricken place, and all beyond our little clearings was infested with wild cannibal natives, who were ready enough to blow a poisoned dart at us if they saw a chance” (Doyle 47).

In addition, the use of the term native was employed to describe those who were thought to be inferior to the colonizers. In *The Sign of Four* adjectives like indigenous, savages, cannibals, black beasts, hellish, devils and uncivilized appeared associated with the Indians. The degeneration, savagery and brutality attributed to Indians was what encouraged popular fear of the colonies and their inhabitants.

Suddenly, without a note of warning, the great mutiny broke upon us. One month India lay as still and peaceful, to all appearance, as Surrey or Kent; the next there were two hundred thousand black devils let loose, and the country was a perfect hell . . . Our plantation was at a place called Muttra, near the border of the Northwest Provinces. Night after night the whole sky was alight with the burning bungalows . . . (Doyle 43)

Throughout the novel, both Sherlock Holmes and Watson make reflections and comments about the Indian natives. The natives of India are seen as barbarians, even Watson details the differences between their race and other races, thus showing a distance between other races and the British.

“The aborigines of the Andaman Islands may perhaps claim the distinction of being the smallest race upon this earth, though some anthropologists prefer the Bushmen of Africa, the Digger Indians of America, and the Terra del Fuegians. The average height is rather below four feet, although many full-grown adults may be found who are very much smaller than this. They are fierce, morose, and intractable people.” (Doyle 30)

Watson’s depiction of natives as fierce, morose and intractable people reflects the stereotypes of the British of the Indians during the nineteenth century. There was a fear of ‘going native’ among the British, that is the fear of colonizers of acquiring native customs and losing their superior identity by the contamination from native practices, reason why the British were not very much related to the native Indians, even the British officers avoided relating to the East India Company’s sepoys (Ashcroft 106).

Distance between British and Indians is also shown when Watson and Holmes refer or describe Indian people. In one of the passages of the novel appears an Indian servant who is called Khitmutgar, Indian servants appear in the novel in houses where wealthy people lived. However, Watson refers to him as the Indian, he is not even called by his name: “We followed the Indian down a sordid and common passage, ill lit and worse furnished, until he came to a door upon the right, which he threw open” (Doyle 11).

‘Indian’ is a generic term for Indian natives. Terms such as Indian, indigenous and aboriginal have negative and derogatory connotations in the contexts in which they are used. The *Sign of Four* shows the stereotypes created by the Victorian society of Eastern culture. The novel reflects the widespread apprehensions of Victorian society toward Eastern culture, as Doyle subscribes to popular beliefs that emphasized the relationship between foreign characteristics and criminality.

This fear is clearly seen in the description of an Indian in *The Sign of Four* called Tonga as Watson remarks that: “Never have I seen features so deeply marked with all bestiality and cruelty. His small eyes glowed and burned with a sombre light, and his thick lips were writhed back from his teeth, which grinned and chattered at us with a half animal fury” (Doyle 38).

The people of Great Britain had this feeling of the Indians after the rebellion. The British tendency was to associate the negative physical characteristics with the aggressive behaviour of the Indians. *The Sign of Four* recreates the fear of society to foreign people; racism is present at all times.

3.2. Idealization and exoticism of India

In the British imagination, India is seen as an exotic and foreign territory as well as land of incalculable wealth where Britain has established a trade. In Great Britain there was an idealization of India, it was common to think that the people who went to India became wealthy. The key concept of the idealization of India has to do with the introduction of the exotic from abroad into a domestic economy. Besides, the idealization of India was nourished by the imported materials. The British developed in Europe markets for a diversity of Indian products which were imported to Great Britain from India due to the high demand, among them indigo, saltpetre and tobacco. The most valuable, however, were the fine woven and hand-made textiles created with Indian looms. From the earliest voyages of the British to India, exotic mineral, artefacts, plants and animals were brought back for display in museums. Peoples of other cultures, as in the case of Indians, were brought to Great Britain as were used as a popular entertainment and those Europeans who visited India and had lived interesting and exotic experiences exhibited themselves as well (Ashcroft 87).

“We earned a living at this time by my exhibiting poor Tonga at fairs and other such places as the black cannibal. He would eat raw meat and dance his war-dance” (Doyle 50).

This example shows how some British exploited the stereotypes about India and its inhabitants, although Jonathan Small knew that Tonga was not a cannibal, he did exhibit him, being aware of the interest that a native Indian depicted as a cannibal would arouse in the British.

In *The Sign of Four* is shown that late nineteenth-century British society regarded colonies as exotic possessions. Conan Doyle represents India as an exotic and attractive place full of beautiful materials, oriental figures, vases, luxuries, tobacco, Indian tapestries, curiosities and treasures and well as precious stones, handicrafts and Indian art.

Evidence that India was associated with the exotic can be seen in the story when Conan Doyle in much detail describes the Indian objects of Miss Morstan's house, which captured Watson's attention. The social fascination with the exoticism and luxury of India is demonstrated in *The Sign of Four*, when Watson describes in detail and enthusiasm the house of Thaddeus Sholto as well, full of Eastern objects. "The carpet was of amber and black, so soft and so thick that the foot sank pleasantly into it, as into a bed of moss" (Doyle 11) or "a lamp in the fashion of a silver dove that [hangs] from an almost invisible golden wire in the centre of the room. As it burned it filled the air with a subtle and aromatic odor" (Doyle 11). Doyle's linkage of India with the exotic suggests that British society was very fascinated with all that had to do with Oriental products.

In *The Sign of Four*, the idea of economic progress appears as well, it was assumed that the aim of the people who travel to India was economic comfort. This idea is not unfounded, as some British were enriched by the use of taxes, licenses, commercial privileges, mortgages, landings and bribes. It was then when rumours of corruption by the British began to appear. In fact, the first British governor of Bengal was accused of corruption against the natives, notwithstanding not all the British were enriched with pillage or corruption. The fact that British officials got large amounts of

money is demonstrated by *The Sign of Four's* fictional character Abdullah Khan, a Sikh soldier whose job is to defend the British fort of Agra. Mahomet Singh and Abdullah Khan try to get the treasure of the Agra Castle and try to convince Jonathan Small to join them and they tell him: "We only ask you to do what your countrymen get to this land for. We ask you to be rich" (Doyle 44). In this conversation it is implied that, according to native Indians, the majority of the British in India was 'to be rich'. This economic prosperity made imperialism attractive to the British population. In addition, the novel conveys the idea of what happens with these men who travel to India with the idea of becoming wealthy, which involves becoming greedy for money. In *The Sign of Four* Jonathan Small, Arthur Morstan and John Sholto are British men who return from India in the novel. All of them become ill because of the greed for the money and the treasure, which is the cause of the death of both Arthur Morstan and John Sholto, as he declares:

"I have only one thing," he said, "which weighs upon my mind at this supreme moment. It is my treatment of poor Morstan's orphan. The cursed greed which has been my besetting sin through life has withheld from her the treasure, half at least of which should have been hers." (Doyle: 12)

This is what told John Sholto to his sons on his deathbed, confessing to them the existence of the treasure and that part of this treasure belongs to Arthur Morstan and consequently to his daughter Mary Morstan.

3.3.Hinduism as fanaticism

In *The Sign of Four* there are mentions against the Hindu and Sikh religion. It is very difficult to speak about India and the rebellion of 1857 without mentioning the religious topic and, above all, the consequences that religion had on population. *The Sign of Four* describes India as a country maddened by religious reasons, where the greatest atrocities are committed.

Many people tended to use 'Hindu' to refer to Indian natives as if both terms, 'Hindu' and 'Indian', were synonyms. It is a common practice to erroneously call 'hindu' to all Indians since a large part of the Indian population belongs to the Hindu religion. However, Hindu refers to religion and under no circumstances to nationality. According to Ashcroft, this occurs because of the catachretic use of the word 'Hindu', process by which the colonizers take and reinscribe a term of the imperial culture. This term is used by Gayatri Spivak in a way that is close to the meaning of appropriation, which "may describe acts of usurpation in various cultural domains, but the most potent are the domains of language and textuality" (15). In *The Sign of Four* we can find this mistake when Watson refers to an Indian servant with the appellation 'Hindoo': "On our knocking, however, the door was instantly thrown open by a Hindoo servant clad in a yellow turban, white loose-fitting clothes, and a yellow sash" (Dole 10).

It is particularly important to note if religious distinctions are made in the novel. When in *The Sign of Four* British characters speak about native Indians they identify them to Hindus as they think that Hindu and Indian are synonyms. However, no reference is made to Muslims, a very large religious group in India; normally Muslims were not usually identified as real Indians. In addition, it is thought that Muslims were

much more civilized than Hindus, especially because Islam is more similar to Christianity than Islam. Islam is a monotheistic religion, Jesus is one of its prophets, and it derives from Christianity, this religion is better seen by the British and it is not identified with fanaticism as it happened with Hinduism.

Hinduism, into the eyes of the British, was seen as more radical, it must be borne in mind that Hinduism differs more from Christianity than Islam. Hinduism is a polytheistic religion, with many gods; some of their deities are represented in the figure of animals, considered strange creatures by the western eye. Any defence by the Hindus of their religion is seen as fanaticism and British emphasized many concrete Indian religious facts for people to think they were fanatics and devil-worshippers. “The city of Agra is a great place, swarming with fanatics and fierce devil-worshippers of all sorts” (Doyle 43), whose common practices were: “The beating of drums, the rattle of tomtoms, and the yells and howls of the rebels, drunk with opium and with bang” (Doyle 44). They were depicted as black fiends as well, who dance and how round the burning houses during the rebellion: “From where I stood I could see hundreds of the black fiends, with their red coats still on their backs, dancing and howling round the burning houses. Some of them pointed at me, and a couple of bullets sang past my head” (Doyle 43).

Sikh religion appears mentioned in several times through the novel. Sikh religion is among the most common religions in India. Jonathan Small, a British character, shows mistrust and misunderstanding towards the Sikhs and these Sikhs seem to show the same distrust towards Jonathan Small because of his British nationality and they avoided talking to him even though they spoke English.

“For two nights I kept the watch with my Punjaubees. They were tall, fiercelooking chaps, Mahomet Singh and Abdullah Khan . . . They could talk English pretty well, but I could get little out of them. They preferred to stand together and jabber all night in their queer Sikh lingo . . . I tried again and again to make my Sikhs talk, but without much success . . . Finding that my companions would not be led into conversation, I took out my pipe . . . In an instant the two Sikhs were upon me. One of them snatched my firelock up and levelled it at my head, while the other held a great knife to my throat and swore between his teeth that he would plunge it into me if I moved a step.” (Doyle 44)

Religion has always performed a fundamental role in colonization through the impact of colonizing missions. The religions of the colonized peoples were habitually despised and attacked, labelled as "worship of the devil", as pagan and superstitious, and thus the civilizing mission was justified as these religions were considered to be in need of reforms. This civilizing mission was hidden in discourses of reform, progress and modernization. The civilizing mission especially happened when the religions in concrete differed much from the Christian religion as in the case of Hinduism.

Therefore, religion has created confrontations between colonizers and colonized. While for the colonized Christianity was a means by which their own cultures were being discriminated, ignored and reformed, for the settlers religion became a vehicle to modernize the religion and customs of India. The British wanted to show evidence of the social and moral degeneration of the Hindu religion through particular Indian practices, such as satee or widow-burning and thuggee, described by Kim A. Wagner as the “controversial cult or ritual highway murderers “discovered” by the British in early nineteenth-century India” in his book *Stranglers and Bandits: A Historical Anthology of Thuggee*. It is true that this was a common practice among thugees but it was not an

extended practice in India. Another Hindu practice was suttee, the custom of burning Hindu widows alive on the funeral pyre of their husbands. All these Hindu practices were suppressed by the British, as well as the custom of burning new-born girls to prevent spreading fortunes due to dowries. All these customs were considered atrocities of the Hindu religion for the British, atrocities that many Hindu reformers also tried to suppress by considering them unnecessary practices. However, the British thought that all Hindus were savages and that their religion was evil so they used all this series of practices to put the British population against the Indians. The British showed their version of the rebellion, they tried to give importance to these practices and they spread that the rebellion emerged because of the refusal of the sepoys to use greased cartridges to offer an image of wild and radical of the Hindu and Muslims.

3.4.Binarism

Binarism is one of the most used terms in post-colonial theory. Binarism is made up of concepts that are organized in dichotomous pairs. These dichotomous pairs are oppositional pairs: one concept opposes the other, with that opposition both concepts gain their identity. In other words, one concept cannot exist without the other, as the day cannot exist without the night, or the dominant without the dominated. This connects us with a fundamental notion of Saussure's theory that is the notion of system, a set of elements that work together and are defined by the relationship that they establish between them, since one cannot be without the other; elements are defined in their mutual relationship.

In post-colonial studies, the idea of empire is established in the binary pair "I" and "the other." In imperialism this tendency of seeing the world in pairs or in binary

oppositions establishes a relation of dominance. The distinction between I/other, centre/margin, colonizer/colonized, master/servant, white/black, good/evil, human/bestial, empire/metropolis, beautiful/ugly, civilized/savage and advanced/retarded represents a hierarchy of dominance that favours one and disfavors the other. By these binary oppositions it can be deduced that colonizer, master, white, good, human, civilized, advanced, handsome is opposed to colonized, servant, black, bad, beast, savage, retarded, ugly. In *The Sign of Four* we can find a lot of references to the appearance of the Indians, their physical characteristics were associated with their aggressive behaviour: “They are naturally hideous, having large, misshapen heads, small, fierce eyes, and distorted features . . . so intractable and fierce” (Doyle 30).

It straightened itself into a little black man—the smallest I have ever seen—with a great, misshapen head and a shock of tangled, dishevelled hair . . . this savage, distorted creature. He was wrapped in some sort of dark ulster or blanket, which left only his face exposed; but that face was enough to give a man a sleepless night. (Doyle 38)

“I caught one glimpse of his venomous, menacing eyes amid the white swirl of the waters” (Doyle 38).

“I can see the two of them now as they stood, the white man with his legs far apart, shrieking out curses, and the unhallowed dwarf with his hideous face, and his strong yellow teeth gnashing at us in the light of our lantern” (Doyle 38).

Binarisms are very important in constructing ideological meanings, especially in imperial ideology. Binary distinctions can be motivated by the desire to dominate. White/black binary opposition means white /non-white, which establishes a dominance relationship (Ashcroft 18-19). In Great Britain, India was seen as "the other". “The

other” is anyone who is separate from one’s self. The 'I' is identified with what is normal and 'the other' with that which is different. In discourses such as primitivism “the I” and “the other” set a binary pair in which the colonizer (I) and the colonized (the other) and therefore establishes a relationship of domination of the first over the second. In post-colonial theory, ‘the other’ refers to the colonized who are marginalized by the imperial discourse and excluded in the discourse of power. However, ‘the other’ is crucial for the existence of ‘the I’ (Ashcroft 154-155).

The term 'othering' was created by Gayatri Spivak to define the process by which imperial discourse creates its 'others' (Ashcroft 156). In *The Sign of Four* we can see this process of othering. Through this process of othering we can see the formation of the world and how geography was built, a geography in which Imperial Europe was defined as the "centre" and everything outside that centre was defined as the margin or periphery of culture, power and civilization, as in the case of India. Both Sherlock Holmes and Watson represent the ‘I’ of Europe and all the characteristics of Europe, they are intelligent, learned, refined, educated, cultured, sophisticated and they use reason and deduction to finally solve the mystery. The second process of othering appears in *The Sign of Four* when Indian natives are described in the novel as the 'others', and this entails a series of adjectives associated with them: barbarians, savages, black cannibal, devils and hellish, that is to say, they are described like beasts.

These are some of the fragments of *The Sign of Four* that contains this type of adjectives attributed to Indian characters: “We went out to meet the rebels at Shahgunge early in July, and we beat them back for a time, but our powder gave out, and we had to fall back upon the city” (Doyle 43).

“It was that little hell-hound Tonga who shot one of his cursed darts into him. I had no part in it, sir. I was as grieved as if it had been my blood-relation. I welted the little devil with the slack end of the rope for it, but it was done, and I could not undo it again.” (Doyle 39)

The object which he held up to me was a small pocket or pouch woven out of colored grasses and with a few tawdry beads strung round it. In shape and size it was not unlike a cigarette-case. Inside were half a dozen spines of dark wood, sharp at one end and rounded at the other, like that which had struck Bartholomew Sholto. "They are hellish things," said he (Doyle 24). (Referring to Tonga, an Indian character)

The centre/margin binary pair has been one of the most controversial in colonial discourse. According to Colonialism, colonialism could only exist if there was a binary opposition in which the world was divided into centre and margin. The establishment of an empire depended on a hierarchical relationship in which the colonized existed as the other of the colonizing culture. Consequently, geography was built, a geography in which Imperial Europe was defined as the "centre" and everything outside that centre was defined as the margin or periphery of culture, power and civilization. The main justification for the colonial mission, the economic and political exploitation of colonialism, was the fact of taking the margin to the centre, modernizing archaic societies.

In some cases the term Metropolis is used to refer to the "centre" in the colonial discourse. This term comes from Greek history, in which metropolis were the cities. The metropolis had a decisive political, religious, economic and cultural influence in the

colonies. This meaning can easily be transferred to the imperial/colonial relationship in which the colonies are peripheral to the metropolis, which are the centre.

Those outside the centre of the metropolis are marginalized. Being on the margins means being marginal. Being "marginal" is a consequence of the binary structure of dominant discourses such as patriarchy, imperialism, and ethnocentrism. The marginal is far from power.

In addition, the centre/margin binary pair is often directly related to civilized/wild. "Uncivilized" is defined as "existing in the lower stage of culture"; "Belonging or characteristic of the savages" reason why once again the colonizing mission was justified using the term 'savage' in its favour. The term savage has played an important role in imperial and colonial ideologies. In *The Sign of Four* terms as "primitive, savage, rebel, indigenous, cannibal, infernal, repugnant, deformed, devil, underdeveloped, archaic, exotic, non-Western and other have been associated with Indian natives. They all take the West as the centre and define the rest as inferior, different, nonstandard, and subordinate. *The Sign of Four* shows how Indian is used by the western world to define and establish their own superiority as a "civilized" culture against the "savage" and "primitive" India.

These binary pairs are established in the novel by means of the characters. Both Sherlock Holmes and Watson and the rest of British characters represent the ideologies of empire, both are intelligent, learned, rational, formal, involves the idea of whites as the superior race, they are the ones who fight against the Indians described as beasts, barbarians, savages, ugly and devils and in fact they are who solve the mystery of the novel.

3.5. Universalism

“Universalism offers a hegemonic view of existence by which the experiences, values and expectations of a dominant culture are held to be true for all humanity” (Ashcroft 216). For this reason, it is a feature of imperial hegemony, because universalism disregards cultural difference, it diffuses the imperial discourse confusing the exploitation of the colonies with the improvements and modernization

Universalism also occurs in literature, since in English literature both universality and canon are represented, it is a characteristic of discourse, and so it is in *The Sign of Four*. In British literature, British characteristics and subjects are often presented as attractive and universal, which served as an effective socio-political control tool in India in the nineteenth century and in other colonies in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (Ashcroft 217).

This idea of universalism appears in *The Sign of Four*. The characteristics of Sherlock Holmes and Watson are presented as universal, something that everyone should have. They are highly intelligent, learned, refined, educated and cultured, they have good manners and they are polite. They are sophisticated and they use observation, reason and deduction to solve the mystery of the treasure, they are honourable and loyal, and they both have a strong sense of justice.

Moreover, while the British virtues are extolled, the absence of these virtues is exposed in Indian society. While the book describes the British as refined, with elegant tastes, interested in the arts, and supporters of the modern, Indians are presented as barbarians, savages, cannibals, infernal, skirts of education, their religious practices were compared with the worship of the devil and it was supposed that Christianity should enlighten and transform them. In this way the British try to demonstrate how

necessary it was to 'improve' and modernize Indian society. This is evidenced in *The Sign of Four*, British wanted to impose the Christian religion and social and cultural practices typical of Great Britain in India because these were thought to be universal while Indian customs were despised. However, although for the British the colonization meant improvement, for the Indians it meant losing their customs and lifestyle.

In addition, the most important events of the novel happen in London, the story begins in London and ends in London, only 'moving' to India when Jonathan Small tells the story of the Indian treasure of Agra. The story would have been completely the same in the conflict of the treasure had happened in Egypt, for example, instead of Agra (India). In addition, the main characters of the story are British: Sherlock Holmes, Watson, Mary Morstan and the Sholto family. Indian is represented by the treasure, which is the greatest source of the conflict, and Tonga, an Indian character, is depicted as problematic. As a consequence, India is represented as a source of problems to the British characters.

Conclusion

According to Robert J. C. Young, “since the early 1980s, post-colonialism has developed a body of writings that attempts to shift the dominant ways in which the relations between western and non-western people and their worlds are viewed” (2). Post-colonialism deals with the effects of colonization on cultures and societies and has been a term used by literary critics to discuss the various cultural effects of colonization. In the words of Young, it:

claims the right of all people in this earth to the same material and cultural well-being...it disturbs the order of the world. It threatens privilege and power. It refuses to acknowledge the superiority of western cultures. Its radical agenda is to demand equality and well-being for all human beings on this earth. (2-7)

The term "post-colonial" is used to refer to cultural interactions within literary production. Primarily, post-colonialism has been concerned with examining the processes and effects of European. However, the term is still used from time to time to simply mean "anti-colonial" and to be synonymous with "post-independence" (Ashcroft 68-170).

This dissertation has attempted to show the results of a post-colonialist reading of Arthur Conan Doyle's novel *The Sign of Four*. A post-colonialism reading implies reading a text of metropolitan and colonial cultures to give deliberate attention to the unavoidable effects of colonization on literary production. It is a form of deconstructive reading that is generally applied to the works of the colonizers and reveals the colonial ideologies and processes of literature, which are often involuntary (Ashcroft 168-170).

A post-colonial and contrapuntal reading of Arthur Conan Doyle's *The Sign of Four* reveal colonialist concepts such as racism. In addition, the novel establishes binary distinctions such as between civilized and primitive that help to consolidate the distinction between Indians and British. In the novel appears the lack of recognition of the different religions of India. In addition, universalism is present in the novel as well as other key concepts of colonial concepts such as 'going native', catachresis, idealization, ethnicity, exoticism, marginality and othering.

The fact that in a novel of Sherlock Holmes appears colonialist ideologies is more significant than appears at first sight because the use of these colonial attitudes in literature may influence the European consciousness and imagination about India. Indian population can be perceived in an erroneous way because of all the stereotypes that appear about them, their religion and customs.

In addition, it must be stressed that all these series of colonialist ideologies appearing in a popular novella is important since it was not only influential in the nineteenth century but it is still read nowadays. Arthur Conan Doyle was and continues to be one of the most widely read writers of all times, especially his novels about Sherlock Holmes. The novels of Arthur Conan Doyle have been so successful that some of them have been adapted cinematographically. Sherlock Holmes is the fictional character that has been most represented in the cinema, with more than 260 films where he was the main character, Sherlock Holmes has also appeared on television in the form of televised series and telefilms, as well as in magazines and weeklies. Furthermore, Sherlock Holmes novels have been adapted for children and adolescents, which may be easier to influence with certain ideas, as in the case of *The Sign of Four*, and others of Arthur Conan Doyle's novels of Sherlock Holmes have been adapted to cartoons, comics and even video games.

The Sign of Four conveys a colonialist ideology in a very subtle way, an ideology that is transmitted and perpetuated until present time, which will influence in a certain way the readers of the novel and their conception of India, thus creating stereotypes that will condition the perception of reality.

Annex I

Plot

In Arthur Conan Doyle's *The Sign of Four* it is presented a new and mysterious case which has to do with the search for an Indian treasure and how this treasure influences the main characters of the history: Mary Morstan, Arthur Morstan, John Sholto, Thadeuos Sholto, Bartholomew Sholto and Jonathan Small.

Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson become immersed in a mysterious case after the visit of Miss Mary Morstan. Mary presents a case with one main unknown: the disappearance of her father Arthur Morstan ten years ago. Mary has received pearls which are sent to her every year on the same date for the last six years. Furthermore, Miss Morstan presents a letter that assures her that she deserves justice and summons her to a meeting. Everything seems to indicate that the person writing this letter is related to both the pearls and the disappearance of her father. Finally, Mary Morstan is accompanied by Holmes and Dr. Watson who will be responsible for solving the case throughout the novel.

Mary Morstan's father was an officer of an Indian regiment. When he had a permission of two months he returned to England. Nevertheless, he disappeared the night of his arrival. The only friend he had in London was John Sholto, an officer of the same regiment in India, who had retired and declared that he did not know that Morstan was in town.

Finally, Miss Morstan together with Sherlock Holmes and Watson met Thaddeous Sholto, who tells Mary how her father died of a heart attack as a

consequence of a strong discussion with John Sholto because of their differences in dividing a treasure that belonged to both of them and Sholto had appropriated. John Sholto died years later, but before his death he decided to tell what happened to his offspring: Theaddeous and Bartholomew. Thaddeous decided to share the treasure with Mary since it belonged to father as her well. Nevertheless, his brother was not in favour of sharing it with Mary.

The ending of the story comes with the death of Bartholomew Sholto, who was the last who possessed the Indian treasure. Sherlock Holmes eventually found out that the two suspects who were related to the death of Bartholomew and the theft of the treasure were Jonathan Small and Tonga.

The mystery of the Indian treasure was related to a secret that is known as ‘the sign of four’. During the Indian rebellion of 1857 took place the union of four men who stole a treasure in the castle of Agra: Jonathan Small, Abdullah Khan, Akbar Dost and Mohamet Singh. Nevertheless, they were condemned to life sentence after killing the man who guarded the treasure. Small, in jail, told John Sholto about his secret and promised to share with him the treasure in exchange of his and the rest of the members of the sign of four’s freedom. Arthur Morstan was involved in this pact as well; nevertheless, Sholto did not keep his promise and he stole the treasure.

Revenge is what leads Jonathan Small to keep track of the treasure once he escaped from jail along with Tonga. Jonathan Small recovered his treasure after killing Bartholomew. However, the successful persecution commanded by Holmes and Watson on the Thames River in London ends up catching Jonathan Small and killing Tonga. Unfortunately, during the chase down the river, Jonathan Small gets rid of the treasure.

Main characters

Sherlock Holmes: The main character of the novel is the private detective Sherlock Holmes. He is presented through the point of view of his friend, Dr. John Watson, the narrator of the story. Watson describes him as an acute and highly intelligent individual in addition to being restless and very observant. In the opening chapters Sherlock Holmes demonstrates his powers of observation and deduction; he also has a strong sense of justice.

John H. Watson: Watson is the partner of Sherlock Holmes, who narrates all the adventures of Holmes. Watson is honourable, loyal, discreet and romantic. He is very intelligent, but lacks the virtues of a detective so he cannot solve cases without Holmes. Watson accompanies Holmes in potentially dangerous situations, and seems to enjoy their adventures.

Mary Morstan: Mary is the one who takes the case of the disappearance of her father to Holmes and Watson. Mary Morstan is a British lady, the main female character. Mary is a young blonde, innocent and delicate, sweet, kind and modest. The father of Mary Morstan, Arthur Morstan, was a senior captain of an Indian regiment disappeared in 1878 in mysterious circumstances.

John Sholto: John Sholto was an officer and friend of Arthur Morstan. Sholto was the one who finally recovered the Indian treasure, thus betraying his friend Arthur Morstan. When Morstan arrived in England he had a conversation with Sholto over the treasure, he suffers a heart attack and dies. Sholto kept this secret for the rest of his life, living with guilt and fear.

Thaddeus Sholto: Mayor Sholto's son, he is the one who sends the pearls to Mary Morstan. Thaddeus Sholto decides to share his money with Mary after knowing that his father was involved in theft of the treasure and the death of Morstan. Sholto decides to communicate with Mary Morstan when he discovers that his brother Bartolome has located the treasure of their father.

Bartolome Sholto: Bartolome is John Sholto's son and Thaddeus's twin brother. Bartolome, unlike his brother Thaddeus, does not want to share the Indian treasure with Mary Morstan. Bartholomew discovers his father's treasure and is later killed by Tonga.

Jonathan Small: Small belongs to 'the sign of four', the group of men who discovered the Indian treasure that was finally stolen by John Sholto. After finally recovering the treasure he was captured by Sherlock Holmes and Watson and while he is in prison he tells the treasure story: John Sholto stole the treasure leaving Small in prison. When Small got out of jail, he went to England to try to obtain his part of the treasure with the help of Tonga. In the novel he is described as terrifying and ruthless. Although Jonathan Small only appears towards the end of the book, he is mentioned in several occasions throughout history. His involvement in the pact of the sign of Four and his aim of recovering the treasure is the principal key of the plot.

Tonga: Tonga is an Indian character who helps Small to recover the treasure. Tonga is the one who killed Bartholomew with a poisoned dart. He is a character that shows some characteristics and traits of the Indian population that the British generalized and applied to all the Indians. He is described as ugly, animalistic, savage, impulsive, tormented and malicious.

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