

# Meeting Notes

March 8, 2025



The Red Circle's March luncheon meeting drew a full house of 42 Sherlockians to Alfio's for food, drink and a thoroughly enjoyable talk by our guest speaker, Olivia Rutigliano, BSI. Olivia is a writer and critic specializing in the history of mass entertainment from the late 19<sup>th</sup> through the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Her illustrious writing portfolio has now expanded to hosting a cultural criticism podcast called *Culture Schlock* on Lit Hub Radio.

Olivia spoke to us about the intersection of the worlds of Charles Dickens and Arthur Conan Doyle, noting how they both practiced spectacle and attempted to cultivate senses of wonder and possibility in their various showmanship pastimes: Dickens, in the decade that he passionately studied conjurors, magic tricks, and other illusions, and Conan Doyle in the period towards the end of his life that he became highly invested in proving the legitimacy of spiritualism, which often involved him attempting to co-opt the legacies and reputations of various magicians. Both men began to calibrate how to employ spectacle, and specifically how to inculcate amazement and astonishment in their audiences, to advance their various public agendas. Dickens, who began to write propaganda in favor of London's New Police, created detective characters who resemble magicians, relying on the thesis that the magician inspires wonder rather than engages in insidious trickery. His detectives possess nearly superhuman surveillance skills and crime-solving abilities, but are not dangerous (as many of London's citizens worried about the plainclothes police) so much as awe-inspiring. Later in the 19th century and into the 20th, Conan Doyle used various manipulations of spectacle in attempts to broaden audiences' minds, to convince them that there might be more in the world than they can know or understand, in service of his commitment to the Spiritualist movement, which advanced the idea that an occult world coexisted with the known one.

A lively question and answer session followed Olivia's talk, and the meeting concluded with door prizes and Peter Blau's customary summary of Sherlockian news and upcoming events.