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Analysis of *The Five Orange Pips*

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle is one of the most successful detective fiction writers of all time. His Sherlock Holmes stories became a widespread phenomenon that gained millions of fans worldwide, and went on to even hold a world record for the most portrayed literary human character in TV and film. It is clear that Doyle had a talent for using different plot elements to conjure up extraordinary mysteries that draw the reader in without being too predictable or cliché, typically following the rules set by the genre. Particularly, in *The Five Orange Pips*, Doyle creates an effective story through the introduction of a seemingly unsolvable case, the death of the client, and the lack of resolution at the end of the story.

Although all of the cases Holmes encounters are bizarre and seemingly unsolvable, otherwise there would not be a reason for him to get involved, this case goes a step further in its mysterious nature. Holmes himself even says to Watson, “that of all our cases we have had none more fantastic than this” (Doyle 86). To begin, there is a lack of evidence and details from the crimes committed. All Holmes is told is that the victim receives a letter with five orange pips and the letters “K.K.K” inscribed on the inside of the letter and then is declared dead by some freak accident some time after. Because of this, Holmes is unable to solely rely on his acute attention to detail in order to solve the case, giving him a more difficult challenge. The nature of the murders also contributes to the bizarreness of the case, because they are all declared as

accidents by the local police with no further reasoning for inquiring otherwise. The first victim, Elias Oppenshaw, was found face down in a two feet deep pool with no sign of violence. The second victim, Elias' brother, fell over a chalk pit and injured his skull without ever regaining consciousness. The last victim, John Oppenshaw, was declared to have accidentally walked off the edge of a bridge and drowned, also showing no signs of violence. Because of this and the addition that the time span of the murders is quite spaced out, one cannot blame the police for not making a connection and getting involved earlier. There was seemingly no connection at all, further emphasizing the effectiveness of this bizarre case.

In addition to the details of the case, Doyle's choice to kill the client is a genius deviation from the typical plot structure of his stories. By the time this story was published, fans of the series would have been relatively secure in the fact that the client was safe from any and all danger, the client not even being the main focus of the case most of the time. The reader would also take comfort in knowing that Holmes' intelligent analytic skills are no match for the common minds of criminals, based on previous stories. However, the shocking twist of poor John Oppenshaw's death adds an element of surprise that sets this story apart from the others. The death of the client also plays a key role in letting the reader see Holmes' more emotional side rather than his typical distant and reserved attitude. After Watson reads the heading in the morning newspaper that reveals Oppenshaw's death, he describes Holmes as "more depressed and shaken than I had ever seen him" (Doyle 90). Holmes even goes so far as to take responsibility for his death, saying "That he should come to me for help and that I should send him away to his death" (Doyle 90). This is a different side of Holmes that makes him seem much more human-like, more feasible, instead of his typical role as the untouchable, incredible

Sherlock Holmes. It also makes the case much more personal to him, since he believes it is partially his fault that Oppenshaw is dead. He works vigorously on the case with more determination to catch the people responsible, in contrast to his typical investigative strategy of pondering the details and having a sudden moment of enlightenment.

Lastly, Doyle deviates a bit from the typical plot structure of a detective novel and ends the story with a lack of resolution. There is still Holmes' explanation of how he solved the case; however, there is no satisfying catching of the criminal or witty comment about the ignorance of the police. Instead, Watson ends the story explaining that the ship was lost at sea, the murderers never being brought to justice by Holmes. Some may argue that this is a resolution in itself and that at least the murderers were brought to some level of justice because of their death at sea, but for Holmes, he never gets a resolution for himself nor the satisfaction of righting the wrong he feels he has committed. Similar to the effect of the death of the client, there is a more realistic aspect that Holmes is not the just ruler of the universe and therefore cannot always succeed. This is alluded to by Holmes when John Oppenshaw mentions the praise from an old client, stating "He said that you could solve anything," in which Holmes replies, "He said too much" (Doyle 79). The reader also feels a sort of uneasiness or tension by the absence of the familiar resolution that typically consists of Watson and Holmes back in their once shared home on Baker Street reflecting. However, it seems that Doyle did this in order to keep the reader interested in further stories, because if he would kill the client and have little to no resolution, then what else would he do?

In conclusion, Doyle's innovative use of a seemingly unsolvable case, death of a client, and lack of resolution within *The Five Orange Pips* contributes to the overall effectiveness of his

work. It is no surprise that Doyle knew how to write a good detective story, but he takes it a step further by incorporating different twists and unexpected turns in order to keep the reader guessing, but more importantly, interested. His millions of dedicated fans are perfect examples of his effectiveness in writing that seems to live on even years after his death and the end of the Sherlock Holmes series.

Works Cited

Doyle, Sir Arthur Conan. *The Five Orange Pips, The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*. 1892.
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