Sir Arthur Conan Doyle is better known for his detective, Sherlock Holmes, than for his stories and novels of fantasy and science fiction, but his contributions to these other genres were formidable. His enormous popularity as a result of the Sherlock Holmes stories allowed him to command a large audience for nearly anything he wrote, and those who read his fantasy and science fiction almost always were rewarded with skillfully written, entertaining, and sometimes thought-provoking tales. Most scholars of Doyle's work agree that in the Sherlock Holmes stories, he advanced plot formulas, narrative conventions, and characters inherited from writers he admired, such as Edgar Allan Poe and Émile Gaboriau, to realize a truly new and powerful literary form, what has come to be known as the classical detective story. Few would argue that his work in fantasy and science fiction advanced those genres in the same way, but his fantasy is influential, and his science fiction, mainly The Lost World (1912), inspired future writers and, along with the novels of H. G. Wells, helped to expand the audience that had been created to a large extent by the French novelist Jules Verne.

While Doyle’s fantasies follow the convention of depending upon magic or the apparently supernatural, those of his stories that have been called science fiction show relatively little interest in technology. Rather, they tend to have scientists as characters and to deal with scientific topics. Still, in each of the major works, Doyle develops ideas that have come to be important in science fiction: the journey to another world; confronting a cosmic catastrophe such as the destruction of humanity; and the discovery and exploitation of hitherto untapped human mental powers. Especially when Doyle works with "spiritualist phenomena" his stories seem to occupy a border between science fiction and fantasy. This occurs in his early comic story, "The Great Keinplatz
Experiment" (1885), first published in Belgravia and collected in The Captain of the Polestar and Other Tales (1890), in which a scientist experimenting with mesmerism unintentionally exchanges bodies with the student who wishes to marry his daughter. Whether mesmerism in this case is to be seen as a technique or magic is not easily decided.

Arthur Conan Doyle was born on 22 May 1859 in Edinburgh, Scotland. In many ways his family were outsiders who were made at least sometimes to feel their differences. They were Roman Catholic in a center of Protestantism. They were artistic in a practical, puritanical society. His grandfather and his uncle were successful illustrators. His uncle Richard Doyle gained fame drawing for Punch. Though Arthur's father, Charles, became clerk of the Board of Works in Edinburgh, he also had artistic ambitions, and he illustrated the first edition of his son's A Study in Scarlet (1888), the first tale of Sherlock Holmes, but Doyle grew up without a strong father. Charles suffered from depression, alcoholism, and epilepsy and was institutionalized at various locations from 1879 until his death by epileptic seizure in 1893. Michael Baker's 1978 publication of one of Charles's notebooks, The Doyle Diary, suggests that Charles was kept in institutions more because of the family's needs than because of his own.

Separated from the mainstream by religion, artistic temperament, an unsuccessful and mentally ill father, and resulting comparative poverty, Doyle was also separated racially by the Irish origins of his family. His Irish-born mother, Mary Foley, acted as the head of the family, though Dr. Bryan Charles Waller, who came to board with the Doyles and eventually shared his home with them, took on some of these functions. Arthur was the second of Mary's seven children, the older of two boys. Seeing talent in him, Mary carefully arranged his education, sending him to Jesuit schools at Stoneyhurst and at Feldkirch, Austria, at considerable financial sacrifice. She fostered his medical studies at the University of Edinburgh and remained his close friend and consultant until her death in 1921. Doyle moved himself further from the mainstream of popular thought when he broke with his Roman Catholic faith and became an agnostic in the years before his marriage. Biographical study has yet to work through the influence upon his works of these many ways in which Doyle inhabited his world as an outsider.

Large, healthy, and energetic, Doyle enjoyed sports and physical activities. This interest led him to seek a vigorous and adventurous physical as well as mental life. Before
completing his bachelor's degree in medicine, he served briefly in 1880 as surgeon on the arctic whaler *Hope*, gathering some of the material for his later fantasy story "The Captain of the Polestar", first published in *Temple Bar* magazine in 1883. In this story a whaler captain, grieving over the loss of his fiancée, comes to believe he sees her in the blowing snow on the ice floes that surround his ship. When he leaves the ship to follow this vision, he eventually freezes to death. Those who find his body also think they may see this mysterious snow-woman. After finishing his bachelor of medicine degree in 1881, Doyle was medical officer on a ship traveling to Africa's west coast. This trip provided materials for one of his more-notorious early stories, "J. Habakuk Jephson's Statement", a hoax in the manner of Poe that appeared in the prestigious *Cornhill Magazine* in 1884 and was collected in *The Captain of the Polestar*. Jephson claims to be the only survivor of the *Mary Celeste*--Doyle changes this to *Marie Celestea*--a ship found abandoned but in excellent condition off the coast of Portugal in 1872. He explains how the ship was taken over by Septimus Goring, an American mulatto who has tired of his secret campaign of revenge against American whites for enslaving Africans and has decided to settle in Northwest Africa after eliminating the passengers of this ship. Goring spares Jephson because he possesses a good-luck piece given him by a grateful black man whom he helped during the Civil War. The story achieved notoriety because the British official at Gibraltar who oversaw the salvaging of the *Mary Celeste* treated the anonymously published story as an intentional hoax and went to considerable len

Doyle completed his M.D. in 1885 and then married Louisa Hawkins. More desperate for a comfortable income and still gaining little from medicine, he put more of his energy into writing, completing two novels within the first year of his marriage, one of which was eventually published, *The Firm of Girdlestone* (1890), a business novel. Also among these early works is a little-regarded novel of supernatural retribution, *The Mystery of Cloomber* (1889), which reveals his early interest in spiritualism and the occult. General Heatherstone retires from the Indian service and takes his family to Cloomber Castle in Scotland. He hopes to avoid the vengeance of Buddhist magicians for killing one of their adepts, but they pursue him, using their magical powers to enter his heavily guarded castle.

A decisive point in Doyle's medical and writing careers came in 1887, when he published *A Study in Scarlet*, his first tale of Sherlock Holmes, in *Beeton's Christmas Annual*. Though this publication did not immediately make him famous, it was
successful enough to be republished as a book in 1888. Thus encouraged, he completed *Micah Clarke* (1889), a historical novel inspired by the work of Sir Walter Scott. Indeed, Scott was his literary model, and Doyle hoped during most of his life to achieve the kind of fame Scott achieved by writing the kinds of novels Scott wrote. While he did achieve Scott's fame, it was not for writing historical romances, though *Micah Clarke* and several of Doyle's other historical novels were popular successes. He now found it easier to publish his work, and so more and more of his energy went into writing.

Doyle fell ill with heart disease in 1929 and died in 1930 at his home, Windlesham, where he is buried. At his death he was one of the best-known Englishmen in the world, his tales of Sherlock Holmes translated into many languages, read and loved almost everywhere. The detective stories are reinterpreted and adapted to film and television anew with each generation. Among his works of science fiction and fantasy, only *The Lost World* has had comparable influence. The novel has been adapted to film at least twice (1925, 1960), and the historically related film, *King Kong* (1933), became a classic with multiple sequels and a reinterpretation in 1976. Furthermore, the novel itself inspired many related stories and films, notably *The Land that Time Forgot* (1918, film 1974) by Edgar Rice Burroughs. Doyle's literary reputation tended to remain rather low in comparison to contemporaries such as Thomas Hardy and Joseph Conrad, perhaps in part because of his association with spiritualism and because of critics' not always helpful distinction between "high" literature and popular entertainment. When scholars and critics in the later years of the twentieth century undertook the serious study of Doyle, they found him more complex than expected. Many critics, scholars, and especially biographers have turned their attention to his works. Though his reputation rests mainly on his achievement in the stories of Sherlock Holmes, collections of his fantasy and science-fiction stories continue to appear, attesting to an enduring lively interest among his readers.