A nighttime photograph of St. Isaac's Cathedral and the Bronze Horseman statue in St. Petersburg, Russia. The cathedral is on the left, illuminated by warm lights, and the statue is on the right. The sky is dark blue, and the street is lit with streetlights, creating a bokeh effect. The text is overlaid on a white rectangular box in the upper center.

# ARTHUR AND GEORGE JULIAN BARNES (2005)

Dr. Hope Jennings  
Neo-Victorian Novel  
Wright State University



## MAJOR THEMES

Guilt and innocence; evidence and justice; knowledge, belief, and perception; Empire and masculinity; the possibility of knowing the past and the responsibility that the present owes to the past.

- Like *Possession*, uses the tropes and conventions of detective fiction to explore the nature of the relationship between the present and the past.
- However, Barnes doesn't use dual plot structure; instead, the detective figure occupies the same temporal moment as the crime and thus has direct access to the evidence.
- Like *Alias Grace*, historical documents relating to the crime are incorporated into the novel; also, similar to when we are given direct access to Ellen Ash's or Grace Marks' internal thought process, many events are narrated directly to the reader – which seems to suggest possibility of unmediated access to the past, while acknowledging the difficulty of accessing evidence and questioning the nature of evidence.

## KNOWLEDGE, BELIEF, AND PERCEPTION

- Holmes' method of "deductive reasoning" relies on empirical detailed observation of the world, to make rational deductions about the crimes, suspects, and sometimes even the victims; links perception and knowledge through observed evidence and pre-existing knowledge.
- In claiming he **knows** George is innocent, Arthur sets up a clear distinction between thinking, believing, and knowing something, and it is knowledge that is prioritized.
- While "thinking" and "believing" imply an element of speculation and faith respectively, "knowing" is aligned with fact, which is clearly grounded in perception.
- This is later ironically contradicted by Arthur's belief in spiritualism – thus also explores impossibility of separating belief and knowledge, particularly within the judicial process.



- In contrast to Arthur, other characters base their knowledge on prejudice, or, they recognize the limitations of knowledge; for example, Captain Anson explains how most crimes happen without witnesses and so the possibility of knowing what really happened slips out of reach.
- This also implies that the idea of complete knowledge is itself a fiction, which is more a postmodern perspective than Victorian -- often represented as a time of fixed and stable belief systems concerning the ability to know and categorize both the present and past.
- However, not so much an anachronism but rather the process of trying cases on the grounds of objective evidence, instead of a subjective confession, was a relatively new one in the nineteenth century and thus the status of knowledge in legal discourses was still in flux.

**Was He Innocent?**  
 Was there a Conspiracy? Was He Wrongfully Convicted?  
 THE GREAT AND MYSTERIOUS HORSE-MAIMING CASE.



**EDALJI'S STORY,**  
 TOLD BY HIMSELF,  
 IN  
**NEXT SUNDAY'S**  
**UMPIRE**  
 which will also contain further sensational chapters of the  
**"CONFESSIONS OF A PRINCESS."**

The **UMPIRE** is the Sunday Paper that everyone is talking about and everyone is curious to see.  
 A Popular Song, with Music, appears Weekly.  
 TO SECURE A COPY ORDER AT ONCE FROM YOUR NEWSAGENT.

# KNOWLEDGE, EVIDENCE, AND JUSTICE



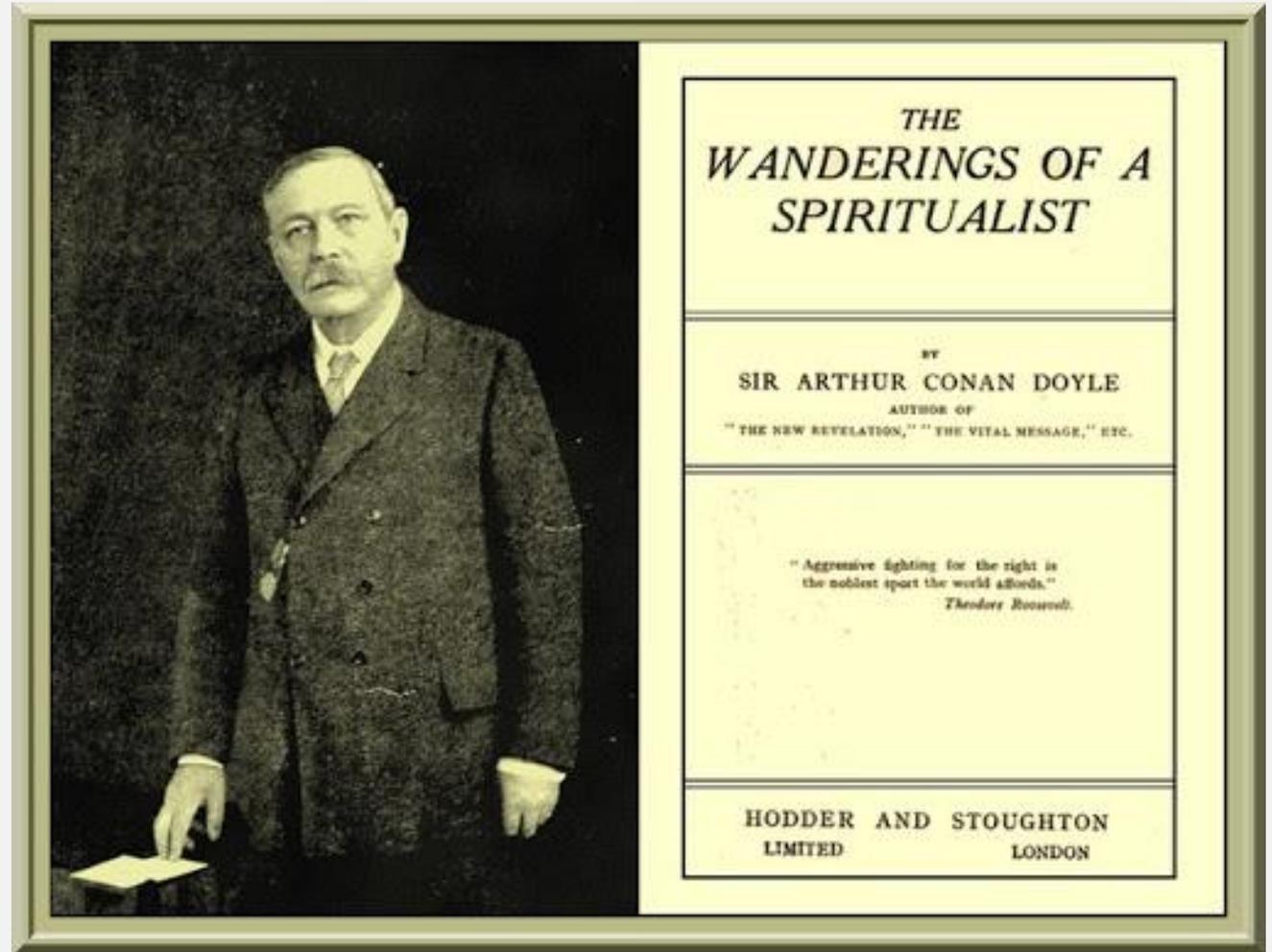
Revealing the intersections between knowledge and belief, fact and opinion, the novel demonstrates that there is not necessarily a direct and transparent connection between knowledge, evidence, and justice.

Emphasizes the position of N.V fiction, combines postmodern awareness of the limitations of evidence about the past with a commitment to working within those limitations to revive the past in the present -- does not so much invent the past as work within the gaps of known history.

(Like Atwood) by refusing a resolution to the historical crime, Barnes respects the limits of historical knowledge since there is no historical evidence identifying the criminal.

Justice is not always directly connected to evidence – and the novel is as much concerned with the processes of justice as it is with the issue of evidence; perhaps more so since the failure of justice is shown to have real effects on the lives of George and his family.

- The process of justice is not guaranteed by evidence, thus acting responsibly towards the past involves more than just an objective, evidential, or cultural materialist approach (explored through spiritualism throughout the novel).
- Because spiritualism can provide a way to connect with the past, at least on a figurative level, Barnes suggests that a responsible approach to the past needs to be sensitive to both its emotional and evidential dimensions.
- On the other hand, we are left to question: To what extent is fiction capable of redeeming the mistakes and injustices of the past?





PART I:  
“BEGINNINGS”

1. How does Barnes convey the feeling or atmosphere of the historical period of which he writes? What details and stylistic effects are noticeable? Were there any elements that disrupted your expectations of the Victorian period, at least in so far as it is typically represented in fiction?
2. How does Barnes use the different viewpoints of Arthur and George to explore the very different attractions of truth telling and storytelling? Why do you think he chooses to write the “Arthur” sections in the past tense and the “George” sections in the present?
3. What does the novel imply about one's parents as a determinant in character development? How do Victorian attitudes toward children and/or childrearing compare to our contemporary views?
4. How does Barnes explore the ways in which national history and national identity contribute to the formation of subjective and/or gendered identity? How are Arthur and George influenced by notions of “Englishness” and “Empire”? How are they situated differently in the framework of Empire and to what extent does this influence their notions of masculinity?

PART II:  
“BEGINNING  
WITH AN  
ENDING”

The brief section on p. 91 describes an unnamed man approaching a horse in a field on a cold night. What is the effect of this section, coming into the novel when it does, and named as it is? Why is this section called “George & Arthur” when it makes no mention of either man?

**THE GREAT WYRLEY AND WALSALL HORSE-MAIMING OUTRAGES.**

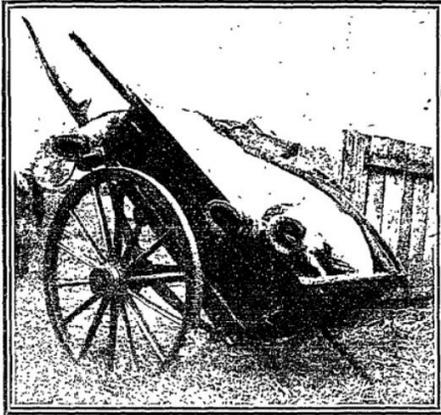


Photo: View and Postcard Co.

**A VICTIM OF THE WYRLEY MAIMING OUTRAGE.**

This is the horse actually found dead with a terrible wound in the abdomen. Another horse had to be killed owing to its injuries.

THE Staffordshire police are on their mettle, for horses have been injured in a manner that points plainly to deliberate intent, to actions which can only be attributed to the crooked workings of a diseased mind. Every available detective is at work, and it is both hoped

**£200 REWARD.**

**The Police at Work.**

**CAN IT BE ACCIDENT?**

**Staffordshire Farmers Alarmed.**



Photo: Topical.

**THE HORSE MAIMED AT WALSALL**

Our photograph plainly shows the clean cut across the buttock, and the stitches put into it.

that every animal in the field was examined at seven o'clock by a detective-sergeant, who reported everything all right.

In this case the police and a veterinary surgeon who examined the animal incline to the belief that the injury is the result of a kick from another horse in the field.

The owner, Mr. Grant, however, cannot reconcile himself to this view, and points out that there never was any accident to horses in the field prior to last Saturday. One point that is quoted against the theory that this horse-wounding at Walsall was an accident is the depth of the wound. It is so deep that the veterinary surgeon was able to insert his fingers into it, and it is suggested that such a wound would hardly result from the kick of another horse.

afterward liberated) is vicar, was crowded with a congregation, many members of which came from as far

ANONYMOUS POST-CARD.

Two more post-cards bearing on the Great Wyrley maiming mystery were received on Monday morning.

The most significant was one threatening the Rev. S. Edalji, the father of

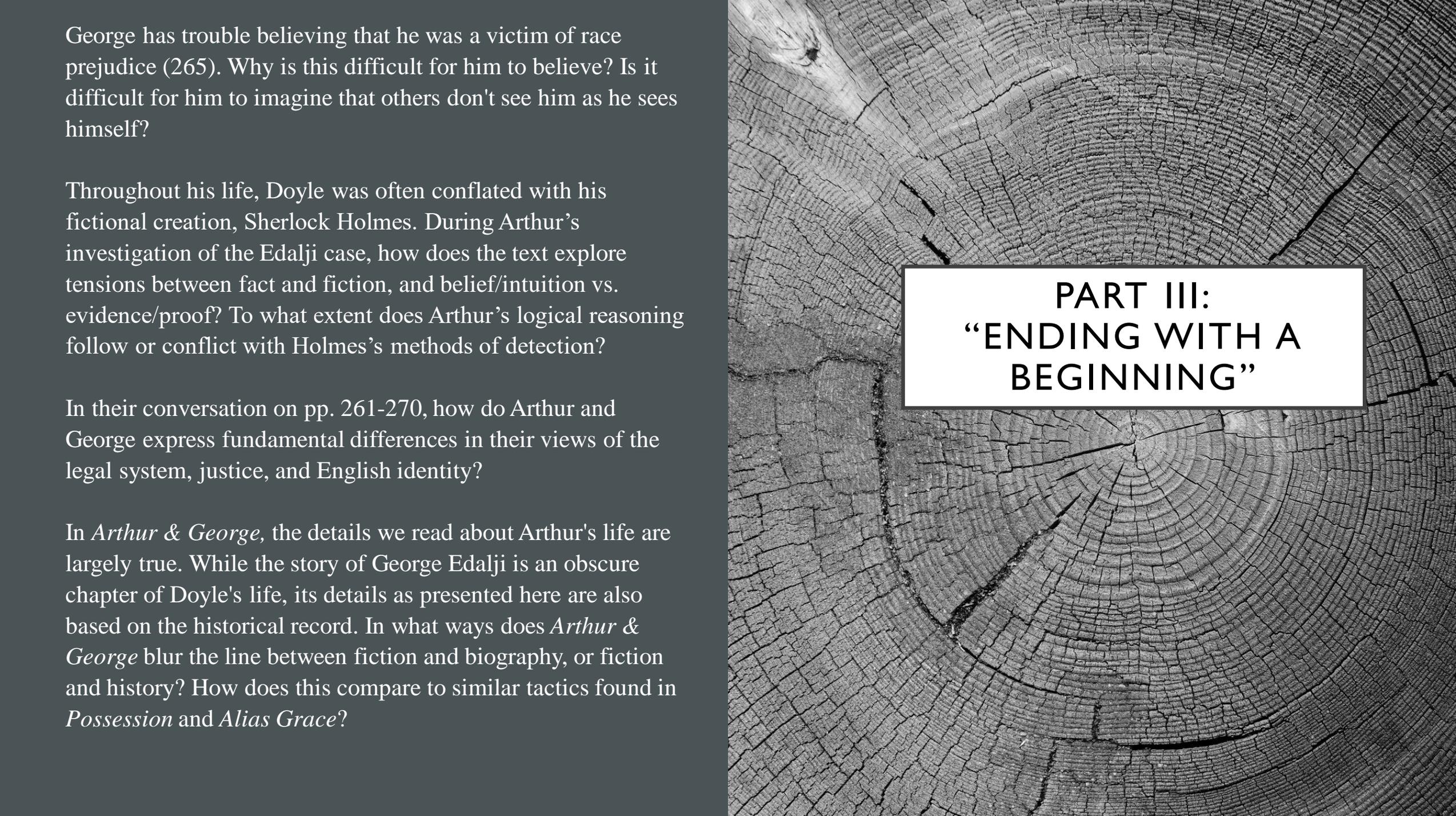
George’s arrest for committing “the Great Wyrley Outrages” causes a sensation in England just a few years following the sensational killing spree of Jack the Ripper that sold millions of newspapers throughout England. Are the newspapers, and the public appetite for sensational stories, partly responsible for the crime against George Edalji? George’s lawyer, Mr. Meek, is amused at his client’s sense of outrage when he reads the factual errors and outright lies in the newspaper reports of his case (137–38; 141–45). What is revealed about the English legal system during the trial proceedings (148–178) and George’s incarceration and release three years later (183–200)?

George has trouble believing that he was a victim of race prejudice (265). Why is this difficult for him to believe? Is it difficult for him to imagine that others don't see him as he sees himself?

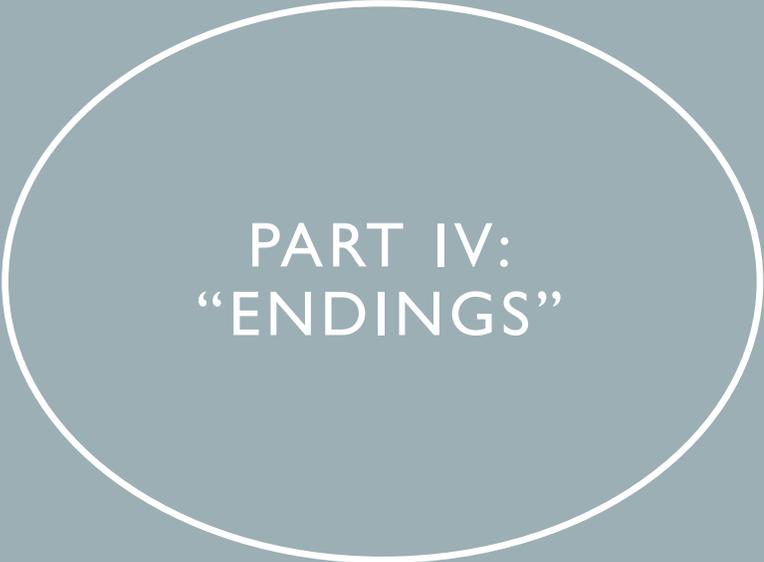
Throughout his life, Doyle was often conflated with his fictional creation, Sherlock Holmes. During Arthur's investigation of the Edalji case, how does the text explore tensions between fact and fiction, and belief/intuition vs. evidence/proof? To what extent does Arthur's logical reasoning follow or conflict with Holmes's methods of detection?

In their conversation on pp. 261-270, how do Arthur and George express fundamental differences in their views of the legal system, justice, and English identity?

In *Arthur & George*, the details we read about Arthur's life are largely true. While the story of George Edalji is an obscure chapter of Doyle's life, its details as presented here are also based on the historical record. In what ways does *Arthur & George* blur the line between fiction and biography, or fiction and history? How does this compare to similar tactics found in *Possession* and *Alias Grace*?



PART III:  
“ENDING WITH A  
BEGINNING”



## PART IV: “ENDINGS”

Why is the real perpetrator of the animal killings never identified? In a Sherlock Holmes story, the criminal is always caught and convicted, but Arthur gets no such satisfaction with this real-world case. How disturbing is the fact that Edalji is never truly vindicated and never compensated for the injustice he suffered? Does Barnes's fictional enlargement of George Edalji's life act as a kind of compensation? How can fiction, or literature, redeem the mistakes and injustices of the past?

The story ends with George's attendance at the memorial service/séance for Arthur. What, if anything, is most moving about this episode? Why are the last three sentences presented as a grammatical conjugation of auxiliary verb tense? What “does” – “did” – “will” George perceive or “see” (441)?