



**THE ENGLISH THEATRE  
OF HAMBURG**

presents

# **THE HOUND OF THE BASKERVILLES**

by

**Sir Arthur Conan Doyle**

adapted for the stage by

**Steven Canny and John Nicholson**

**STUDY GUIDE**

Premiere on 23<sup>rd</sup> November 2023

Preview performances at reduced prices on 20<sup>th</sup>, 21<sup>st</sup>, and 22<sup>nd</sup> November  
2023

Tuesday – Saturday	19:30
selected Sundays	14:30
Wednesday/Friday	11:30 (Matinee performances weekly alternating)

**THE ENGLISH THEATRE OF HAMBURG**

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**TICKETS**

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The English Theatre will premiere Steven Canny and John Nicholson's adaptation of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's **THE HOUND OF THE BASKERVILLES** on 23<sup>rd</sup> November with preview performances at reduced prices on 20, 21 and 22 November. Bookings for the play have already started. See the cover of this Study Guide for dates and times of performances. Teachers who would like to preview the play before bringing a group of students should contact [marketing@englishtheatre.de](mailto:marketing@englishtheatre.de).

### About the play

The play is a comic adaptation by Steven Canny and John Nicholson of Arthur Conan Doyle's classic novel, **THE HOUND OF THE BASKERVILLES**. It features just three actors who play all the parts as they dramatize the basic events of the story. The play was first produced by Peepolykus, one of the U.K.'s theatre companies whose style of comedy has been compared to The Marx Brothers.

"This script was written for Peepolykus, whose members have their roots in clowning. Their inspiration is drawn from the many memorable solo, double- and triple-act performers whose physical-comedy routines were honed in front of a live audience. With this in mind, it felt to us like an exciting prospect to approach Holmes and Watson as a classic comedy double act. A large part of the success of Conan Doyle's creation lies in the pure pleasure of luxuriating in the world of Holmes and Watson. Our hope therefore was that we'd not only make you laugh but also enjoy being in the company of the characters – just as we rejoice in spending time with Laurel and Hardy, The Marx Brothers or The Mighty Boosh. These factors led us on to create lots of classic clown routines in the play where the physical pace and dexterity of the performers is as important as the pace at which the text is played. And through all of this, as for many comedy shows, rehearsals were largely about finding solutions to tricky bits of writing."

(by Steven Canny and John Nicholson from **THE HOUND OF THE BASKERVILLES**, NICK HERN BOOKS, LONDON)

### About the Sir Arthur Conan Doyle

"Born in Edinburgh in 1859, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle was a Scottish writer and physician, best known for his stories about the master detective Sherlock Holmes. Generally considered a milestone in the field of crime fiction, some of the most famous Holmes stories include **THE SIGN OF THE FOUR**, **THE ADVENTURES OF SHERLOCK HOLMES**, **HIS LAST BOW** and **THE HOUND OF THE BASKERVILLES**. They brought the writer international acclaim, with societies of devotees that still flourish today. Conan Doyle practiced medicine from 1882 to 1891, but as his literary career was immediately successful he was able to turn to writing full time, approximately four years after the publication of the first Holmes novel **A STUDY IN SCARLET**. After tiring of his famous character, Conan Doyle killed Holmes off in **THE FINAL PROBLEM** in 1893, but brought him back due to public demand, featuring him in over sixty stories altogether until 1927."

"Conan Doyle was married twice, first to Louise Hawkins and then to Jean Leckie. After his son Kingsley died in 1918, he was drawn towards spiritualistic studies and the occult, and became president of several spiritualist organizations. He was knighted in 1902 for his works **THE GREAT BOER WAR** and **THE WAR IN SOUTH AFRICA: ITS CAUSES AND CONDUCT**. His other work includes non-fiction, plays, short stories, several historical novels and science and supernatural fiction. He died from heart disease in 1930, at home in Windlesham, Sussex."

(from **THE HOUND OF THE BASKERVILLES**, NICK HERN BOOKS, LONDON)



### **About Steven Canny**

“Steven is an award-winning executive producer, writer and director. As writer and adapter his work includes NO WISE MEN (Liverpool Playhouse); ORIGINS (Pleasance and Theatre Seven); FOOT/MOUTH (Soho Theatre); SPYSKI (Lyric Hammersmith and national tour and West End); A DULDITCH ANGEL (national tour and West End); A SHROPSHIRE LAD (National Theatre, London, and Radio 4); HUMBLE BOY (Radio 4); Mnemonic (Radio 3). As executive producer his work includes MILLER’S MOUNTAIN (winner Scottish BAFTA); BOB SERVANT (RTS Best Comedy); THE NEWS QUIZ; THE ELEPHANT VANISHES, MNEMONIC, THE NOISE OF TIME, LIGHT. He was also Associate Director of Al Pacino’s THE RESISTIBLE RISE OF ARTURO UI.”

(from THE HOUND OF THE BASKERVILLES, NICK HERN BOOKS, LONDON)

(by Steven Canny and John Nicholson from THE HOUND OF THE BASKERVILLES, NICK HERN BOOKS, LONDON)

### **About John Nicholson**

“John works as a writer, director and performer. He is Co-Artistic Director of Peepolykus with whom he has toured throughout the UK and worldwide since 1995. Writing credits on award-winning Peepolykus productions include LET THE DONKEY GO, I AM A COFFEE, HORSES FOR COURSES, GOOSE NIGHTS, MINDBENDER, THE MIDSUMMER RUDE MECHANICALS (commissioned by the Royal National Theatre). Writing credits with Steven Canny include NO WISE MEN, an original Christmas story (Liverpool Playhouse); THE HOUND OF THE BASKERVILLES (West Yorkshire Playhouse, national tour and West End); ORIGINS, Darwin’s beginnings (for Pentabus). Other writing credits include P.S. COMEDY SKETCH SHOW, COMEDY SHUFFLE and UNDER SURVEILLANCE for BBC TV, FORCE 9 AND A HALF: a musical (MTM Award at Edinburgh Festival); THE FIRST THING THAT EVER, EVER HAPPENED (Lyric Hammersmith); FALLEN ANGELS (UK tour); RIK MAYALL’S BEDSIDE TALES and MARLEY WAS DEAD (Radio 4), RICHARD’S RAMPAGE (The Kevin Spacey Foundation). John has also written many shows for large casts of young people, including an adaptation of Paul Gallico’s THE LOVE OF SEVEN DOLLS. Other projects include his first screenplay, WINNING PEAL, and directing a live show for Nina Conti.”

(from THE HOUND OF THE BASKERVILLES, NICK HERN BOOKS, LONDON)

## SUMMARY

Dr. James Mortimer comes from Dartmoor, a town in the county of Devonshire, to London to ask the famous detective Sherlock Holmes and his colleague Dr. Watson to investigate the mysterious death of his friend Sir Charles Baskerville. Mortimer reports that people in Dartmoor believe that for generations the Baskerville family has been under a curse which calls for the death of all the heads of the Baskerville family by a monstrous, supernatural hound. This legend started in the 18th century when Sir Hugo Baskerville was killed by an unearthly, savage hound after having assaulted an innocent servant girl which resulted in her death. And just recently Hugo's descendant, the late Sir Charles Baskerville, was frightened by a large, ferocious hound and died of a heart attack. The beast is said to haunt the moors of Dartmoor, an eerie place near the Baskerville estate full of boulders, treacherous winding paths and slime in which people have been known to sink and die. Dr. Mortimer seeks Sherlock Holmes' help because he is afraid that the next Baskerville, Sir Henry, may be in grave danger. Having arrived in England from Canada to live in the Baskerville estate, Sir Henry has already been warned not to come to Dartmoor by an anonymous letter. And one of his shoes went missing, then mysteriously reappeared at the hotel where he has been staying temporarily.

Sherlock Holmes does not believe the legend of the hound has anything to do with the supernatural. He intends to solve the case with logic. After he discovers that Sir Henry is being followed by some unknown person, he instructs Dr. Watson to accompany Sir Henry to Dartmoor to investigate the matter and report back to him whatever happens there.

When Sir Henry and Watson arrive in Dartmoor, they discover that an escaped convict has been hiding in the moors. Dr. Watson meets the domestic help in the Baskerville Hall, Mr. and Mrs. Barrymore, the butler and housekeeper. Neighbors, Mr. Jack Stapleton and his sister, invite Watson and Sir Henry to have dinner with them.

Watson is invited to stay at the Baskerville estate and discovers in the night that the butler, Mr. Barrymore, seems to be signaling with a candle in a window to someone in the moors. He demands to know what Barrymore is up to, and the butler confesses that he has been signaling to the escaped convict whenever food is available for him. He then takes the food to the convict so he won't starve. It turns out that the convict is the brother of the butler's wife who has taken pity on him despite his misdeeds because of the familial relationship.

Sir Henry is pleased with the Baskerville mansion and happy that he has decided to take his place as the rightful heir to the estate. He and Watson accept the Stapletons' invitation to dinner and Henry discovers that he has romantic feelings for Stapleton's sister. When Jack Stapleton realizes that his sister is drawn to Henry, he is not pleased.

Watson reports everything to Holmes in letters that he faithfully writes to him. Sometime later, back at the Baskerville estate, Watson discovers another figure in the moors and sets out to find out who it is. To his surprise it is Holmes who has decided that, after Watson's research and reports, this is the right time for him to make an appearance.

Holmes has discovered that Jack Stapleton is the son of the late Sir Charles Baskerville's brother and is therefore in line to inherit the Baskerville estate, but only after the death of Sir Henry. Stapleton is, therefore, their chief suspect in the murder of Sir Charles and in any plans he may have of doing away with Sir Henry. Holmes plans to catch Stapleton in the act of trying to dispose of Sir Henry. After a late dinner at the Stapletons, Sir Henry returns home only to be chased and attacked by Stapleton's wild hound. Holmes and Watson have expected this to happen and are waiting in the moors with guns so they can rescue Sir Henry and kill the hound. Sir Henry follows Holmes' instructions and heads back to the Baskerville mansion by walking through the moors, but when Stapleton sets his hound loose, the beast is too fast for Holmes and Watson, and Sir Henry fails in



his efforts to escape. After falling he is attacked by the hound and killed. Holmes and Watson catch up and shoot the hound dead. They discover that the man they thought was Sir Henry is not him after all. It is Seldon, the escaped convict dressed in Sir Henry's clothing given to him by his sister, Mrs. Barrymore, to stay warm. They also notice that the hound has been painted with phosphorus so it would glow in the dark and give an other-worldly appearance lending credence to the legend that the hound was a supernatural creature.

They turn their attention to capturing Jack Stapleton who meets his death in his efforts to escape by falling into the slime of the moors and drowning. Meanwhile, Sir Henry Baskerville has arrived safely back at his estate. Holmes

had concluded that Sir Henry's missing shoe had been stolen to give the hound his scent so he would go after him in the moors and kill him. Instead, it was Henry's clothes taken to Seldon by Mrs. Barrymore that led the hound to the convict.

Holmes and Watson go to Stapleton's home where they discover his sister tied up because she refused to go along with Jack's plan to have Sir Henry killed. They discover that she is Jack's Stapleton's wife, not his sister. Jack had forced her to pose as his sister to attract Sir Henry and keep the young man from getting suspicious of Jack's real purpose: to get rid of Sir Henry so Jack could inherit the Baskerville fortune.

## Study Questions

1. What does Dr. Mortimer ask Sherlock Holmes and Watson to do?
2. According to legend, what has been happening to the heads of the Baskerville family for generations?
3. Who is next in line to inherit the Baskerville fortune?
4. Why do Holmes and Watson go to Sir Henry Baskerville's estate?
5. For whom does Sir Henry develop romantic feelings?
6. What happens to Jack Stapleton's hound when the beast attacks Sir Henry in the moors?
7. Why has the hound been painted with phosphorus?
8. Why did Stapleton want to get rid of Sir Henry?
9. How does Stapleton die?
10. What do Holmes and Watson discover about Stapleton's sister?

## Answer Key

1. To investigate the mysterious death of his friend Sir Charles Baskerville. 2. They have all been killed by a supernatural hound in the moors near the Baskerville estate. 3. Sir Henry Baskerville. 4. They believe that Sir Henry's life is in grave danger. 5. Jack Stapleton's sister. 6. The hound is shot and killed by Holmes and Watson. 7. So that it would glow in the dark and appear supernatural. 8. He wanted to inherit the Baskerville fortune. 9. He falls into the slime of the moors and drowns. 10. They discover that she was really his wife, not his sister.