

S·T·U·D·Y



G·U·I·D·E



KEN LUDWIG'S

THE GAME'S AFOOT

OR HOLMES FOR THE HOLIDAYS



Compiled by Jesse Groat

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“Ken Ludwig’s The Game’s Afoot”
is presented by special arrangement with SAMUEL FRENCH, INC.
Originally Produced by Cleveland Play House;
Michael Bloom, Artistic Director; Kevin Moore, Managing Director

December 5 - 23, 2019
The Vault Theater

CAST

William Gillette Andrew Beck‡
Martha Gillette Patrick Spike†
Felix Geisel Peter Schuyler‡
Madge Geisel Signe Larsen†
Simon Bright Phillip J. Bernst†
Aggie Wheeler Arianne Jacques‡
Inspector Goring Janelle Rae
Daria Chase Jessi Walters‡

CREW/PRODUCTION TEAM

Director Kymberli Colbourne‡
Fight Choreographer Signe Larsen†
Technical Director & Lighting Designer Jim Ricks-White
Costume Designer Melissa Heller
Scenic Designer Shannon Cramer
Sound Designer Elliot Lorence^
Props Master Tervor Harter^
Stage Manager Ephriam Harnsberger
Production Manager TS McCormick
Assistant Stage Manager (a.k.a. Barnes) Kenny Pratt^

‡Bag&Baggage Resident Artist, generously sponsored
by Linda Morrisson and Andrew Hoffmann

†Bag&Baggage Associate Artist

^Bag&Baggage Emerging Artist, generously sponsored
by Brad & Linda Needham

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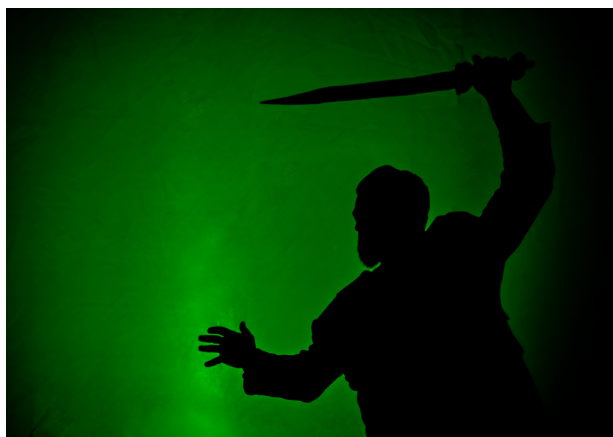
THE GAME'S AFOOT

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INTRODUCTION

It is December 1936, and Broadway Star William Gillette, the internationally-acclaimed leading actor in the wildly popular stage play *Sherlock Holmes*, is the victim of an attempted murder. Not long after, Gillette invites his fellow castmates to his castle in Connecticut for a fun holiday weekend. But when one of the guests is stabbed to death, the festivities in this isolated house of tricks and mirrors quickly turn dangerous. It is then up to Gillette himself, as he assumes the persona of his beloved Holmes, to track down the killer before the next victim appears. Ken Ludwig's *The Game's Afoot, or Holmes for the Holidays* received the 2012 Mystery Writers of America Edgar Allan Poe Award for Best Play.



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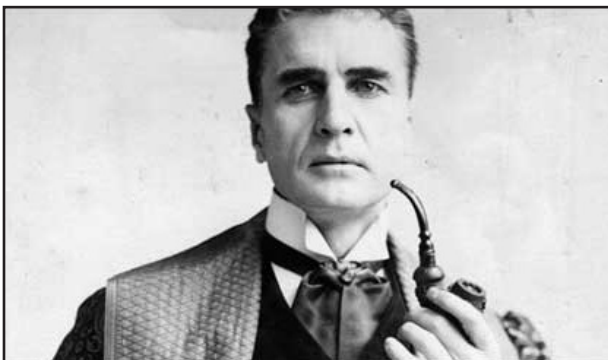
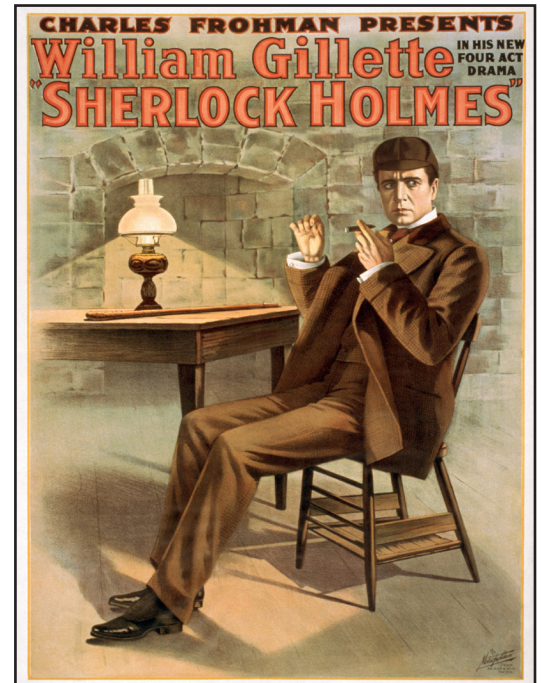
HISTORY & INFLUENCES: WILLIAM GILLETTE

excerpted from Emily E. Gifford's "Holmes at Home: The Life of William Gillette"

William Gillette was a character from a young age. Born in 1853 in Hartford, Connecticut, Gillette was exposed to literary influence from day one. The Gillette family happened to be neighbors with Harriet Beecher Stowe and Mark Twain, both very prolific writers. Starting in his youth, William Gillette was an avid performer, even going as far as building a miniature puppet theatre and entertaining his family and friends with short, self-written puppet shows. Later on, he and his friends co-founded an amateur journal called Hail Columbia, which included articles, stories, puzzles, and jokes.

Starting in 1874, Gillette worked in the American theatre, becoming very popular for his understated style of acting. In a time full of melodrama and over-the-top performances, Gillette delivered his lines in a more "natural" way, which was a welcomed shift for audiences. This popularity sent Gillette across the Atlantic in 1897, where his play *Secret Service* was a critical and commercial success.

At that time, Arthur Conan Doyle, the mind behind the wildly popular "Sherlock Holmes" stories, had fallen on hard times, and in order to raise funds, decided to adapt *Sherlock Holmes* to the stage. After a few failed attempts to capture the stories to his own satisfaction, Doyle found Gillette through a mutual connection, and charged him with the task of capturing Sherlock for the stage. After much work, Gillette met with Doyle in person to show him the play, simply titled *Sherlock Holmes*. The two immediately began a long lasting, and highly profitable, friendship.



With this new stage adaptation of *Sherlock Holmes*, Gillette brought three new elements to the character: his deerstalker cap, his long coat, and his iconic curved pipe. Gillette felt that these elements showed much better on stage than the original straight pipe that was pictured in the stories, and all these elements are now synonymous with the legendary detective now. Gillette also pioneered the telltale arrogance and loftiness that we all associate with Sherlock these days, playing him in a more aloof and impatient way than the original portrayals.

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Not only that, but Gillette also popularized the phrase, “Oh, this is elementary, my dear fellow,” which later evolved into the well-known phrase, “Elementary, my dear Watson.” Neither of these phrases ever appeared in the original stories, but Gillette’s portrayal of Holmes has forever linked these phrases to the character of Sherlock Holmes.

The stage play *Sherlock Holmes* premiered in Buffalo, New York on October 23, 1899, and was an instant success with audiences. Gillette appeared on stage as Holmes approximately 1,300 times between his first and final performance, which took place on March 19th, 1932, 33 years after the show’s premier. The new image of Sherlock Holmes lived on past Gillette’s portrayal, and is now the quintessential picture of the one and only Sherlock Holmes.

Of course, Gillette made a fortune playing Holmes, and he used a portion of that money, as well as his wild imagination, to build a castle in his home state of Connecticut. The castle, built from Connecticut stone, has 24 rooms, puzzle locks, secret doors, and even secret mirrors through which he could spy on his guests and time his dramatic entrances accordingly. The castle is now maintained as a state park and sees about 100,000 visitors a year.



Above:
the exterior and interior of
Gillette Castle in Connecticut

Right:
Bag&Baggage Scenic Designer
Shannon Cramer works on
scenic painting detail that hearkens
back to the actual design and
interior of Gillette Castle.



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HISTORY & INFLUENCES: SIR ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle was born on May 22, 1859 in Edinburgh, Scotland. The Doyle family was a prosperous Irish-Catholic family, despite Arthur's father being a chronic alcoholic. His mother, Mary Doyle, was a very well-educated woman with a gift for storytelling, and would spin tales for young Arthur to distract him from his father's drunken states. Doyle recounts some of his best memories being of his mother's stories, which would "obscure the real facts of my life".

For Doyle's ninth birthday, the wealthier members of his family offered to pay for his studies in England, where he spent the next 7 years of his life. Doyle hated the Jesuit boarding school he was sent to, his only happy moments found in writing letters to his mother, his cricket practices, and exercising his newfound talent for storytelling. Doyle would often have a group of younger students gathered around him, enraptured by his stories. In 1876, Arthur Conan Doyle graduated at the age of 17, ready to face the world.

Shortly after returning home to Scotland, Doyle was inspired by Dr. Bryan Charles Waller, a young lodger that Mary Doyle had taken in as an extra source of income, to go to medical school at University of Edinburgh. While at university, Doyle met his greatest inspiration for his future story writing: a professor named Dr. Joseph Bell. Bell was a master of observation, logic, deduction, and diagnosis, which inspired Doyle's future writing endeavors.

Amid authoring a few short stories, as well as a brief stint as a naval surgeon on a whaling boat, Doyle received his medical degree in 1881. His new degree took Doyle many places, including Africa and Plymouth, eventually bringing him to Portsmouth to open his own practice. As a private physician, he found himself on rocky financial footing, only able to furnish the two rooms in his rented house that were seen by his patients; the rest of the house remained unfurnished and barren for a number of years. As time passed, Doyle slowly began growing his practice, at the same time struggling to become a recognized author.

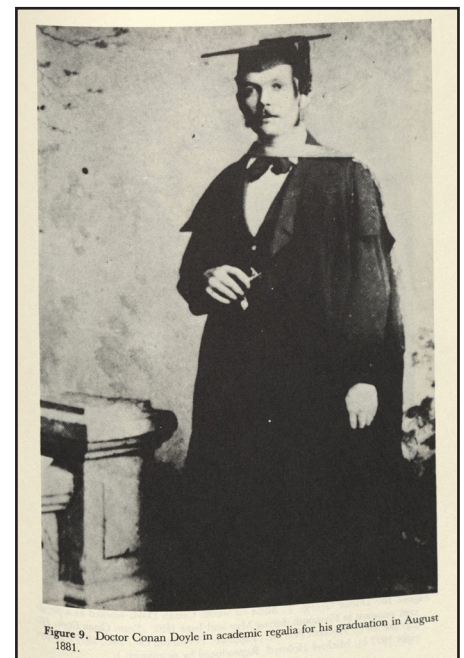


Figure 9. Doctor Conan Doyle in academic regalia for his graduation in August 1881.

In March of 1886, Doyle began writing a story called *A Tangled Skein*, which, two years later, transformed into the wildly popular *A Study In Scarlet*, which included the first appearance of the now immortal Sherlock Holmes. Doyle believed that his next novel, *Micah Clark* was a much better work, but the public gravitated to the exciting story of Holmes. Thus began a struggle within Doyle, one that he carried with him for the rest of his life: he wanted desperately to be recognized as a serious historical writer, and thought of *Sherlock Holmes* as nothing more than a fad, but his readers did not share his sentiment. Doyle came to resent the fame of Holmes, and only wrote more stories because of his financial position.

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During a trip to Switzerland after abandoning his now-failed medical business, Doyle thought it fit to give his begrudgingly-loved Sherlock the end he deserved. Published in December 1893, the story *The Final Problem* had Sherlock Holmes and his archnemesis Moriarty plunging to their deaths at The Reichenbach Falls. The beloved Sherlock Holmes was finally dead; unfortunately, so was Doyle's readership. After saying farewell to Sherlock, twenty thousand readers cancelled their subscriptions to Doyle's stories, leaving him with a sense of freedom.

Many years later, after Doyle's wife fell deathly ill and his father had passed, Doyle decided to adapt his beloved Sherlock Holmes stories into a stage play. His decision to become a playwright was made solely because he had fallen on hard times, and felt this would be a quick and easy way to recoup some funds. After finishing his manuscript, Doyle met the famous American actor William Gillette, who asked if he might be able edit the stage version of his story and take some artistic liberties with the Sherlock character. Doyle gave his blessing, and while the story, newly revitalized by Gillette, saw critical failure, it succeeded in winning the hearts of audiences. *Sherlock Holmes* the stage play was a huge success, and would run for many years to come.



THE DEATH OF SHERLOCK HOLMES.

Doyle continued writing new Sherlock stories up until his death, as well as other works of popular fiction. Near the end of his life, he began to cultivate an obsession with the occult, which all started with a collection of photographs depicting fairies. Doyle and his second wife, Jean, became enraptured with the supernatural, even putting on seances and traveling the world on psychic crusades with their children. After one psychic tour to northern Europe, Doyle fell very ill and became bedridden. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle died on July 7th, 1930 surrounded by his family. His stories remain some of the most iconic in Western literature.



A fairy photo from Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's extensive collection

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THE PLAYWRIGHT: KEN LUDWIG



Ken Ludwig is a man with different names for his two divergent careers: As an attorney, he is Kenneth D. Ludwig; he writes plays under his abbreviated name. Born in York, Pennsylvania, he graduated from York Suburban High School in 1968. He chose Haverford College in Pennsylvania to study music theory and composition. Following graduation in 1972 with a B.A., magna cum laude, Ludwig faced some hard decisions about his future.

From the time he saw his first play at age six, Ludwig yearned to be in the theater. His mother's theatrical interests and family trips to Broadway shows had enticed him, and he considered playwriting. However, his physician father, Jacob S. Ludwig, advised his son to pursue a career that would offer greater stability.

Ludwig entered Harvard Law School. Partway through his studies, he decided to attend Trinity College at Cambridge University in England. At Trinity, Ludwig opted to study English literature. He graduated from Trinity in 1975 and returned to Harvard to graduate in 1976. That year was an eventful one for Ludwig. He went to work at the law firm of Steptoe and Johnson in Washington, D.C., and married attorney Adrienne George. They would have two children.

From 1976 to 1989, Ludwig worked as an attorney in international business and entertainment law, but each morning he would rise at 4:30 a.m. and write until it was time to leave for the firm. His first production while he juggled dual careers was *Divine Fire*, performed in Washington, D.C., in 1979, then Off-Off-Broadway in 1980. He followed with the musical *Sullivan and Gilbert*, which dealt with the stormy relationship between dramatist Sir William S. Gilbert and songwriter Sir Arthur Sullivan. *Sullivan and Gilbert* received its New York showing in 1984. It was not until Andrew Lloyd Webber's 1986 London production of Ludwig's farce *Lend Me a Tenor*, however, that Ludwig was catapulted into the theatrical world he had persistently sought.

Lend Me a Tenor is a farce that employs quick comebacks and fast action. This high comedy won two Tony Awards, four Drama Desk Awards, and three Outer Critics Circle Awards. The play's success on Broadway presented Ludwig with the opportunity to write full time. He maintained a status "of counsel" at his law firm and consulted in the areas of publishing, copyright, and intellectual property rights.

In 2011, Ludwig penned the "snappy, clever drawing-room mystery" *The Game's Afoot; or Holmes for the Holidays*, which received its premiere that December at Cleveland Play House in Ohio. *The Game's Afoot* was the recipient of the 2012 Edgar Allen Poe Award, awarded by the Mystery Writers of America, as the Best Mystery Play of 2012.



Poster from the 2010 Broadway revival of Ludwig's *Lend Me A Tenor*.

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In his introductory notes to *The Game's Afoot*, Ludwig writes:

Why do mysteries grab us?

*About four years ago our family went on vacation in England, and during the London portion of the trip we went to the theatre and saw *The Mousetrap* by Agatha Christie. As you may know, *The Mousetrap* is the longest-running play in history. When we saw it, it had been running for fifty-six years (be still my heart) and it's still running today as I write this.*

As I watched the play unfold that night and saw the joy that it gave to our entire family, I resolved to try and write a mystery of my own. However, I knew even then that I wouldn't have a chance of writing a good one until I figured out the allure of mysteries on the stage, and how and why the great ones entertain us so powerfully.

I started by reading every good mystery play I could lay my hands on. ...What I learned from all my reading is that the greatest mystery plays written in the past hundred years have certain elements in common, and by recognizing these elements, I was able to understand more deeply the genre I was trying to tackle. Here is a summary of some of the lessons I learned from my foray into the literature of mysteries.



*The 2011 Cleveland Play House premiere of *The Game's Afoot*.*

1. The greatest mystery plays are plotted meticulously. ...When we speak of plot, it's worth remembering the definition of plot offered by E.M. Forster in his book *Aspects of the Novel*. He illustrates the difference between story and plot as follows:

"The king died and then the queen died" is a story. "The king died and then the queen died of grief" is a plot. The time sequence is preserved, but the sense of causality overshadows it. Or again: "The queen died, no one knew why, until it was discovered that it was through grief at the death of the king." This is a plot with a mystery in it, a form capable of high development.

In other words, a plot requires causality. It's not just "and then and then and then."...

2. The plots of great mystery plays are relentlessly linear. Mysteries take us on a ride, starting at the beginning and driving straight through to the end. Like roller coasters, the best mysteries may twist and turn, climb and plunge, but they're always headed straight forward and zoom on to the finish.

Because the best mystery plays are so linear, there is rarely time for subplots. ...Of course mysteries sometimes contain red herrings: developments that make us believe that someone other than the culprit committed the crime. And in the best mysteries, the red herrings are woven into the forward motion of the play.

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3. The greatest mystery plays, like the greatest plays of any kind, somehow, almost magically, have resonances to other, deeper layers of meaning. ...mysteries speak to something central to us all. We try to find out who the killer is just the way we ask other, deeper questions of identity. We want answers to vital questions that can make the world more rational and sensible because answers give us peace of mind.

4. Mysteries by their very nature contain certain recurring themes. These usually include questions about death, about justice, and about appearance versus reality. ...And this is one of the reasons that we find mysteries so endlessly fascinating: Mysteries are journeys trying to answer the question of who we really are.

5. Finally, what we're really seeking when we look for answers in a mystery is a sense of order. In *The Game's Afoot*; or *Holmes for the Holidays*, I have the inspector in the play, Inspector Goring, say to the protagonist, William Gillette (the actor who played Sherlock Holmes on stage for over thirty years): "Order from chaos. Order from chaos. It's what I do."

And that's what mysteries do. They fit the pieces together.

THINGS TO LISTEN FOR, OR *THE PLAY'S THE THING*: THEATRICAL REFERENCES IN THE SHOW

Throughout *The Game's Afoot*, there are many references to classic works of theatre, specifically Shakespeare plays. Here is a guide to many of the references you'll hear throughout the show:



Peter Schuyler plays Richard in Bag&Baggage's 2015 production of Shakespeare's *Richard III*. In *The Game's Afoot*, you'll see Schuyler onstage as Felix Geisel.

GILLETTE: "I am not shaped for sportive tricks / nor made to court an amorous looking glass... I am rudely stamped and want love's majesty / to strut before a wanton, ambling nymph...And that so lamely and unfashionable that dogs bark at me as I halt by them;"

— *Richard III*, Act I, scene i

MADGE: "What country, friend is this?"

FELIX: "It is Illyria, lady."

MADGE: "My brother, he is in Elysium. Perchance he is not drowned! What think you, Sailor?"

FELIX: "It is perchance that you yourself were saved."

— *Twelfth Night*, Act I, scene ii

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FELIX: "Spout / Till you have drenched our steeples, drowned the cocks!"

—*King Lear* Act III, scene ii

GILLETTE: "But even then the morning cock crew loud And at the sound it shrunk in haste away."

—*Hamlet*, Act I, scene ii

FELIX: "The knave turns fool that runs away."

—*King Lear*, Act II, scene iv

GILLETTE: "Where's my fool? Ho! I think the world's asleep!"

—*King Lear*, Act I, scene iv

FELIX: "To sleep, perchance to dream."

—*Hamlet*, Act III, scene i

GILLETTE: "To sleep, no more."

—*Hamlet*, Act III, scene i

GILLETTE: "Stir up the Athenian youth to merriment, Awake the pert and nimble spirit of mirth!"

—*A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Act I, scene i

GILLETTE: "When churchyards yawn and hell itself breathes out Contagion to this world!"

—*Hamlet*, Act III, scene ii



Kevin Connell plays King Lear in Bag&Baggage's 2014 production of *LEAR*.

INSPECTOR: "The evil that men do lives after them! The good is oft interr'd with their bones!"

—*Julius Caesar*, Act 3, scene ii

INSPECTOR: "Blood will have blood!"

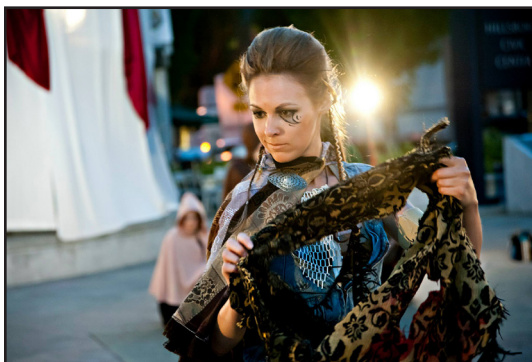
—*Macbeth*, Act 3, scene iv

INSPECTOR: "Is this a dagger which I see before me?!"

—*Macbeth*, Act 2, scene i

INSPECTOR: "Come, you spirits / That tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here, / And fill me from the crown to the toe top-full / Of direst cruelty!"

—*Macbeth*, Act I, scene v



Cassie Greer plays Mark Antony in Bag&Baggage's 2013 production of *Julius Caesar*.

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OUR PRODUCTION: NOTES FROM DIRECTOR KYMBERLI COLBOURNE

To solve any good mystery, one must endeavor to:

Gather the facts

Connect the dots

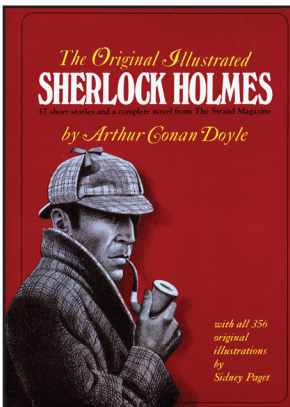
And draw a conclusion.

In Ken Ludwig's *The Game's Afoot*, we connect: a famous author, his even more famous creation, and an actual real-life actor...whose claim to fame is utterly dependent upon the previous two dots.

So here are a few facts:



Sir Arthur Conan Doyle tried very hard NOT to be a writer. He studied to be doctor and served as a ship's surgeon; had a failed ophthalmology practice; ran unsuccessfully for parliament twice; bought a car without knowing how to drive it and entered in the Prince Henry Tour International road race; played goalie on the same cricket team as JM Barrie; believed in fairies and mediums and ultimately became a practitioner of Spiritualism himself; and, after his death, had a seance held for him at Royal Albert Hall, attended by thousands and at which, after much pomp and circumstance, he failed to make an appearance. He was also the reluctant creator of Sherlock Holmes, a character he killed off only six years after his debut, but was forced to bring back to life due to popular demand and "monetary persuasion".



Sherlock Holmes was "born" at Christmastime, making his first appearance in *A Study In Scarlet*, published in Beeton's Christmas Annual in 1887. He was a master of logic, observation, and deduction; knowledgeable in literature, astronomy, politics, botany, geology, chemistry, anatomy, and cryptology; a forerunner of modern forensic science; an expert singlestick player, boxer, and swordsman; an erstwhile violinist; a beekeeper in his retirement years; and a cocaine addict. He is featured in 60 stories by Doyle, appears in numerous other literary works, and has been the subject of comic books, graphic novels, radio dramas, TV shows, and approximately 226 films and counting.



The very first actor to portray Holmes was **William Gillette**. Born in Connecticut in 1853, the son of a US Senator, Gillette became a celebrity in the infancy of the American Theatre. Stunningly good looking, he wrote, starred in, directed, and produced plays — including *Sherlock Holmes* with the personal permission of Arthur Conan Doyle, who became a lifelong friend. The only known footage of Gillette as Sherlock, filmed in 1916, will be playing as you enter the theatre; he spent the majority of his 33 year career portraying Sherlock in over 1,300 performances in the US and England. On the grounds of his imposing stone castle on the shores of the Connecticut River (constructed with his *Sherlock* earnings), Gillette built a miniature railroad, allowing him to fulfill his lifelong dream of being a train engineer.

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Our playwright, **Ken Ludwig**, weaves the strands of these three eccentric characters into a “relentlessly entertaining”...mystery, of course. And yet, deeper themes lie beneath the surface. Ludwig states in his writer’s notes, “Mysteries are journeys trying to answer the question of who we really are.”

In the theatre, as is life, there is a constant tension between appearance and reality. And in every great mystery, there comes the moment when everyone is suspect, everyone must reveal or discover who they are, and everyone is guilty — of something — and the truth will come out.

In that examination of self and others, everything comes into question: What is the nature of guilt? The nature of innocence? What should we conclude?

Death, murder, can be morally ambiguous. “Should the culprit be punished if the victim is a predator...?” Ludwig asks. Despite his respect for the law, Sherlock tells Watson in *The Abbey Grange*, “Once or twice in my career I feel that I have done more real harm by my discovery of the criminal than ever he did by his crime...I had rather play tricks with the law of England than with my conscience.” Six times in the Sherlock stories, he allows the culprit to escape — in four of those instances, the crime was murder.

Theatre is one of those places where we can throw the puzzle pieces of a story — either familiar or something we have no lived experienced with — up into the air and look at in a new way. It is a place where we can start a conversation about how those pieces might fit together...and how we all might bear some responsibility.



Andrew Beck plays William Gillette in Bag&Baggage's production of The Game's Afoot, along with Signe Larsen as Madge Geisel, Peter Schuyler as Felix Geisel, Phillip J. Berns as Simon Bright, and Arianne Jacques as Aggie Wheeler.

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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS & WRITING ACTIVITIES

Before you see the show:

1. Consider Ken Ludwig's notes on the essential elements of a good murder mystery.
 - a. Can you think of examples of these elements in mystery stories you know?
 - b. Do you agree with Ludwig's analysis? Is there anything you think he missed?
2. What, from your personal experience, do you know about Sherlock Holmes? Why do you think this character got to be so famous?
3. Imagine you are writing a fictional play about a historical figure, just as Ken Ludwig did about William Gillette. Which historical figure would you choose and why? What story would you choose to bring to life?

After you see the show:

4. Did you figure out who the killer was before everything was revealed? What clues did you notice throughout the show that helped you figure out who was guilty?
5. Ken Ludwig says, "Mysteries are journeys trying to answer the question of who we really are." Choose one of the characters in the show, and consider the question of who they really are. What personal qualities did they reveal through their actions, intentional or not?
6. William Gillette built a castle with many hidden doors and secret passageways. Of course in theatre, it's difficult to figure out how to put those fun hidden things on stage. Imagine you are the one designing the set for this show. Draw a picture of what your set would look like, including details about how you would design the hidden doors and stairways. Are there any additional details you would choose to include?
7. Imagine you are Ken Ludwig's writing partner for *The Game's Afoot*, and you want to make a different character the killer. Which character would you choose and why? What clues would you leave for the audience to help them figure out who dunnit?
8. *The Game's Afoot* is a murder mystery, but Ken Ludwig chose to make it a comedy as well. Why do you think he made this choice? How do you image you might have responded to this show if it wasn't funny?
9. In addition to the references to Shakespeare plays, *The Game's Afoot* has several other theatrical references. Which ones did you notice?
10. Imagine you are writing a mystery novel about your life. What event in your life would you write about? What clues would you find and how would you solve your mystery?

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SOURCES AND FURTHER READING

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle

The Official Site of the Sir Arthur Conan Doyle Literary Estate:
<https://www.arthurconandoyle.com/>

The Official Conan Doyle Estate:
<https://conandoyleestate.com>

The Arthur Conan Doyle Encyclopedia:
<https://www.arthur-conan-doyle.com>

Sherlock Holmes

Sherlock Holmes History on the Sherlock Holmes Memorabilia Company Site:
<https://sherlockholmes.com/history/>

Curated Directory of Sherlock Holmes:
<https://www.sherlockian.net>

The Sherlock Holmes Short Stories on Lit2Go:
<https://etc.usf.edu/lit2go/collections/16/the-sherlock-holmes-short-stories/>

William Gillette

“Holmes at Home: The Life of William Gillette” by Emily E. Gifford:
<https://connecticuthistory.org/holmes-at-home-the-life-of-william-gillette/>

William Gillette on IMDB:
<https://www.imdb.com/name/nm0319069/>

William Gillette Biography on henryzecher.com:
<http://www.henryzecher.com/gillettebio.htm>

William Gillette, America's Sherlock Holmes by Henry Zecher:
ISBN: 1453555811