

**“You and I, the Slayer and the Slain”:  
How Sir Arthur Conan Doyle’s Wavering Theosophical Beliefs Impacted  
“The Blood-Stone Tragedy: A Druidical Story”**

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**Abstract**

Arthur Conan Doyle’s short stories reflect his fluctuating religious beliefs. From 1883 to 1885, he believed in Theosophy, a worldview that drew some of its doctrine from Druidry. In 1884 he published “The Blood-Stone Tragedy: A Druidical Story.” The story depicts conflicting viewpoints on Druidry. On the one hand, in Wales, Druids were nationalist figures consistent with Theosophy. On the other hand, English Victorians’ viewed Druids as backwards, barbaric, and violent. In brief, Doyle’s Theosophical worldview at the time and his anti-Druid story seem mutually contradictory.

In this frame narrative’s outer frame, the narrator encounters a husband who alludes to and shows disdain for real-life neo-Druid William Price. In the inner narrative, the husband tells the narrator how his outspoken wife Madison leaves to go on a hike and is abducted by a Druid who explains Druidry to her. Because women must be sacrificed by men to appease the gods, he tells her, he intends to sacrifice her. As he is about to do so, she faints, and the husband arrives and intervenes by striking the Druid in the head, rendering him unconscious. The husband rescues his wife and brings her home. In the outer frame, the narrator asks what happened to the Druid, to which the husband replies that the Druid was a former scientist who had escaped from a lunatic asylum.

The story rejects the Welsh nationalist view of druids as patriarchal by showing that this as the view of a lunatic. That is, the story favors the English Victorian negative stereotype of Druids as backwards because they are anti-patriarchal, instead showing through the actions of Madison and her husband the importance of anti-patriarchal outspokenness and individuality, qualities parallel those of Theosophy’s founder “Madame” Blavatsky.