

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE SHERLOCK HOLMES SOCIETY OF LONDON

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Michael Dirda is a bookman in the tradition of Christopher Morley and Vincent Starrett: highly intelligent, well educated, widely read, and entirely unpretentious. All this is gratifyingly evident in his latest book *On Conan Doyle, or, The Whole Art of Storytelling* (Princeton University Press; press.princeton.edu; £13.95), which concentrates largely on Sherlock Holmes but finds space in its 220-odd pages for perceptive discussion of Brigadier Gerard, Professor Challenger, Nigel Loring and pretty much all of Conan Doyle's important fiction – which is to say, most of it. As the subtitle indicates, Mr Dirda doesn't disagree with Greenhough Smith's claim in *The Strand Magazine* that Arthur Conan Doyle was 'the greatest natural storyteller of his age', but he knows that there was far more to it than natural talent. He knows too, that the telling of tales is not to be despised, and that Conan Doyle was actually one of the most important observers of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Mr Dirda is, enviably, able to tell you just why he loves Conan Doyle and Sherlock Holmes, so that you realise, yes, that's why you love them too.

The subtitle of *Introducing Sherlock Holmes: The Great Detective According to Doyle* by **William Hyder** (The Battered Silicon Dispatch Box; www.batteredbox.com; Cdn\$25.00; e-book Cdn\$12.99) is a trifle misleading. The bulk of the book is pure Conan Doyle, consisting of the texts of eight significant cases plus the opening chapters of *A Study in Scarlet*, but the 'biography' that Mr Hyder offers as background material seems to derive mostly from his own imagination. We're told, for instance, that Sherlock's brother was given the name Mycroft by his mother, the first syllable reflecting 'her possessive feelings towards her first-born' and the second 'taken from her maiden name' of Howcroft being 'her way of affirming her presence in a household dominated by her husband'. None of this has anything to do with Conan Doyle, and in any case 'Mycroft' is a real name, particularly notable in Derbyshire – Bernard Davies's essay 'Mycroft Country' is especially enlightening. Bill Hyder is always worth reading, of course, but I've shelved *Introducing Sherlock Holmes* alongside the inventive 'biographies' of W S Baring-Gould, Michael Harrison, Michael Hardwick and Nick Rennison.

The second set of Sherlock Holmes audio productions from Big Finish comprises *The Final Problem* and *The Empty House*, dramatised by **Nicholas Briggs**, who also directs and plays Holmes, with Richard Earl as Watson. The partnership of Briggs & Earl is absolutely solid, and will rank, I'm sure, alongside Hobbs & Shelley, Merrison & Williams/Sachs, Lowrie & Albert or (I hope) Crozier & Hawkes. Unlike Bert Coules, who dispenses with narration as much as possible, Mr Briggs makes great use of Watson as storyteller – to a great extent, indeed, these are dramatised readings, so cleverly done that they lose none of their dramatic effect. You could argue, in fact, that the narration adds an element of immediacy, as the evidence of an eye-witness. John Banks makes an impact in his dual rôle as Lestrade and Moran; Beth Chalmers is effective as a Scottish Mrs Hudson; but it's a special treat to welcome Alan Cox as the suavest, most subtly sinister Moriarty imaginable. (Unexpectedly, the line, "You stand fast?" is given to Holmes, with Moriarty replying, 'Absolutely.' And it works.) Sound effects are admirable, and I love Jamie Robertson's music. Each play is followed by an interview with members of the cast and crew – a nice bonus.

At our Annual Dinner in January, **Anthony Horowitz** announced that he had been commissioned by the Conan Doyle Estate to write a Sherlock Holmes novel. The result is *The House of Silk* (Orion Books; www.orionbooks.co.uk; £18.99, e-book £9.99). As you'd expect from the creator of *Foyle's War* and *Midsomer Murders*, the narrative is

exciting and the mystery baffling. Actually, that should be 'mysteries'. Mr Horowitz presents us with one puzzle, then introduces a quite different one, and cleverly leads us through the labyrinth until, with a flourish of his magician's staff, he reveals the devilish connection between them. The case of the Man in the Flat Cap, a mission of vengeance from the underworld of New York, has echoes of *The Valley of Fear* and 'The Dancing Men', but when Holmes involves the Baker Street irregulars he stumbles upon an even darker case, that of the House of Silk. The name hides something so abominable that even a certain criminal mastermind is repelled. And Sherlock Holmes is arrested for the murder of a young woman, committed while under the influence of opium. Mr Horowitz captures the Watsonian style competently, though there are lapses. The names of Edgar Allan Poe and Mary Morstan are misspelled. Addresses are inconsistently said to be 'on' a street, in the American style. Watson's accounts are published in *The Cornhill Magazine* instead of *The Strand*. The portraits of Henry Ward Beecher and General Gordon are said to belong to Holmes rather than to Watson. And we really could have done without the reiteration of several previous, published, cases. The adverts announce that this is Holmes's darkest case. It's certainly darker than any that Conan Doyle wrote – or would have considered writing.

The Papers of Sherlock Holmes by **David Marcum** (The Battered Silicon Dispatch Box; www.batteredbox.com; Cdn\$25.00) contains nine intriguing mysteries. The first four are set in or near London, and, but for the odd intrusive Americanism, are very much in the classic tradition. Then, in 'The Affair of the Brother's Request', Holmes and Watson travel to rural Tennessee, Mr Marcum's own homeland – and why not? Some of the most interesting pastiches of recent years have taken the detective to the new world. The last and longest tale, 'The Adventure of the Other Brother', proposes a close family relationship between Holmes and Solar Pons, the sage of Praed Street, and draws on the theory that the Mycroft-like Nero Wolfe is the son of Sherlock Holmes and Irene Adler (there's a nod, too, to the film *Sherlock Holmes in New York*). You can't mistake David Marcum's educated affection for the creations of Arthur Conan Doyle, Rex Stout and August Derleth. He writes well, too.

The sequel to *Shadowfall* is just as deliriously weird. *Shadowblood* by **Tracy Revels** (MX; £10.99/\$19.95/€12.99) introduces us again to the World of Shadows, whose interaction with our own world can be devastating. Watson's recuperation from his previous encounters with the supernatural is interrupted when an unpleasant recluse demands that Holmes find his missing daughter. Shortly after the detective's arrival, the old man is horribly murdered, and Holmes's own Shadowborn powers are tested to the limit in a quest for the girl and, ultimately, for the Fountain of Youth. He and Watson travel to Prague, where they are helped by Dr John Dee, and then to St Augustine, Florida, where they receive assistance and opposition from even stranger beings. The missing girl is practising blood magic and has acquired a very dangerous assistant, a woman skilled in murder. I said that *Shadowfall* is rather like an enjoyable nightmare. *Shadowblood* is even more enjoyable.

The Case of the Russian Chessboard by **Charlie Roxburgh** (MX Publishing; www.mxpublishing.com; £6.99/\$9.95/€7.99) packs quite a lot into its 110 pages. Not for the first time, Holmes and Watson are caught up in international politics – the 'chessboard' is a metaphor for the deadly tussle between Russian revolutionaries and the Tsarist secret police, and the historical background is accurate. (The anarchist community that Holmes visits was only ten miles from my house.) Mr Roxburgh's writing is occasionally clumsy, and he hasn't, I think, quite

mastered Watson's style, but he tells a good story, and his subject – terrorism and the control of people's minds – remains sadly topical.

Should you wish to hold a Canonical quiz – or a series of quizzes – you could find everything you need in *Questions of Sherlock Holmes* by **Paul Avon** (www.thascales.co.uk; £9.99). I could argue with one or two of Mr Avon's statements – that Watson was married three times, that Lestrade's Christian name was Giles – but the book is intelligently devised and attractively produced. I don't see the point, though, of Dan Grigsby's illustrations, which are all redrawn from Paget, Steele, Wiles and others.

A Brief History of Sherlock Holmes by **Nigel Cawthorne** (Robinson; www.constablerobinson.com; £8.99), though blazoned on the cover as 'The complete guide to the world's most famous detective', simply isn't. Summarising every one of the sixty stories was a new idea, and useful, fifty years ago, when the Hardwicks wrote *The Sherlock Holmes Companion*. Like them, subsequent writers have been careful not to reveal the outcome of each story – until now. If plot outline is all you're interested in, then you can read Mr Cawthorne's book and not bother with Conan Doyle. But the book's information about Holmes and creator should be treated with caution. Facts gathered from the standard biographies are sometimes inaccurately presented, and speculation is presented as fact. (Conan Doyle's play *The Crown Diamond* was not filmed during his lifetime – or ever. *The Threshold*, which became *The Stark-Munro Letters*, was not, in any important sense, 'a reworking of *The Narrative of John Smith*'.) And misprints abound: 'the Society for Physical Research', 'his play, *Brigadier General*', 'His Last Blow'... Nigel Cawthorne has a good name as a writer, but the good in *A Brief History of Sherlock Holmes* is, sadly, outweighed by the bad.

Some excellent news from **Michael Cox**: his classic authoritative account of the making of Granada TV's Sherlock Holmes series, *A Study in Celluloid*, has been published in a revised edition by Gasogene Books (www.wessexpress.com/ – though the title isn't yet listed on the website). The first edition, published in 1999, is long out of print, and copies fetch three-figure prices, so the new edition is doubly welcome.

R T Campbell was the name under which Ruthven Campbell Todd wrote seven detective novels in the 1940s. Though described as lively, humorous and hugely enjoyable, they've long been almost impossible to find. Now Lomax Press (13 Park Place, Stirling, Stirlingshire FK7 9JR; www.lomaxpress.co.uk) has published the first edition since 1946 of *Take Thee a Sharp Knife*, introduced by Christopher Todd & Peter Main, and annotated by Forbes Gibb. This is a limited numbered edition of 300 copies, priced at £21.00 each, plus £4.00 postage within the UK.

Barbara Roden has written only a few Holmes stories, but quality far exceeds quantity. Now four of them have been published by Calabash Press as a Kindle e-book, under the title *The Thames Horror, and Other Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*, the others being 'The Things that Shall Come upon Them', 'Of the Origin of the Hound of the Baskervilles' and 'The Adventure of the Suspect Servant'. The book is available for download for £4.95 on Amazon.co.uk or \$7.38 on Amazon.com – or \$5.99 from the publisher's website at www.ash-tree.bc.ca/eBooks.htm.

Other Kindle books that have been brought to my notice are *Sherlock Holmes' London* by **Joshua Hammer** (£2.14 – Mr Hammer spent an afternoon with members of our Society); *Sherlock Holmes and the Alien Abduction* by **Phillip Duke** (86p); and *Mr S.* by **Daniel Adams** (86p).

Mea culpa. The limited hardback edition of *A Study in Sherlock* (see DM 315), is available from Poisoned Pen Press, is not in fact signed. See <http://www.poisonedpen.com/products/hfiction/9781590585498/?searchterm=study%20in%20sherlock>.

Highlights of the **Arthur Conan Doyle Weekend** to be held in Haslemere (close to ACD's home at Hindhead) 15-17 June next year include *Sherlock Holmes – The Last Act!* performed by **Roger Llewellyn**, a talk by **Andrew Lycett**, the Hammer film *The Hound of the Baskervilles* (shot nearby) introduced by **Alistair Duncan**, a murder mystery evening with **The Irregular Special Players**, a musical matinee with **Catherine Cooke** and local musicians, and a talk by, er, me. To be kept informed of the planned events, write to Haslemere Visitor & Local Information Centre, Haslemere Museum, 78 High Street, Haslemere, Surrey GU27 2LA, or e-mail haslemerevisitor@haslemere.com.

Paul Singleton will play Holmes in a reading of Alex Simmons's *Sherlock Holmes and the Hands of Othello* on 4 December at WorkShop

Theater Company, 312 West 36th Street (between 8th and 9th Avenues), 4th floor, New York City. The performance starts at 6.00pm, and admission is free.

Sherlock Holmes and the Bearded Imposter, the 'alternative Christmas pantomime – for adults', will be staged at the Studio Theatre, South Hill Park, Ringmead, Bracknell, Berks. RG12 7PA, from 7 to 10 December. The box office number is 01344 484123.

Our member **Richard Burnip**, who regularly leads Sherlock Holmes walks for London Walks (www.walks.com), will offer two specials next month. On 11 December, meeting at Green Park Station (north exit) at 2.30pm, there's *Sherlock Holmes Saves the Nation! The Great Detective in Westminster*. And on 18 December, meeting at the Eros statue in Piccadilly Circus at 10.45am, there's the *Arthur Conan Doyle Walk – The Adventures of Sherlock's Creator*.

Lynn Gale tells me that the **Undershaw Preservation Trust** Christmas card – a very attractive painting of Conan Doyle's former residence – is now available, as are other goodies, from the Trust's online shop at www.saveundershawshop.com/index.html.

Andy Solberg has discovered that there's an active Sherlock Holmes society in mainland China – **The Chinese Sherlockian Society**, which has a website at www.sherlockian.org/sh/home.php and a forum at www.sherlockian.org/sh/forum/index.php. (Thanks to Peter Blau.)

A few days ago The Daily Telegraph reported: 'A burglar was caught after police caught him walking in the street carrying a pink handbag he had just stolen.' Clearly he hadn't learned anything from *A Study in Pink!*

Peter Hammond, who died on 12 October aged eighty-seven, directed eight of the Granada *Sherlock Holmes* films, including the first and best feature-length film *The Sign of Four*. His trademark penchant for reflected images – though ideal for a series such as *The Avengers* – occasionally got the better of him, but *The Sign of Four*, at least, will ensure that his memory is honoured.

James Peters reports the death on 12 November of **David Sinclair**, author of the admirable *Sherlock Holmes's London*, published by Robert Hale in 2009.

John Neville died on 19 November, aged of eighty-six. He excelled at Shakespeare, quickly becoming a leading man at the Old Vic. In 1972 he moved to Canada, where, as artistic director, he rescued the Stratford Shakespeare Festival from financial peril. We treasure his performance as Sherlock Holmes in the 1965 film *A Study in Terror* – and envy those who saw him in William Gillette's play on Broadway a decade later.

Periodicals received. *The Camden House Journal*, October 2011 and November 2011 (**The Occupants of the Empty House**, Debbie Tinsley, PO Box 21, Zeigler, IL 62999, USA). *Canadian Holmes*, Fall 2011 (**The Bootmakers of Toronto**, Mark & JoAnn Alberstat, 46 Kingston Crescent, Dartmouth, Nova Scotia, B3A 2M2, Canada). *For the Sake of the Trust: The Baker Street Irregulars Trust Newsletter*, Fall 2011 (**The BSI Trust**, Marshall S Berdan, 2015 Main Street, Glastonbury, CT 06033, USA). *The Gaslight Gazette*, vol. XVII, no. xi (**Survivors of the Gloria Scott**, David J Milner, 6 Crowndale Drive, Taylors, SC 29687, US). *The Illustrious Clients News*, November 2011 (**The Illustrious Clients**, Steven T Doyle, 9 Calumet Court, Zionsville, IN 46077, USA). *Ineffable Twaddle*, November 2011 (**The Sound of the Baskervilles**, Terri Haugen, 3606 Harborcrest Court NW, Gig Harbor, WA 9832-8981, USA). *Irregular Newsletter*, October 2011 (**The Conan Doyle [Crowborough] Establishment**, Brian Pugh, 20 Clare Road, Lewes, Sussex BN7 1PN). *The Moor: Magasin für Sherlockianer*, November 2011 (**The Baskerville Hall Club of Sweden**, Anders Wiggström, Byggmästarvägen 29, 168 32 Bromma, Sweden). *The Petrel Flyer*, November/December 2011 (**The Stormy Petrels of British Columbia**, Len Haffenden, 1026 West Keith Road, North Vancouver, B.C., Canada V7P 3C6). *3-Pipe Problem Plugs and Dottles*, November 2011 (**The Nashville Scholars of the Three-Pipe Problem**, Kay Blocker, 5017 Maywood Drive, Nashville, TN 37211, USA pkblocker@comcast.net).

And *Scuttlebutt from the Spermaceti Press*, October 2011 (Peter E Blau, 7103 Endicott Court, Bethesda, MD 20817-4401, USA; blau7103@comcast.net).

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