

“I AM AN OMNIVOROUS READER”

Book reviews BY DAVID STUART DAVIES, ALISTAIR DUNCAN, M J ELLIOTT
and ROGER JOHNSON

The Lost Stories of Sherlock Holmes by John Watson MD, edited by Tony Reynolds, illustrated by Chris Coady. *MX Publishing*, 2010. 188pp. £9.99

This entertaining set of eight stories manages, on the whole, to capture the flavour of the Conan Doyle originals and Watson's elegant prose. They present a pleasing variety of mysteries, including an encounter with the giant rat of Sumatra, international shenanigans involving a Russian anarchist, a Christmas tale set in Yorkshire which also features Mycroft, and my favourite concerning a fraudulent medium. Elements of cliché sneak in, but the plots are satisfying and retain a whiff of the Baker Street of old. Reynolds even manages some new quotable Holmesian sayings, my favourite being: “The telegram is, alas, rather a blunt instrument. It does not lend itself to delicacy of touch.” The illustrations by Chris Coady, wearing his Sidney Paget hat, are wonderfully atmospheric and look as though they have been copied from the pages of the *Strand*.

DSD

Watson's Afghan Adventure by Kieran McMullen. *MX Publishing*, 2011. 206pp. £9.99

The life and career of John H Watson until his first encounter with Sherlock Holmes — a highly original project with many fascinating elements. The bulk of the action takes place in Afghanistan where a treasure map eventually brings Watson to the battle of Maiwand. The author had a long career in the American army, and his strong interest in military matters infuses the text to such an extent that it interferes with the narrative flow. We are given detailed reports of battles, weapons and historical perspectives which would be better placed in a history book rather than an adventure novel. McMullen is a knowledgeable enthusiast rather than a writer and needed the guiding hand of a perceptive editor to help shape the story and eliminate the punctuation errors and clumsy phrasing that litter the pages — a shame because the basic idea is exciting, and, I believe, unique.

DSD

Sherlock Holmes' Tibetan Adventure by John F Rice. *Robert Hale*, 2010. 222 pp. £18.99

After Moriarty's death at the Reichenbach Falls, and Holmes' escape from Colonel Moran, Holmes contacts Mycroft to request help, which arrives in the form of a Norwegian passport, instructions to go to India and a sealed letter. In India one of Mycroft's government contacts tells him to make his way into Tibet. The story of his journey and the troubles he encounters along the way is very well told and gave me a vivid impression of how difficult and dangerous entry was to the country for foreigners. In Lhasa Holmes becomes involved in a mystery concerning the disappearance of the Dalai Lama's ceremonial robe and hat. But Rice is bold enough to deal with some very real issues. Part of Holmes' mission is to prevent the encroachment of the Chinese into Tibet — rather topical given the present Dalai Lama's exile from his native land. Mycroft's aim is to

prevent China using the country as a springboard into India and the British Empire.

Unfortunately we don't really get stuck into the main part of the plot until about two-thirds of the way through the book. Also, we have no need to work out or guess the identity of the principal enemy, and at the climax the enemies of Holmes are defeated with remarkable ease: he brings about their demise in less than a paragraph. Rice gives us a slightly more emotional, even romantic, Holmes than we are perhaps used to. His Holmes seems perfectly prepared and willing to marry the wife of his Tibetan host (in accordance with the polygamous traditions of Tibet) even though he admits he does not love her. Unlike his engagement to Milverton's maid Agatha, the potential marriage in this case has no purpose except an apparent desire not to cause offence.

In summary, this is a good story that quite neatly fills the gap between Reichenbach and Southern France, the geographical beginning and end of the hiatus, but it suffers from a hurried conclusion and the lack of mystery as to the enemy.

AD

Murder in the Vatican by Ann Margaret Lewis. *Gasogene Books*, 2010. 151 pp. \$18.95

Like many before her, Lewis has attempted to expand upon some hints dropped by Watson throughout the Canon, but she has chosen three tales on a similar theme. (Her book has the seal of approval of the Catholic Writers Guild — as a Catholic myself I've never heard of such a thing, and I wonder if I'm missing out.) This is not a tract: it depicts Holmes and Watson as agnostics, but it goes into matters of faith and details of Vatican life more deeply than Conan Doyle would have done. While the stories are detailed and feature many Canonical references without ever seeming artificial, each is hampered by credibility problems. *The Death of Cardinal Tosca* revolves around a method of murder which, while ingenious, is far from practical. In *The Vatican Cameos*, Holmes is despatched to Rome after the cameos, sent to Queen Victoria as a gift by Pope Leo XIII, are discovered to be missing. It beggars belief, however, that the thief would still be keeping the stolen items in the same hiding place after such a period. This story marks the first appearance here of G K Chesterton's Father Brown, who has a greater part to play in the last tale, *The Second Coptic Patriarch*. I have doubts as to whether it is possible to kill a man with a large book, although I would hesitate to take part in the experiments necessary to prove or disprove such a notion. These concerns aside, all three stories are extremely well-written and worth a place on a Sherlockian's bookshelf.

MJE

The Adventure of the Spanish Drums by Martin Daley. *The Irregular Special Press*, 2010. 175pp. £7.50

Holmes attempts to recover a set of drums stolen from the Border Regiment at Carlisle Castle. Save for preserving the reputation of the Regiment, this is not a case of the greatest moment; and to extend it out to 175 pages,

the author includes an unconnected sub-plot concerning a prison break. Daley has clearly done his homework, and wants the reader to know it: several pages are devoted to Watson's trip to the public library to engage in researches that have little bearing on the plot. In truth, there is only material here for a decent short story. Holmes displays little of his customary deductive skill, and none of his behaviour could be described as dynamic. It is regrettable that the author didn't take more care over the text: errors crop up every couple of pages, and it would seem that the book went to print without the benefit of the proof-reader's beady eye. However, there is at least one noteworthy and unique feature in this volume: thanks to clever computer work, drawings of Holmes and Watson have been added to photographs depicting 19th century Carlisle. It's a testament to the work of Sidney Paget that his artwork can be blended with the real world almost seamlessly.

MJE

Sherlock Holmes and Conan Doyle Locations; A Visitor's Guide by Allan Foster. *McFarland & Co.* 2011. x + 156 pp. £30.50

Alistair Duncan's book *Close to Holmes* was, I think, the first to give equal consideration to the London locations associated with the detective and to those frequented by his creator. Allan Foster spreads his net more widely, covering sites throughout Scotland and England. His book is clearly and conveniently laid out, starting in Conan Doyle's native city and ending in the city where he gave birth to Holmes. Naturally Edinburgh and London receive the most attention, and it's with the former that Mr Foster really scores, not only because he knows the place inside-out, but because we've long lacked a proper guide to the sites of Conan Doyle's youth. I wish I'd had this book when our Society visited Edinburgh in 2009! Allan Foster has done his homework, as his bibliography and his well-chosen quotations attest. The entries are engagingly written and nicely illustrated. For a 168-page paperback the book is very expensive, but otherwise, full marks!

Outrage: The Edalji Five and the Shadow of Sherlock Holmes by Roger Oldfield. *Vanguard Press.* 2010. 362 pp. £11.99 or €12.99

As a detective, Arthur Conan Doyle's most controversial case was that of George Edalji, convicted of brutally maiming horses in a Staffordshire village. The dispute continues because opinions are often polarised — some still think Edalji "guilty as hell", even though he was cleared on appeal. His father, the Vicar of Great Wyrley, was born a Parsee in Bombay, and his mother came of an English family, but what difficulties arose through Shapurji Edalji's long incumbency in the parish seem to have had less to do with racial differences than with his insistence on moral duty over compromise. Prejudice certainly played its part in George's case, however. The court that cleared him of the animal mutilations refused compensation on the grounds that he was guilty of writing a series of vile anonymous letters — an offence of which he had never been accused, never tried and certainly never convicted. The amateur investigators working for Conan Doyle were sometimes inept, but they were matched in that respect by the police, who often seemed to have just one object in view: to arrest and convict George Edalji. Roger Oldfield's book seems unlikely to be surpassed as a comprehensive, intelligent, balanced and intensely readable account.

Ronald Knox and Sherlock Holmes: The Origin of Sherlockian Studies edited, annotated and introduced by Michael J Crowe. *Gasogene Books.* 2011. 130 pp. \$32.95

In 1911, Ronald A Knox delivered to the Gryphon Club at Trinity College, Oxford a satirical paper, in which he applied nit-picking critical methods to the chronicles of Sherlock Holmes. Subsequently published under the title "Studies in the Literature of Sherlock Holmes", it's regarded by many as the cornerstone of our game. The humour is evident in the references to fictitious scholars named Sauwosch, Backnecke, Piff-Pouff and the like, and there's at least one glaring error, concerning Gilchrist's pencil, but the essay's lively humour doesn't detract from its importance. It's reprinted in this beautiful hardback book, along with "The Mathematics of Mrs Watson", which considers the dating of *The Sign of Four*, "The Mystery of Mycroft" which propounds a shocking theory about Holmes major, Knox's introduction to *The Best Detective Stories of 1928* — interesting and entertaining but only marginally Sherlockian — and "The Adventure of the First Class Carriage", an excellent pastiche, first published in *The Strand Magazine* in February 1947. Gasogene Books and Professor Crowe have done us a great service with this little book.

Sherlock Alive: Sherlockian Excerpts from VS's "Books Alive" Column in The Chicago Tribune 1942-1967 by Vincent Starrett. *The Battered Silicon Dispatch Box.* 2010. 504 pp. Cdn\$35.00

This thick, handsome paperback volume is the fruit of pensive nights and laborious days on the part of Karen Murdock, who extracted, edited and annotated the relevant pieces from twenty-five years of "Books Alive". We're familiar, or we should be, with Vincent Starrett's book *The Private Life of Sherlock Holmes* and his sonnet "221B". Another Holmesian book from that pen is an unexpected and wonderful treat. The hundreds of articles range from illuminating trivia to wise essays. As Susan Rice notes in her introduction, "This is a bountiful book, first because it gives us some Holmesian musings from the Vincentian pen that few of us now alive have read, but also because it places these jewels and shards into a fine setting." Highly recommended!

The Grand Game: A Celebration of Sherlockian Scholarship. Volume One: 1902-1959 edited by Laurie R King and Leslie S Klinger. *The Baker Street Irregulars.* 2011. xii + 438 pp. \$39.95 plus postage in USA, \$49.95 plus postage elsewhere

Also highly recommended! The last such comprehensive anthology, *The Baker Street Reader* in 1984, was only half the size of this one. Sixty-seven essays, mostly American, begin with Knox's "Studies in the Literature of Sherlock Holmes" and take in Early Criticism, Textual Criticism, Higher Criticism, Radical Criticism (Rex Stout's "Watson Was a Woman" and Julian Wolff's rebuttal), and *Midrash* — which, as Laurie King explains, is "a homilectic approach to Biblical interpretation". (This section includes AA Milne's "Watson Speaks Out" and James Montgomery's "Art in the Blood" *inter alia*. Don't worry. It does make sense.) Here are familiar names like Paul Gore-Booth, Dorothy L Sayers and Bernard Davies, alongside near-unknowns such as Pope R Hill, JW Sovine and Leon S Holstein, and a couple of people best known in other fields — Zazu Pitts and Franklin D Roosevelt. *The Grand Game* is a treasure house, full of good things.

Under the Darkling Sky: A Chrono-Geographic Odyssey through the Holmesian Canon by John E Weber. *The Battered Silicon Dispatch Box*. 2010. 392 pp. Cdn\$40.00

One of the most impressive essays in the *Journal* in recent years was “Time Lines and the Trust”, in which John Weber definitively identified the location and date of “The Musgrave Ritual”. In this admirable book he applies the same meticulous research, rigorous logic, sound common sense — and literate wit — to the entire Canon. Other scholars have specialised in Holmesian chronology or, more rarely, topography. Mr Weber is the first, I think, to give equal emphasis to both time and place in all sixty stories. Not all his findings are original: he is conversant with every important commentary, and is happy to accept the conclusion of a predecessor if it seems right. Moreover he explains why he agrees or disagrees, and his standards are high. If an identification is uncertain, he says so. The past six months have seen a remarkable flowering of really important Holmesian scholarship. *Under the Darkling Sky* is up there with the best.

Sherlockian Heresies by Léo Sauvage. *Gasogene*. 2010. xv + 233 pp. \$19.95

Léo Sauvage contributed four pieces to *The Baker Street Journal* and received the investiture of “Victor Savage”, BSI in 1960, but his *magnum opus* was unfinished at the time of his death in 1988. Julie McKuras and Susan Vizoskie, with assistance from Sauvage’s children, have edited, annotated and introduced the eight extant chapters, adding three brief pieces about the Sherlockian phenomenon. Sauvage refused to regard the Holmes stories as sacred, preferring the term “the Conan” to “the Canon”, but his criticisms are not mere carping. He condemns Holmes’s cavalier attitude to security at 221B, for instance, and the fact that the detective persistently endangers his associates. He devotes a chapter to demolishing the misconception that the address 221B indicates just one floor within Mrs Hudson’s house. He exposes numerous flaws in Holmes’s methods and in Watson’s reports, and when it comes to “The Final Problem” and “The Empty House” he is scathing. This sounds completely negative, but it isn’t, because Sauvage writes superbly and with obvious deep affection. We learn too, in the editors’ introduction, that the man himself was as remarkable as his subject. *Sherlockian Heresies*, incomplete as it is, is one of the great Holmesian commentaries.

Italy and Sherlock Holmes edited by Enrico Solito and Gianluca Salvatori. *The Baker Street Irregulars*. 2010. ix + 208 pp. \$39.95

This is the fourth book in the BSI’s International Series, which aims “to bring the finest foreign language Sherlockian scholarship to English-speaking readers”. The brief introduction is complemented by “Notes on the Italian Sherlockscape”, a revised version of a paper presented at the 2009 conference *Arthur Conan Doyle and Sherlock Holmes: Their Cultural Afterlives*. Italian Sherlockians have had little impact on scholarship in the English-speaking world — a pity, because the essays in this collection show that they have a good deal to offer. I’m particularly impressed by Enrico Solito’s tracing of Holmes’s route from Meiringen to Florence, by Luca Martinelli’s identification of Cardinal Tosca, by Roberto Pirani’s examination of the Naval Treaty, by Ivo Lombardo’s piece on fingerprints, and by Mr Solito’s identification of “Carina”. My one reservation is that the

translation often reads rather clumsily, but that, after all, is a minor matter.

Bohemian Souls: A Facsimile of the Original Manuscript of “A Scandal in Bohemia” edited and introduced by Otto Penzler. *The Baker Street Irregulars*. 2010. xiii + 199 pp. \$35.00

Not all of the original Sherlock Holmes manuscripts still exist, of course, and most of us will never get the chance to examine the survivors in person, so publications like this are especially important. Randall Stock describes the MS, which belongs to the University of Texas at Austin, and recounts the history of this, the story that really brought Holmes to the attention of the public. Philip Bergem has transcribed and annotated the manuscript, originally entitled “A Scandal of Bohemia”. Only twenty-three of the thirty pages are in Conan Doyle’s hand; the writer of the other seven is still unidentified. The story poses several problems, such as doubtful dates, an apparently illegal wedding, and the very nature of Irene Adler as a person and as a singer. Essays by John Linsenmeyer, Andrew Jay Peck, Ray Betzner, Curtis Armstrong, Michael H Kean, Julia Rosenblatt and Donald Pollock tackle these and other enigmas, and Rikki Niehaus writes briefly about the development of her cover painting. Long may the BSI Manuscript Series continue!

Victorian Holmes by Michael Duke. *The Battered Silicon Dispatch Box*. 2011. 234 pp. Cdn\$24.00

The title is a nice pun, as Dr Duke heads the Sherlock Holmes Society of Melbourne in Victoria, Australia. He’s also a long-standing member of our Society and of others world-wide. This book, which boasts a superb cover painting by Tom Roberts, brings together fifty articles from various journals. None, I think, runs to more than eleven pages, and some are much shorter, but often an important point can be most effectively made with concision as well as precision. If the book has a theme, says Dr Duke, “it may be that of considering the unconsidered people in the stories”. Some, naturally, are Australian, but, for instance, Tonga, Beryl Stapleton, Mrs Godfrey Staunton, Steve Dixie and Mrs Josiah Amberley are all appraised, intelligently and sympathetically. The essays also cover topics such as Gypsies, first aid, the Dacre Hotel, leprosy and chess (I remain unconvinced that Holmes “distrusted chess players”). *Victorian Holmes* is literate, readable and full of stimulating insights.

William Gillette: America’s Sherlock Holmes by Henry Zecher. *Xlibris*. 2011. 733 pp. £23.00 hardback; £14.00 paperback

Gillette’s last appearance as Sherlock Holmes was in 1932, and the silent film of his play is long since lost — as are his two performances on American radio. Only an amateur recording of one short scene survives. Yet his influence on the accepted image persists. Helen Hayes spoke for many when she said, “William Gillette is the only real Sherlock Holmes for me, or for anyone else who ever saw him.” But to associate him with just the one play and the one character is, as Mr Zecher says, to ignore “one of the modern theatre’s pioneering dramatists, one of its most majestic actors and one of its most fascinating personalities.” His plays introduced “realism of action”, eliminating excess dialogue in favour of action, and his

theory of “the illusion of the first time” led to a fundamental change in acting styles. Gillette was, says Mr Zecher, “a biographer’s nightmare”. Fourteen years’ research has uncovered no scandal, no sensation — just the fascinating life of a brilliant, chivalrous, witty gentleman who was also a very important dramatist and a great actor. The book was worth waiting for!

Oscar Wilde and the Nest of Vipers by Gyles Brandreth. *John Murray*. 2010. 448 pp. £17.99.

In 1893, at a glamorous *soirée* given for the Prince of Wales, Wilde is fascinated by an elegant young stranger, Rex LaSalle, who claims to be a vampire. The next morning he learns that his beautiful hostess, the Duchess of Albemarle, has been found dead, her body beaten and scratched, and with two small but deep incisions in her neck. The Prince commissions him, unofficially, to investigate the death, which he does, with the rather reluctant help of his friends Arthur Conan Doyle and Robert Sherard. The *dramatis personae* also include Bram Stoker (naturally), Antonin Dvorak, Lillie Langtry, Jane Avril, and an ominous police detective named Hugh Boone. Oscar is on sunny form, but the clouds are gathering. Like its central character, *Oscar Wilde and the Nest of Vipers* is both witty and profound. It’s also dazzlingly clever.

The Dragnet Solar Pons et al. by August W Derleth. *The Battered Silicon Dispatch Box*. 2011. 339 pp. Cdn\$25.00

Solar Pons knows that he is not Sherlock Holmes, and he knows that we know it, but his exploits capture the essence of Holmes better than almost any direct pastiche. When *The Final Adventures of Solar Pons* appeared in 1998 it seemed that the Canon of “the Sherlock Holmes of Praed Street” was complete — and there are actually no new Pons stories here. Instead we have the texts of the first five tales as they appeared in *The Dragnet Magazine* or *Detective Trails* in 1929-30, before the market collapsed in the aftermath of the Wall Street crash, plus original versions of six more that August Derleth had written in that same period. All were eventually revised for inclusion in one or another of the series that began publication in 1945 with *In Re: Sherlock Holmes – The Adventures of Solar Pons*. The texts in the present book enable us to appreciate how the author and his characters developed and matured, and we are helped greatly by Mark Wardecker’s bountiful and perceptive annotations. (Early magazine publication was always attributed to “August W Derleth”.)

Young Sherlock Holmes: Red Leech by Andrew Lane. *Macmillan Children’s Books*. 2010. 352 pp. £6.99)

As this second adventure opens, the American bounty-hunter Amyus Crowe is still teaching fourteen-year-old Sherlock how to look and how to reason, but Crowe has other matters on his mind. Only three years ago Abraham Lincoln was murdered by John Wilkes Booth, who was himself shot dead twelve days later by Union soldiers. But Crowe fears that the assassin actually escaped and is now at the heart of a plot to destroy the United States government. Sherlock Holmes, Amyus Crowe, his daughter Virginia, and Sherlock’s friend Matty Arnatt pursue the conspirators to New York, where they uncover even worse things. *Young Sherlock Holmes: Red Leech* is an intelligent and desperately exciting read.

The Remains of Sherlock Holmes by Paul W Nash. *The Strawberry Press*. 2010. 248 pp. £12.00.

The Watson/Conan Doyle style is deceptively hard to reproduce well, but Paul W Nash does it with apparent ease. “There is but one step from the grotesque to the horrible,” said Holmes, and here we find an assassin nearly ten feet tall, a ghostly jewel-thief, murder committed by a monkey... “The Mystery of Dorian Gray” stands out as a clever attempt to provide a rational explanation for the events of Oscar Wilde’s novel, though I prefer the tragedy of “The Silent Valet” and the ingenious enigma of “The Camden Rose”, which seems to echo another tragedy, that of “The Musgrave Ritual”. “The Remains of Sherlock Holmes” is the detective’s final case; he solves a tantalising puzzle, but the outcome is not a happy one, especially for Dr Watson. The stories are gratifyingly well-written, the proof-reading is good, and the book is handsome.

In brief

“Sometime during the evening of Monday, 13 March 1911, a 23-year-old Probationary Fellow of Trinity College, Oxford, sat down in his room and began reading a paper to 16 members of that college’s literary club...” *The Baker Street Journal Christmas Annual 2010* is *From Piff-Pouff to Backnecke: Ronald Knox and 100 Years of “Studies in the Literature of Sherlock Holmes”* by Nicholas Utechin (The Baker Street Irregulars; US \$11.00 postpaid; elsewhere \$12.00 postpaid). Participants in our Oxford weekend would do well to read Nick Utechin’s little book before then — but note that more information came to light while it was being printed, so there was a follow-up in the Spring 2011 *Baker Street Journal*!

In *Surrey with a Fringe: The Handbook of the Surrey & Hampshire Weekend, 10 to 12 September 2010* (edited by Jonathan McCafferty: The Sherlock Holmes Society of London; £10.00) David Jones tells how we investigated “The Solitary Cyclist” and “The Crooked Man”, Catherine Cooke researches “Solitary Locations”, and Anna Smyth writes about Teddy the mongoose. Here are articles on the artist G F Watts, Guildford Workhouse, Brooklands, the old Imperial Theatre, and Freeman Wills Crofts; classic essays by Bernard Davies and Geoffrey Stavert; an amusing contrast between the issues of *The Strand Magazine* and *Collier’s* that carried the first appearance of “The Solitary Cyclist”; and a typically dazzling poem by Auberon Redfean. It’s very nicely produced, with splendid illustrations, though I can’t help wishing that most of the photos were larger.

I once said, “David Hammer is the nearest thing we have today to Michael Harrison: polymathic, literate, witty, opinionated and sometimes careless. We should treasure him.” *Realms of Conjecture* (The Battered Silicon Dispatch Box; 2011; Cdn\$20.00) is his final Holmesian book, but in truth there’s little about Holmes in its 146 pages. There are anecdotes and reminiscences, accounts of psychic experiences, memories of Michael Harrison, some light verse, a thought-provoking mystery novella... What lingers, though, is the impression of bitterness at the perceived sorry condition of the BSI, and “sadness at the state of Sherlockian scholarship” — and that latter complaint, at least, seems to me simply perverse.

The Crack in the Lens by Darlene A Cypser (Foolscap & Quill; \$14.95) tells an engrossing story of the

boy Holmes, at the same time exploring the reasons why the man Holmes turned out as he did — a brilliant, unconventional, and apparently emotionless righter of wrongs. Following William Baring-Gould's imaginative "biography", Sherlock and his brothers Mycroft and Sherrinford are the sons of Siger Holmes of Mycroft Manor in Yorkshire, where Sherlock is educated by a private tutor, Professor James Moriarty. It's a colourful and appropriately atmospheric basis for a tale that seems to owe as much to Emily Brontë as to Arthur Conan Doyle. Ms Cypser plans a further three novels, taking Holmes through his years at university and his career as an actor to his early days as a consulting detective.

Much of the entertainment in *A Study in Crimson: The Further Adventures of Mrs Watson and Mrs St Clair, Co-Founders of the Watson-Fanshaw Detective Agency* by Molly Carr (MX Publishing; £12.99) comes from the clashes between Mary Watson and her cross-dressing partner. Each is a woman with a past, but that past remains largely untold. Mary, Emily and the ever-obliging John Watson (formerly Ormond Sacker) head for New York to investigate the Long Island Cave mystery, and immediately fall foul of the Red Circle when a trusted ally turns out to be no such thing. The gang's plan is to groom Watson to be the next Moriarty — and that's just the beginning. Add the Vatican Cameos, Hercule Poirot's regrettably criminal father and brother, Wilson the notorious canary trainer, A J Raffles, and the old Russian Woman, and you get a *very* rich mixture. As the theatre critics used to say, this one will run and run.

Recorded sound

Back in the late 1990s, Penguin Audiobooks issued six sets of excellent readings from the Canon by our own honorary member Douglas Wilmer, the producers being our former Chairmen, Philip Porter and Richard Lancelyn Green. Four recordings were never released by Penguin, but that curious omission has now been rectified by Porter Press International (Hilltop Farm, Knighton-on-Teme, Tenbury

Wells, Worcs. WR15 8LY; sales@porterpress.co.uk). *The Memoirs of Sherlock Holmes*, comprising "Silver Blaze", "The Cardboard Box", "The Yellow Face" and "The Stockbroker's Clerk", is available as four CDs (£9.99 plus postage) or as audio download (£7.99) from www.porterpress.co.uk. Performance and production are, of course, first-rate.

In 1971 another great Holmes, Peter Cushing, recorded an unabridged reading of *The Return of Sherlock Holmes*, though few of us will have heard it. It was made for the Royal National Institute for the Blind and for forty years was available only to blind and partially sighted people in the UK. Now Cosmic Hobo has released Volume One on CD, the first of three, with liner notes by David Stuart Davies, at £19.99. The audio format enabled Peter Cushing, as it did Douglas Wilmer, to display a remarkable range of voices and accents that he rarely had the chance to use on film or television.

AudioGO, formerly BBC Audiobooks, has released *The Rediscovered Railway Mysteries and other stories* by John Taylor, read by Benedict Cumberbatch (two CDs; £12.99). "The Conundrum of Coach 13" concerns the apparently impossible theft of gold bullion from a secure train, and the mystery of "The 10.59 Assassin" is solved by an experiment with ballistics. The other cases, "An Inscrutable Masquerade" and "The Trinity Vicarage Larceny", are just as baffling and as satisfactorily explained. Mr Taylor has a sure touch with the Watson style, and Mr Cumberbatch is a splendid reader.

Also from AudioGO comes a splendid boxed set: *The Memoirs of Sherlock Holmes* read by Derek Jacobi (£20.40) — eleven stories on eight CDs, with a running time of just over nine hours. Sir Derek subtly but unmistakably defines each character, and his timing is superb. This production exudes class. Do I really need to say any more?

The Sherlock Holmes Journal, Summer 2011
The Sherlock Holmes Society of London
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