

“I AM AN OMNIVOROUS READER”

Book reviews by DAN ANDRIACCO, LISA BURSCHEIDT, ALISTAIR DUNCAN, MARK MOWER, SARAH OBERMULLER-BENNETT, JOHN SHEPPARD, JEAN UPTON and ROGER JOHNSON

The Life and Death of Sherlock Holmes: Master Detective, Myth and Media Star by Mattias Boström. *Head of Zeus*, 2017. 597pp. £25.00 (hbk)

This is the story of the birth and enduring life of the character whose name means “detective” in almost every language. And what a fascinating story it is! “Reads like fiction” is a cliché that’s hard to avoid in describing this engrossing narrative full of quirky characters and twists and turns of plot. The 497 pages of text, followed by 100 pages of notes and index, fly by.

The book begins in 1878 with Arthur Conan Doyle. It ends in 2015 with the rediscovery of the lost William Gillette film of his classic melodrama *Sherlock Holmes*. The closing lines remind us, however, that the story will go on. With so much ground to cover — literal ground across many countries as well as metaphorical ground across more than a century — even such a hefty tome as this couldn’t give detailed attention to everything. So Boström had to be selective about what to sketch lightly and what to put under the magnifying lens. This he did almost perfectly. Most of the 111 brief chapters, greatly expanded from the original Swedish version, involve material that I’m somewhat familiar with after more than five decades of Sherlockian reading. And yet, almost every chapter also contains material that was new and interesting to me. The book is neither too elementary nor too advanced for anyone interested in the Holmes phenomenon.

It would be hard for me to pick a favourite part, but the account of how the first female members were added to the ranks of the Baker Street Irregulars is among the most dramatic and moving. And the explanation of the Sherlock Holmes copyright ownership, a complex thread running through multiple chapters and many years, was most enlightening. I first interviewed Mattias Boström about this book just over four years ago. I’m delighted to be able to finally read it in English and learn that it’s just as good as I expected. If I had a much smaller Sherlockian library, this book would still be an indispensable part of it.

DA

The Adventure of the Creeping Man by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. Facsimile edition with an Introduction and annotated transcript by Neil McCaw. *University of Winchester* (supported by Portsmouth City Council), 2017. 132pp. £35.00 (hbk)

Facsimile editions of the Sherlock Holmes stories are to be treasured, and this edition of “The Adventure of the Creeping Man” shines as brightly as any. The rather eccentric story of Professor Presbury is greatly

enhanced by the very impressive introduction and annotated transcription by Neil McCaw, Professor of Victorian Literature at the University of Winchester. This is a splendid work of scholarship and essential reading for all Sherlockian students and collectors.

Professor McCaw’s introduction provides valuable context for the story and a brief history of Conan Doyle’s time in Southsea. He examines the rather negative reputation which the story has gained over the years. Consideration is given to Conan Doyle’s writing in his later career, the impact of World War One on the author’s view of the world and the claim that this story is more science fiction than detective fiction. Professor McCaw rejects the view that the writing is weak. For example, Professor Presbury’s unorthodox search for eternal youth has much in common with present day procedures.

The original *Strand Magazine* story is included with the facsimile of the manuscript and Professor McCaw’s scholarship. The manuscript is part of Richard Lancelyn Green’s bequest to the City of Portsmouth, and our late Chairman, I am certain, would have been so pleased to see it published alongside Sherlockian scholarship of the highest quality. This book is the perfect way to celebrate the ninetieth anniversary of the publication of *The Casebook of Sherlock Holmes*.

The frontispiece of this beautifully presented volume advises: “Read at once if convenient- if inconvenient read all the same.” The reader will be thoroughly absorbed!

The book is available from www.visitportsmouth.co.uk/conandoyle/TheCreepingMan.

DJ

The Man Who Would be Sherlock by Christopher Sandford. *The History Press*. 2017. 320pp. £20.00 (hbk)

This book concerns Conan Doyle’s excursions into the world of true crime. Inevitably, it predominantly dwells on the cases of George Edalji and Oscar Slater, which account for over 50% of the book. They are also the events that have caused a lot of other authors to put pen to paper (including yours truly). Beyond these, the Chicken Run murder also features as do some crimes that Conan Doyle encountered when travelling outside the UK on his Spiritualist lecture tours.

Perhaps surprisingly, a considerable amount of time is spent on Conan Doyle’s Spiritualist work and his run-ins with Harry Houdini. Sandford has covered this ground before, in greater detail, so some of his work in this area will be familiar if you’ve read his earlier book. However, here this is used as background material in

connection with Conan Doyle's ideas about the use of mediums in the solving of crime. Mention of the Cottingley Fairies is harder to justify but I guess it is very easy to talk about how credulous Conan Doyle was in such matters if you lean on the fairies as an example. As a means to this end their inclusion makes sense.

If you are a student of Conan Doyle's life you're likely to have read a good deal about Edalji and Slater so you may be wondering what you'll get out of Sandford's book. Therein lies my problem. I thoroughly enjoyed the book but I'm not sure it will add a huge amount to what is already known. I'm still very glad I have it, and if you have no books in this area — go for it.

AD

Sherlock Holmes from Screen to Stage: Post-millennial Adaptations in British Theatre by Benjamin Poore. *Palgrave Macmillan*, 2017. 268pp. £66.99 (hbk)

The Sherlock Holmes phenomenon is now the subject of serious academic commentary, some of it dull or pretentious. Fortunately, Benjamin Poore writes to be read; he's genuinely enthusiastic about his subject and he communicates that enthusiasm.

Traditionally the play comes before the film. True, Basil Rathbone and Jeremy Brett transferred their own portrayals of the detective from screen to stage, with sharply contrasting results, but that's not Dr Poore's theme. He has attended as many Holmes plays as possible since 2000, read all the scripts he could access, and watched all the available film and TV adaptations. Consequently he can indicate how the writers of various plays have adopted aspects of, say, *Sherlock* or the Guy Ritchie blockbusters, and what use they've made of them. Unlike a film, though, a play can directly involve the audience. Usually that's a comedy technique (*Move Over Moriarty*, *Potted Sherlock*) but Clive Francis and Simon Williams made it a feature of their thrilling versions of *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, and others have followed suit. One chapter examines the plays in which audience interaction is a real comic or dramatic game. Another looks at *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, the most frequently and variably adapted story, but one of the least obviously suitable for the stage.

The Holmesian authorities cited include Mattias Boström, Alistair Duncan, Zach Dundas, Lyndsay Faye, and even Jean Upton and me. Richard Lancelyn Green's *The Uncollected Sherlock Holmes* is carelessly attributed to his father Roger, but that's a small error in an important and very interesting book.

RJ

A Singular Countryside edited by Nicholas Utechin, David Jones and Heather Owen. *The Sherlock Holmes Society of London*, 2017. 40pp. £7.50 (pbk)

This slim, handsome volume has large pages, to accommodate the splendidly reproduced illustrations — most notably the 1984 photograph of twenty-five

people forming a message in Dancing Men code. Robert Graham recalls how that remarkable icon came about. (A copy is displayed at The Hill House in Happisburgh, where Conan Doyle's story was conceived.) Margaret Bird tells the story behind the first, ground-breaking expedition to "The Country of the Broads", and explains why Horsey Hall is the real "Donnithorpe". There follow extracts from some of the letters exchanged in 1983 between Mrs Bird and Thomas Cubitt, who welcomed the Society at Honing Hall the next year. Shirley Purves goes back further, to her researches in 1963 and her correspondence with Thomas's uncle Reginald Cubitt. Randall Stock looks at the inspired phrase "Dancing Men" (see also his essay in *Dancing to Death: A Facsimile of the Original Manuscript of "The Dancing Men" by Arthur Conan Doyle*, published by the BSI). Nick Utechin considers Holmes's friend Victor Trevor, an unfairly overlooked character. And there's more! I was there in 1984 and in 2017, and I'm keen to explore more of Holmes's Norfolk.

RJ

The Mile End Murder: The Case Conan Doyle Couldn't Solve by Sinclair McKay. *Aurum Press*, 2017. 320pp. £20.00 (hbk)

In 1901 *The Strand Magazine* published "The Debatable Case of Mrs Emsley", in which Arthur Conan Doyle studied the murder in 1860 of an elderly and wealthy widow, unforgiving and "an object of mingled dislike and curiosity among the inhabitants of Grove Road, Stepney". When Mary Emsley was found beaten to death in her own house there was no lack of suspects, but there were problems. Who could have gained access to the house without apparent disturbance, and got away without being seen? Eventually James Mullins, one of her own employees, was convicted and hanged. Conan Doyle wrote: "After reading the evidence one is left with an irresistible impression that, though Mullins was very likely guilty, the police were never able to establish the details of the crime, and that there was a risk of a miscarriage of justice when the death sentence was carried out." Sinclair McKay has examined the case in detail, and has named a more convincing suspect. Perhaps more important is that the people involved, even mean old Mrs Emsley, are rounded personalities, the East End of 150 years ago becomes almost tangible, and the grim story is compellingly told.

RJ

The Story of Classic Crime in 100 Books by Martin Edwards. *British Library*. 2017. 288pp. £25.00 (hbk)

Martin Edwards unearths the fascinating story behind crime fiction. Starting with *The Hound of the Baskervilles* (1902), he makes his way through the first half of the 20th century, as far as Julian Symons' *The 31st of February* (1950). He hasn't attempted to choose the 'best' books, but those that best reflect the

development of the genre. There are twenty-four thematic chapters, illustrating the chronological evolution of crime fiction. Many familiar authors are highlighted, but the more obscure and lesser-known are not neglected. Each book has an introduction, including information about the author, the plot and its theme. As one would expect from the British Library, the production quality is high. The dust jacket is a colourful, attractive illustration in the classic 1920s/30s style so beloved of railway posters of that era. Additionally, there are sixteen pages of beautifully reproduced colour illustrations of book jackets and maps relating to some of the stories. This is an enjoyable book to dip in and out of at one's leisure, and would be a recommended choice of gift for fans of this genre.

JU

Femme Friday: Celebrating the Women in the Sherlock Holmes Canon and Transformative Works by The Baker Street Babes and Friends, edited by Maria Fleischhack. *Lulu.com*, 2017. 116pp. £9.69 (pbk).

Femme Friday is a timely and welcome new collection of essays, about women, by women — and, as the subtitle suggests, the subjects range beyond the ladies and “young persons” of the canon. *Femme Friday* began as a weekly post on the Tumblr page of the Baker Street Babes' website, where, if I've counted right, twenty of the thirty-three essays first appeared. Lyndsay Faye says in her introduction: “At first we threw our virtual parades for classic characters from the Sir Arthur Conan Doyle Adventures, but soon enough we were extolling the virtues of Molly the lab technician and Olivia the mouse.” The essays are varied in tone and style, but they're all intelligent, perceptive and entertaining.

RJ

Memoirs from Mrs Hudson's Kitchen by Wendy Heyman-Marsaw. *MX Publishing*, 2017. 130pp. £7.99 (pbk).

“From Mrs Hudson's Kitchen” has been a popular feature in *Canadian Holmes*, the journal of the Bootmakers of Toronto, since 2011. The chapters in this attractive, nicely illustrated book are expanded and rearranged from those columns. Mrs H's narrative, friendly and level-headed, gives a good picture of what life must have been like for an intelligent lower-middle class landlady catering for an eccentric genius in late Victorian London. She tells us what food and drink she served her lodgers, and what would have been available to them on railway journeys and at hotels or inns. And there are nearly sixty recipes, all authentic and practical. It's a very nice new volume for the Holmesian cook's bookshelf — though perhaps we should avoid the tobacco cookies.

RJ

A Reader's Companion to Sherlock Holmes by Father J Michael Venditti. *Dorrance Publishing Co.* 2017. 150pp. £16.77. (hbk)

Father Venditti, who serves in New Jersey, managed to find time in his busy schedule to write this *Reader's Companion to Sherlock Holmes*. Long-time Sherlockians are unlikely to find anything new — but this is fine, because Father Venditti's intention is for the book to serve as encouragement to new readers. He provides a concise biography of Conan Doyle as well as commentary on each story. As an American reader has said, the book is better than Cliff's Notes and “infinitely more fun to read”.

JU

Creating Sherlock Holmes: The Remarkable Story of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle by Charlotte Montague. *Chartwell Books*, 2017. 192pp. £9.99 from Amazon.co.uk (hbk)

This is a *very* good-looking book, profusely illustrated and arranged to cover the essentials of Conan Doyle's life and career, and the development of Sherlock Holmes, from 1887 to 2017. However... There are several factual errors, though none of grave importance (Joseph, Carle and Horace Vernet were not brothers but father, son and grandson; it was Stevenson, not Kipling, who recognised Joseph Bell in the protagonist of *A Study in Scarlet*...). More troubling is that every story in the canon is summarised at great length and in great detail: what should have been an enticing primer is spoilt by the fact that the entire plot of each tale is given away. Still, Ms Montague's book could be an attractive gift for a younger fan who has not yet read any biography of Arthur Conan Doyle.

RJ

The MX Book of New Sherlock Holmes Stories, Part VII: Eliminate the Impossible 1880-1891 edited by David Marcum. *MX Publishing*, 2017. 488pp. **and Part VIII: Eliminate the Impossible 1892-1905**. 596pp. Each £17.99 (pbk), £28.99 (hbk)

Between them these two volumes contain forty-eight new stories, all as faithful as possible to the Watsonian style and traditional form. The special request this time was to honour Holmes's clearly stated disbelief in the supernatural, and to devise puzzles that appear to be impossible but aren't. The contributors include Mark Mower, Daniel D Victor, James Lovegrove, Hugh Ashton, John Hall, Jayantika Ganguly, Jim French, Tim Symonds, Andrew Lane, Paul D Gilbert, Daniel McGachey, Tracy Revels... And Michael Cox, father of the classic Granada TV series, provides a foreword. An impressive list, but none of them will make a penny out of it, as all royalties go towards the preservation of Undershaw, Conan Doyle's former Surrey home, which now houses Stepping Stones School.

RJ

Grandville Force Majeure: A Detective-Inspector LeBrock of Scotland Yard Scientific-Romance Thriller by Bryan Talbot. *Jonathan Cape*, 2017. £18.99 (hbk)

This is the fifth and last of Bryan Talbot's imaginative and beautifully illustrated *Grandville* graphic novels, featuring the heroic badger, Archie LeBrock. In this Steampunk world England has recently gained independence from France, having been conquered by Napoleon two hundred years ago along with the rest of Europe. All the people are animals, French is the universal language, and the Imperial City of Paris is nicknamed *Grandville* (a tribute to the 19th century French caricaturist, JJ Grandville, whose depictions of people as hominid animals helped inspire surrealism). LeBrock is in more danger than ever before, on the run from the criminal mastermind Tiberius Koenig, who wants revenge, and from his own colleagues, who want him tried for murder. His plucky fiancée Billie is abducted. Then LeBrock is killed... But it's not too much of a spoiler to reveal that he isn't actually dead. Archie LeBrock has always had more than a touch of Sherlock Holmes. Now we meet his Holmesian mentor, ex-DCI Stamford Hawksmoor — who is, naturally, a hawk. It's a genuinely thrilling drama, peppered with verbal and pictorial wit, and there's an appropriate superscription, old Mr Sherman's warning: "Keep clear of the badger, for he bites."

RJ

The Consulting Detective Trilogy Part II: On Stage by Darlene A Cypser. *Foolscap & Quill*, 2017. 283 pp. £11.41 (pbk)

Cypser continues her series in the life of the younger Sherlock Holmes, adding flesh to William S. Baring-Gould's biography where the fledgling consulting detective tours America as an actor in the late 1870s. Personally, I find myself at odds with many of Baring-Gould's theories about Holmes's early life, which made me wonder if I was going to like this book. I was pleasantly surprised by what I found, so much so, that I have added the first part of the trilogy to my reading list. Cypser produces a convincing and intriguing plot to explain how Holmes's stage career might have come about, skilfully weaving in details from the canon, whilst introducing new characters and inventively expanding on the background of others. That the author has done considerable historical research is evident: from the London stage to the plains of America, the scenes are set in rich and vivid detail. Several cases take place along the way, a few soon-to-be famous faces appear and moments of suspense and rescue are balanced with quieter moments of introspection, making for an enjoyable read. The final part of the trilogy, focusing on the Montague Street years is promised to be coming soon.

SO-B

The Criminal Mastermind of Baker Street by Rob Nunn. *MX Publishing*. 2017. 328pp. £10.99. (pbk)

If, like me, you have a passion for the traditional pastiche, you might approach this book with some initial apprehension, as you read on the back cover that the plot "...explores Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's original sixty stories through the lens of Sherlock Holmes the criminal instead of Sherlock Holmes the detective." However, let me reassure you from the outset — this is a fabulous read. Starting with their coming together in January 1881, the book takes us on a fast-paced chronological canter through the Canon and the highs and lows of Holmes's criminal career, aided by the very capable Dr Watson. There is great attention to detail throughout and some really clever nods to many of the untold cases we see tantalising glimpses of in the original tales. The familiar and heartening bond between our heroes is well observed and the storytelling from a third person perspective feels wholly appropriate.

This is a well written and clever book. But it is also a ripping yarn with lots of humour. I would like to see a follow up, but I guess that might be difficult as the author has refashioned the entire Canon in this one text. Perhaps a pre-Watson outing might be feasible? Let's hope so.

MM

Queen City Corpse by Dan Andriacco. *MX Publishing*, 2017. 240pp. £9.99 (pbk)

When QueenCon, a mystery convention named after the great Ellery Queen, comes to Cincinnati (Longfellow's "Queen City of the West") Sebastian McCabe BSI, Jeff Cody, and Jeff's wife Lynda make the short journey from Erin, Ohio. Sebastian is a successful crime writer, magician and amateur sleuth, and Jeff still has hopes of publishing his own detective novels. Lynda wants to meet her favourite author, Rex Carter, before he succumbs to terminal cancer. On the first night Jeff overhears some ominous whispered words: "*Where do we hide the body?*" though no one's there to say them. Inevitably (this is a McCabe and Cody story) murder ensues — but why would anyone kill a man who'll soon be dead anyway? This is the seventh novel in a deliciously literate, witty series, with ingenious plots and engaging characters. Highly recommended!

RJ

Sherlock Holmes: The Baker Street Case-Files by Mark Mower. *MX Publishing*, 2017. 182pp. £8.99 (pbk)

Mower's name should be familiar as a regular contributor to the MX Anthologies of New Sherlock Holmes stories. This handsome book of seven adventures gathers together five of his tales from those volumes with two new stories. Beginning with a case from the pre-Watson years, these stories span Holmes's career, ending with a mystery that takes place in the wake of the First World War. Mower has an engaging,

readable style, carrying the reader along with convincing dialogue whilst combining a good eye for period detail with well-paced plotting. My favourite story has to be “The Manila Envelope”, which showcases Holmes’s methods in a virtuoso display of observation and deduction. Overall, an impressive collection.

SO-B

Practical Handbook of Bee Culture by Paul Ashton. *MX Publishing, 2017. 274pp. £24.99 (hbk); £11.99 (pbk)*

This book purports to be a journal that Holmes kept from 1904, when he retired from active service, until “His Last Bow” forced him out of retirement in 1912 for one last hurrah. There are two short stories, which detail investigations Holmes carried out while he was officially in retirement, and some shorter conversations about his involvement in real-world major crimes of the era. Occasionally, figures of the time make appearances. But mostly, it is composed of fictional diary entries that detail Holmes’s life and beekeeping activities in excruciating detail. I didn’t have the stamina for pages upon pages of technical jargon, and found myself flicking forward a lot to get to an interesting narrative bit.

It’s obvious that a tremendous amount of work went into the book, that dates have carefully been worked out and photos selected for effect. But I often felt it was written as an inside joke for a group of people that I do not belong to. I enjoy it when real people have cameos in Holmes pastiches, but this diary’s name-dropping for the sake of it puzzles me, because apart from a few exceptions none of it ever “pays off” in a narrative sense. I liked the narrative bits well enough, but on the whole it wasn’t for me.

LB

Sherlock Holmes: Cry of the Innocents by Cavan Scott. *Titan Books. 2017, 358pp. £7.99. (pbk)*

This is Cavan Scott’s second Sherlock Holmes pastiche, a worthy successor to his first. *Sherlock Holmes: Cry of the Innocents* is historically well grounded, with good period detail. Among the ingredients are the secret lodge of a secretive League, Orientalism, plans for human sacrifice, and much, much more. It is an altogether heady brew of corruption, intrigue, murder and mayhem; with Holmes and Watson in and out of disguises as never before! It’s told in no fewer than fifty-four short and breathless chapters, and at a pace that makes it un-put-down-able. Fortunately, there are sufficient Canonical references to keep us Holmesians happy, and just enough humour to be a counterpoint to the violence and mysteries. Some might think it a cocktail with too many ingredients, but it’s a rollicking good tale, and I heartily recommend it.

JS

In brief

Back in 2012 I welcomed *Sherlock Holmes on the Air*, a selection from the many radio scripts written by our own Matthew J Elliott for the Seattle-based Imagination Theatre. Last year, with no fanfare, Caliber Comics published *Sherlock Holmes Is on the Air!* (£12.99 from Amazon.co.uk), containing two more of Matthew’s scripts with two by Steven Philip Jones, and a foreword by Lawrence Albert, who has played Watson throughout the series. Despite the confusingly similar title, this is definitely for me, and I’m looking forward to *Imagination Theatre’s Sherlock Holmes*, due shortly from MX and featuring fourteen scripts by Messrs Elliott, Jones, Albert and others.

Last year’s Richard Lancelyn Green Lecture was “Performing Holmes: Changing Acting Style in British Television Adaptations” given by Richard Hewett, drawing on his extensive research for *The Changing Spaces of Television Acting: From Studio Realism to Location Realism in BBC Television Drama* (Manchester University Press; £75.00). The lecture was very well received, and it’s evident that a great deal of extra work went into it, since only *Sherlock* is mentioned (in passing) in the book — nothing about the Holmes dramatisations of the 1950s, 60s, 80s or 2000s. *The Changing Spaces of Television Acting*, which focuses specifically on *The Quatermass Experiment*, *Doctor Who* and *Survivors*, is exceptionally interesting, but its relevance to us is tangential.

Solving Sherlock Holmes: Puzzle Your Way Through the Clues by Pierre Berloquin (Wellfleet Press; £12.99) is, I think, the most elaborately devised and handsomely produced Holmesian puzzle book I’ve come across, with crosswords, number puzzles, cryptograms, logical conundrums and more, all linked, though often loosely, to a case from the canon. It’s an attractive brain-teaser and would make a good present.

Supernatural Sherlocks: Stories from the Golden Age of the Occult Detective edited by Nick Rennison (No Exit Press; £9.99) is in the grand tradition of Michel Parry’s *The Supernatural Solution* and Peter Haining’s *Supernatural Sleuths*, both long out of print. The fifteen tales of ghost-hunters include classics by E & H Heron, William Hope Hodgson, Dion Fortune and Henry S Whitehead, along with a few whose inclusion seems a touch dubious, and three or four that are new to me. There’s even a story by Conan Doyle, but, unsurprisingly, *no Sherlock Holmes*.

Too late for review, but heartily recommended, are *Sherlock Holmes Great War Parodies and Pastiches I: 1910-1914* edited by Bill Peschel (Peschel Press; £12.49 from Amazon.co.uk), and *The Papers of Solar Pons: New Adventures of the Sherlock Holmes of Praed Street* by David Marcum (Belanger Books; £22.95 from Amazon.co.uk).

RJ