

“I AM AN OMNIVOROUS READER”

Book reviews by ROGER JOHNSON

The Hound of the Baskervilles by Arthur Conan Doyle, illustrated by Matthew Stewart. *Easton Press*. 2013. 246 pp. \$267.00. (hbk)

Printed in clear type on fine quality laid paper and enhanced by Matthew Stewart’s superb new illustrations, this is certainly the most gorgeous book to grace my shelves. Mr Stewart provides a vignette for each chapter heading — a portrait, a landscape, an object, all done with style, knowledge and precision — but the ten full-colour plates, each tipped in, and protected by a semi-transparent leaf, are among the finest illustrations I’ve seen for a Holmes story. Holmes and Watson, Baskerville Hall, the man on the tor... The Hound itself is awe-inspiring. The pages are gold-edged, and the full leather binding is stamped in gold and black. The book comes in a fabric-covered slipcase, also stamped in gold and bearing a copy of the plate showing the arrival at Baskerville Hall. You won’t be surprised to learn that the edition is limited to 1,200 copies, each signed by the artist and numbered. It ain’t cheap, but by golly it’s beautiful! *The Hound of the Baskervilles* is available from the publishers for three monthly instalments of \$89.00 or a single payment of \$267.00. (The Easton Press, 47 Richards Avenue, Norwalk, CT 06857, USA; www.eastonpress.com/prod/BDD/THE-HOUND-OF-THE-BASKERVILLES_2871.aspx).

The Baker Street Journal 2013 Christmas Annual: Disaster at the New Century: Sherlock Holmes: A New Play in Three Acts by Ouida Rathbone. *The Baker Street Irregulars*. 2013. 82pp. (pbk)

Susan Dahlinger and Glen Miranker told the story behind the troubled production of Ouida Rathbone’s play in *The Baker Street Journal Christmas Annual 2007: Rathbone Returns! A Misadventure Called Sherlock Holmes*. Now, with help from various individuals and institutions, Nicholas Utechin presents the first-ever publication of Mrs Rathbone’s drama. This is the play that brought her husband to the stage as the Great Detective — and closed after just three performances on Broadway. The leaden script

is only one reason why the production sank so rapidly. Of course, one longs for what might have been, but be honest — wouldn’t you have gone to see Rathbone live on stage playing Sherlock Holmes, even in the face of lousy reviews? The *Annual* is available only as part of the BSI subscription (www.bakerstreetjournal.com/home.html).

Irregular Stain: A Facsimile of the Original Manuscript of ‘The Second Stain’ by Arthur Conan Doyle edited by Andrew Solberg and Robert Katz. *The Baker Street Irregulars*. 2013. xii + 188pp. \$39.95. (hbk)

The BSI’s admirable series takes a major step forward with this volume. For the first time the reproduction is in colour, which gives a better idea of the appearance of the original manuscript — which was donated by Christopher Morley to his alma mater, Haverford College, Pennsylvania — and makes such details as pencil markings clearer. As with a couple of the other extant MSS, a few pages are in a different hand from the author’s own small neat script; the amanuensis in this case was identified by Dame Jean Conan Doyle as her mother, evidently writing from Sir Arthur’s dictation. Philip Bergem provides a transcript and notes, and Randall Stock traces the history of the story and the manuscript. Two unique features of the book are a scan of the galley proofs, the only ones surviving for any of the Holmes stories, and a scan of Paget’s original artwork for one of the *Strand* illustrations. There are essays on the political, legal and social aspects of the story, and a brave but misguided attempt to convince us that Sherlock Holmes was a student at Haverford. The heart of the book is the manuscript facsimile, which enables us to see how the stories we love came into being.

The One Fixed Point in a Changing Age: A New Generation on Sherlock Holmes edited by Kristina Manente, Maria Fleischhack, Sarah Roy & Taylor Blumenberg. *Gasogene Books*. 2014. xii + 271pp. \$24.95 plus postage. (pbk)

The title quotes Sherlock Holmes’s tribute to his friend, but it applies equally to the detective himself. In some ways mercurial,

he embodies certain eternal qualities, even beyond his canonical existence. As far as I know, none of the twenty-five writers in this admirable anthology have contributed to the traditional outlets for Holmesian writing, but their essays here prove that scholarship among the young generation can be as perceptive, as exciting and as entertaining as anything their seniors have produced. The viewpoints may shift a little — several of the papers concentrate on *Sherlock* or *Elementary* rather than the canon — but the focus is always on the great detective and his world. I'm particularly impressed by Lucy Keifer's survey of names in the canon and by Anna McDonald's tribute to the importance in Holmes's life of Victor Trevor. I'm even more impressed by the fact that for most of the writers, all but one of whom are female, English is a second language.

The Remarkable Characters of Arthur Conan Doyle edited by Joel B Silver. *The Baker Street Irregulars*. 2013. xiv + 138pp. \$35.00. (hbk)

Here we have the papers from a conference at the Lilly Library at Indiana University Bloomington in 2009. Holmes gets a look-in, of course, championed by Leslie Klinger, but the emphasis is mostly on some of Conan Doyle's other noteworthy creations, who are perhaps less appreciated than they should be. Besides Roy Pilot on Professor Challenger, Clifford Goldfarb on Brigadier Gerard, and Mark Gagen on Sir Nigel Loring — obvious examples — we have Susan Rice on the female characters and Steven Doyle on the supporting characters. There are other papers too. Joel Silver's account of how David Randall created the Lilly Library's Conan Doyle Collection is fascinating. *The Remarkable Characters of Arthur Conan Doyle* is a very interesting and occasionally eye-opening book.

Magnifying the Mary Morstan Mysteries: Series One Companion Guide by Ross K Foad with Lexi Wolfe. *CreateSpace/No Place Like Holmes*. 2014. 197pp. £4.88 from Amazon.co.uk. (pbk)

Last year I welcomed a volume of Ross Foad's scripts for his entertaining web-based comedy drama *No Place Like Holmes* (you'll find it at www.nplh.co.uk/) whose premise is that Holmes and Watson were

frozen in a time-spell by the demonic Hugo Baskerville, emerging eventually in the year 2010. The equally inspired spin-off series is firmly set in the late nineteenth century, and the principal character isn't Holmes or Watson — though they do feature, of course. Series two of *The Mary Morstan Mysteries* is under way; meanwhile there's this large format volume, containing Mr Foad's scripts for series one, with an introduction to each episode by Lexi Wolfe, who plays Mary. I'll declare an interest here, Ross Foad asked me to contribute a foreword to the book, which I was delighted to do.

The Real Sherlock Holmes: The Hidden Story of Jerome Caminada by Angela Buckley. **Pen & Sword**. 2014. xvi + 157pp. £19.99. (hbk)

The title *The Real Sherlock Holmes*, borne by at least three previous books, suggests a deliberate cash-in — but the book is better than the title. This is a most interesting popular biography of a great Victorian police detective. "Hidden" may be the wrong word, but I suspect that Caminada is less well known than he should be because he lived and worked outside London — and, perhaps, because none of his cases were classic crimes or investigations. The dirty, dangerous city of Manchester, the criminals, the victims, and above all the man himself — intelligent, dedicated and incorruptible — are what's important. The parallels with Holmes are superficial (Robert Horridge was a desperate criminal with a personal grudge against Caminada, but he was no Moriarty), and less interesting than the contrast between the career of the gentleman private detective and that of the no less brilliant working class policeman. Jerome Caminada is justly celebrated in his native city. He deserves to be celebrated outside it.

The Ordeals of Sherlock Holmes by Jonathan Barnes. *Big Finish*. 2013. 4 CDs. £30.00 or download £25.00.

Nicholas Briggs and Richard Earl, now a firmly established team, play Holmes and Watson in this boxed set of four full-length plays. The first, *The Guttering Candle*, tells of events before the two men meet. The cocksure young detective raises the hackles of a sceptical Lestrade by insisting that an apparent murder is actually suicide. The

doctor's experience is stranger: abducted from his unit in Afghanistan, he's taken to tend a dying Englishman. Both occurrences will profoundly affect events in the future. Holmes is well established as a detective when *The Adventure of the Gamekeeper's Folly* takes him and Watson to rural Norfolk, where the curious behaviour of a young woman evokes sinister and puzzling memories for both men. *The Adventure of the Bermondsey Cutthroats* opens with a horrifying scene whose significance doesn't become apparent for some time. A vicious killer is taunting Holmes for reasons he can't fathom. The discovery of the truth is part of the reason for his retirement. Now, at this stage you'd do well to listen to Jonathan Barnes's earlier drama, *The Adventure of the Perfidious Mariner*, which will enhance your appreciation of the final play, *The Sowers of Despair*. The conclusion is both fantastic and inevitable. Messrs Briggs, Earl and Barnes, director Ken Bentley, and the rest of the fine cast are to be congratulated.

The Dead Can Wait by Robert Ryan. *Simon & Schuster*. 2014. 263pp. (hbk)

Dead Man's Land told how Major Watson of the Army Medical Corps dealt with a series of mysterious deaths on the Western Front. Now Watson is back in England, helping soldiers invalided home with shell-shock, but he faces a no less deadly situation. A powerful secret weapon is being tested, something quite new, nicknamed the "Tank", and the men involved are dying. Can Dr Watson make sense of it? Yes, with help from Sherlock Holmes, though the detective is no longer the man he was. The narrative is gripping, the writing is admirable, and the people — especially the courageous, intelligent and good-hearted Watson — are real human beings. There won't be many better novels of the Great War. The conclusion finds the doctor in a particularly hazardous position — assuring us of at least one more book in the series.

The Conan Doyle Notes: The Secret of Jack the Ripper by Diane Gilbert Madsen. *MX Publishing*. 2014. 346pp. £17.99. (hbk)

An apparently routine fraud case for insurance investigator DD McGill interweaves with a more curious matter: a murderous assault on a friend of hers and the theft of an old diary that hints at a momentous discovery

— Arthur Conan Doyle's own notes on the Whitechapel murders and the identity of Jack the Ripper. And DD herself is being stalked... Holmesians have long speculated on the fact that the Ripper murders aren't mentioned in the canon, though the obvious reason is undoubtedly the correct one: even if Conan Doyle had suspected the killer's identity he'd never have mentioned it in the context of a fictional entertainment. Ms Madsen's novel equates his silence with that of the dog in the night-time, assuming that Conan Doyle did know who the murderer was but chose not to say — which, of course, implies that good old stand-by, the establishment cover-up. I doubt that the Ripper was anyone famous or distinguished, but fiction is not fact, and *The Conan Doyle Notes* is a gripping tale, with an intelligent, courageous and very likable protagonist.

In brief

A Chronology of the Life of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, May 22nd 1859 to July 7th 1930: 2014 Revised and Expanded Edition by Brian W Pugh (MX Publishing; £14.99) replaces the previous edition as the one essential reference source. Anyone seriously interested in Conan Doyle's life and career should have a copy.

The UK went decimal in 1971, but little has been done since to indicate what "old money" might buy in, say 1895, and what a particular sum might be worth in today's terms. *Coin of the Canonical Realm* by Nicholas Utechin (The John H Watson Society; www.johnhwatsonociety.com; \$14.00 inclusive to addresses outside the USA) can benefit even those who remember pounds, shillings & pence. To those who never knew that arcane but serviceable system it will be invaluable.

The Holmes Sutra: A Birthday Gift for Sherlock Holmes as He Turns 160 (MX; £6.99) is a charming and entertaining collection of observations compiled by Jayantika Ganguly, from apocryphal sources as well as from the canon. I particularly like "Sherlock Holmes is more than just a man — he is a just man" and "The canon is real and true — though not always accurate". As an appendix there's a questionnaire to enable you to gauge your Holmes Mania Quotient. (I apparently am "Holmesick"...)

Few are really successful in capturing the Watson style, Denis O Smith's excellent early stories appear to be out of print, so the twelve adventures in *The Mammoth Book of The Lost Chronicles of Sherlock Holmes* are most welcome (Robinson; £8.99). Many pasticheurs think that Holmes must at least have a murder to investigate, but Mr Smith knows that "The Red-Headed League" and "The Blue Carbuncle" are among the best in the canon, and he follows suit. In his stories we hear the authentic voices of Holmes and Watson, and it all rings true. John Heywood, a new name to me, also captures the authentic Watson style. The seven stories in *The Investigations of Sherlock Holmes* (MX; 28 April; £8.99) are among the best I've come across. Hugh Ashton's latest admirable collection, *Without My Boswell* (Inkbeans Press; £6.23) gives us Holmes's own accounts of the Tarleton murders, Vamberry the wine merchant, the aluminium crutch, Ricoletti of the club foot and his abominable wife, and the most winning woman that Holmes ever knew.

MX Publishing has issued David Marcum's novel *Sherlock Holmes & a Quantity of Debt* as a hardback original at £12.99. The title, taken from *Great Expectations*, hints at a Dickensian flavour in this account of the investigation of a crime apparently committed half a century before. There's a grand gothic atmosphere, and it's a pleasure to find Inspector MacDonald among the main characters.

After twenty years at 221B Holmes intends to retire to the country, and Watson plans to take a medical practice again. The somewhat strained relations between the doctor and the detective are complicated by the arrival of an attractive young woman. Watson falls for her, and she strikes up a relationship with Mycroft Holmes as well. That's *The Watson Chronicles: A Sherlock Holmes Novel in Stories* by Ann Margaret Lewis (Gasogene Books; \$22.95 plus postage).

Tim Symonds goes to history for the characters and events of *Sherlock Holmes and the Mystery of Einstein's Daughter* (MX; £8.99), a tale woven around the still unsolved enigma of the great scientist's first child, whose existence was unknown until 1986.

The Revenge of Sherlock Holmes by Phil Growick (MX; £10.99), is like a rich plum-pudding, full of diplomacy, intrigue and deception. *The Secret Journal of Dr Watson*

told how Holmes, Watson and Sidney Reilly rescued Tsar Nicholas II and his family from the Bolsheviks. Now we learn what became of them all.

The way Amy Thomas develops the woman's relationship with Sherlock Holmes in her Irene Adler novels is particularly appealing. As *The Detective, the Woman and the Silent Hive* (MX; £9.99) opens, Irene brings Holmes a problem: her bees have died, and she wants to know how and why. The mystery, rooted in the detective's past and involving far more than the silence of the bees, is presented alternately from her angle and from his.

The Poisoned Penman, the second enjoyable exploit of Enoch Hale, by Dan Andriacco and Kieran McMullen (MX; £7.99) begins in 1922 with the death of Langdale Pike, poisoned while taking tea with Hale. Pike's specialism was society gossip, but he seemed to have something more important on his mind. Hale's investigation, helped by a clever advertising copywriter named Dorothy L Sayers, brings him into contact again with TS Eliot and Winston Churchill, and introduces him to GK Chesterton, Horatio Bottomley and Rudolph Valentino. Sherlock and Mycroft Holmes have an important part to play.

Charlie Milverton and Other Sherlock Holmes Stories by Charlotte Anne Walters (MX; £7.99) wittily updates five cases from the canon — the others being "The Premier Bachelor", "The Leaping Man", "A Question of Identity" and "Abbey Strange". Perhaps she was inspired by *Sherlock*, but approach, style and set-up are rather different.

Larry Millett's architectural books about Minneapolis and St Paul are already classics, and he has a strong sense of place. He also has a deserved reputation for ingenious, exciting and well-written detective stories, set mainly in Minnesota and featuring Sherlock Holmes. *Strongwood: A Crime Dossier* (University of Minnesota Press; \$24.95) is the account of a murder trial told through contemporary documents. Did Addie Strongwood shoot her former lover in self-defence, or was it refined, deliberate, cold-blooded murder?

Marlene Aig died in 1996, aged just forty-three. *Sherlock Holmes and the Lufton Lady* (MX; £6.99) is a young woman's story, a romantic tale that ignores, as so many do,

Holmes's very clear statement, "I have never loved." But as one would expect, it's rather better written than most. Marlene circulated it to her Sherlockian friends and probably never expected it to be published. That it is, and nicely too, edited by Chris Redmond, is a tribute to a much-missed friend and colleague.