

# I AM AN OMNIVOROUS READER

Book reviews by LISA BURSCHEIDT, CARRIE CHANDLER, CATHERINE COOKE, DAVID STUART DAVIES, MATTHEW J ELLIOTT, DAVID JONES and ROGER JOHNSON

**The Baker Street Journal 2014 Christmas Annual: The Only Actor Who Ever Got It Right — Douglas Wilmer as Sherlock Holmes** edited by Elaine and Jonathan McCafferty. *The Baker Street Irregulars*. 2014. 68pp (pbk). Available only with BSJ subscription.

This long-awaited tribute is not an unbiased portrait, but it gives an accurate account of the difficulties Douglas Wilmer had to overcome to give his wonderful performances in the 1960s BBC TV series, to the extent of having to re-write some scripts himself. Yet, in the face of such obstacles, the series is lauded as the most consistently authentic of all.

Among the contributors, Mark Gatiss admires the “grandeur” of the Wilmer Holmes, Sir Roger Moore considers Douglas to have been “the consummate Sherlock Holmes”, and Sir Christopher Frayling states that his audio readings of the Holmes stories are “among the very finest”. Russell Merritt, in an absorbing critique, praises Wilmer’s “vivid display of Holmes’s mental restlessness”. Others record their memories of our esteemed Honorary Member, and there are fascinating descriptions of how he prepared and delivered his performances. Jonathan McCafferty’s essay provides a remarkable commentary on the actors and locations seen in the series. David Stuart Davies’s tribute completes this unique publication: to play Sherlock Holmes “you need the looks, the voice, the authority and the saturnine humour to carry it off successfully. I reckon Douglas Wilmer has got the lot!” And so say all of us!

DJ

**The Great Detective: The Amazing Rise and the Immortal Life of Sherlock Holmes** by Zach Dundas. *Houghton Mifflin Harcourt*. 2015. xiv + 320pp. £17.17 (hbk)

Part Doylean biography, part memoir, part social history, part academic critique, part fan adventure; Dundas cogitates over the current Sherlockian renaissance in the context of Holmes’s various incarnations in popular culture from Doyle onwards. Reading this book is like an ideal first meeting with a fellow aficionado: that outpouring of shared knowledge, mutual Canonical love, comparative experience, and the occasional clash of opinion over taste (Zach, how can you be so disparaging about *The Master Blackmailer*!?) It’s an American’s love letter to Holmes. Dundas relates his own adventures as a tourist, visiting sites of Canonical significance in England, alongside the escapist pleasures of mentally inhabiting and recreating the world created by Doyle (his description of 221B Baker Street as a ‘viral room’ is incredibly pertinent). He encounters lots of familiar names along the way, from Steven Moffat and Benedict Cumberbatch to our own Roger Johnson, Jean Upton and Catherine Cooke. *The Great Detective* revels in

the current Sherlockian moment — and the history that brought us here — and is filled with wonderful anecdotes told with insight and wit: it’s simply a great read.

CChandler

**Die Welt des Sherlock Holmes** by Maria Fleischhack. *Lambert Schneider*. 2015. 287pp. €24.95 (hbk)

Maria Fleischhack is a lecturer at Leipzig University, and she approaches Sherlock Holmes from the literary and cultural point of view, which is refreshing. She starts by discussing Conan Doyle, before turning to the main characters in the stories and looking at their antecedents and the world they inhabit. A brief discussion of every case follows. The book then moves to the success of the stories, with a very interesting discussion of how Conan Doyle achieved the realism that persuaded so many readers that they were not fiction, how using Watson as narrator lent them authenticity and how the constant quoting of dates made them feel as if they were narrating real events. Fleischhack highlights the care the author took over his descriptions and the immediacy that gives, and she discusses the London setting, showing how London itself has responded with events and places for the Sherlockian to visit. The fact that Holmes from the beginning was someone who moved between fiction and reality brings her neatly to a discussion of the Game, its origins, Holmesian societies and how Holmes has conquered the world through media such as film, radio and television, and more recently the Internet. One of the strengths of the book is how very up-to-date it is, even including the exhibition at The Museum of London.

This is an extremely good introduction to the world of Holmes, with an extensive bibliography and indexes of titles and names. There are some typographical and other errors leading to some inconsistency and the odd wrong conclusion (Conan Doyle treated Louise Hawkins’ brother not her father; the “blue plaque” at 239 Baker Street is fake and cannot be taken as a proof of Holmes’ status in British literature and culture) but in the overall picture these are fairly minor and could easily be addressed in a second edition or, it is to be hoped, an English translation.

CC

**221 BBC: Writing for the World’s Only Complete Dramatised Canon and Beyond** by Bert Coules. *Gasogene Books*. 2015. xvi + 298pp. \$22.95 + postage (pbk)

For all the millions of words written upon the subject of Conan Doyle’s creations, there are only a handful of volumes that could be described as indispensable. I’ve recently had the good fortune to review two of them, both expanded versions of too-long out of print

editions: *A Study in Celluloid*, Michael Cox's history of the Granada series starring Jeremy Brett, and now *221 BBC*, Bert Coules' first-hand account of what is still the only dramatisation of the complete canon, recorded for Radio 4 between 1989 and 1998. As the writer of the most episodes and, essentially, the instigator of the project thanks to his 1988 adaptation of *The Hound of the Baskervilles* starring Roger Rees and Crawford Logan, Mr Coules is the person best-suited to describing the creative process that led to this remarkable series. The original *221 BBC* ended with the recording of *The Retired Colourman*, but here the author takes us further, dealing with the death of Michael Williams (a fine Watson to Clive Merrison's Holmes) and *The Further Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*, in which Coules scripted more problems for the detective. Of particular interest are the writer's studio diaries, which provide a revealing description of what goes on in a BBC radio studio. An additional treat is the script of what is undoubtedly the most memorable episode of *The Further Adventures*, as well as one of the most daring radio dramas of all time, *The Abergavenny Murder*.

I cannot force you to purchase this book, but I would certainly urge you to do so, given that, for once, the phrase "no Sherlockian's library would be complete without it" is entirely accurate.

MJE

**The Strange Case of Dr Doyle: A Journey into Madness and Mayhem** by Daniel L Friedman and Eugene Friedman. *Square One Publishers*. 2015. xi + 339pp. \$29.95 (hbk).

In 1905, Conan Doyle took a few acquaintances on a Jack the Ripper walk. A fictional version of this event is one of the strands of this book. Conan Doyle, accompanied by seven other (fictitious) members of the "Murder Club", talks us through the Ripper murders. Exploring the theories through various people sounds like an interesting concept, but it soon gets tired because the characters bring up theories merely so Doyle can dismiss them. The second strand is a biography of Doyle, written in a style that I believe is called creative non-fiction. The reason why the chapters alternate between the Ripper walk and the biography is fairly elusive at first, but it becomes apparent that the point is to prove that Doyle was the Ripper. This bold statement is not made outright, even in the afterword, in which the authors explain that some of the facts of Conan Doyle's biography, together with the fact that he took people on a Ripper tour, make it obvious that "only one conclusion can be drawn." I am unable to determine how serious they are with this accusation, but given the amount of research and effort which went into the book, I fear they are quite serious.

The argument is compelling, but because the book itself is an odd mix of fact and fiction and curiously fails at being either, I was ultimately unconvinced. I did enjoy the Doyle biography aspect which paints a vivid picture of his background and history. The parallels to the Ripper's supposed personality may or may not be due to the authors' being selective — Doyle experts

may be able to judge this better than I can. The general impression is that Doyle was always ready to rush into an adventure, but maybe a bit too full of himself. Overall, a book that gets better as it goes on: the first few chapters especially of the Tour sections are a bit clunky and heavy on exposition, but once everything is set up, things flow a lot better. An intriguing read, not without its merits, and even though I am unconvinced by the argument, I was entertained by it.

LB

**The Fifth Heart** by Dan Simmons. *Sphere*. 2015. 624pp. £18.99 (hbk)

Should a modern Sherlock Holmes pastiche be copycat Conan Doyle — an earnest attempt to reproduce as accurately and as faithfully as possible the substance of those canonical tales? Or should the writer, while being true to the spirit of the character, try to do something new, exciting and fresh? If you plump for the former, *The Fifth Heart* is not for you. If you are prepared to take on the latter, even then it may not suit. Dan Simmons has caught Holmes during the great Hiatus, so there is no Watson, and he opens with the detective, having faked his own death at Reichenbach, contemplating suicide in Paris. Here he encounters the American novelist Henry James and the pair team up and travel to America to investigate the suicide of Clover Adams, wife of the historian Henry Adams. We have Holmes in very unfamiliar territory mixing with a number of "real" people in a very slow-moving story. Simmons writes elegantly, his prose, perhaps appropriately, reminiscent of Henry James rather than Doyle, but he includes a great deal of unnecessary background information which holds up the plot. His Holmes is under mental strain, and does not quite emerge as the familiar fellow we know so well. And as is the fashion these days, there is a startling revelation about Moriarty. If you want to wander off the straight and narrow path of Doylean Holmes, this novel is worth a shot, providing you have the time to devour over 600 pages.

DSD

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

Big Finish's CD-only series moved into full gear last year with the release of *The Ordeals of Sherlock Holmes*, a box set of four interconnected stories by Jonathan Barnes. The idea was a daring one, the story arc taking place over a period of several years. For its sequel, *The Judgement of Sherlock Holmes*, Barnes has upped the stakes considerably, with a tale set during the years in which Holmes, having vanquished Professor Moriarty, was believed dead to the world. But this is not a solo adventure. Both Holmes and Watson are battling against a nebulous enemy known as the Society, neither realising the part played by the other. In contrast to the four cases of *Ordeals*, we have one vast, complete case, with stakes higher than anything Conan Doyle could have imagined. It's easy, given the time period, to imagine this as a sequel to the movie, *A*

*Game of Shadows*, save that this is an altogether more serious affair, an oppressive air of impending doom overshadowing the action.

Nicholas Briggs gives, as ever, an assured performance as Holmes, fighting to keep his strong emotions in check when faced with certain devastating home truths. But it is Richard Earl as Watson, who earns the biggest plaudits — Barnes takes the good doctor to hell and back, and Earl is gripping in every scene in which he appears. The dialogue is faultless, and the scale of the story so vast it is difficult to see how Barnes could ever hope to top it, and yet sufficient plot points are left unresolved that it is clear the author has plans for a further series of adventures.

MJE

**Sherlock Holmes: The Man Who Never Lived and Will Never Die – A Catalogue** by Nicholas Utechin and Catherine Cooke. *The Quartering Press*. 2015. 96pp. \$20.00 + postage from [www.bakerstreetjournal.com](http://www.bakerstreetjournal.com) (pbk)

The Museum of London decided against publishing a catalogue of that fabulous exhibition, investing instead in Alex Werner's beautifully illustrated book of essays (see Nick Utechin's review in the previous *Journal*). But a catalogue was obviously desirable, and achievable, with the co-operation of Alex and some of his colleagues, and the support of Glen Miranker and Constantine Rossakis, who had generously shared some of their choicest Sherlockian treasures with us. The result is much more than a descriptive list, important though that aspect is, thanks to the editors' research, contributions from Messrs Miranker, Rossakis and Werner, and a sumptuous array of full-colour illustrations, complementing those in the Museum's own book. The first edition is limited to 300 copies. All those allocated to the Society have already gone, but you can still order one from America.

**Out of the Abyss: A Facsimile of the Original Manuscript of 'The Empty House' by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle with Annotations and Commentary on the Story**, edited by Andrew Solberg, Steven Rothman & Robert Katz. *Baker Street Irregulars*. 2014. xii + 229pp. \$39.95 + postage (hbk)

In 1994 Jean Upton and I reproduced four pages of the MS of "The Empty House" in the Society's book *Back to Baker Street*. The opportunity never came for us to publish the entire manuscript, but we hoped that the BSI would do so — and now they have. Philip Bergem, Steve Rothman & Randall Stock write about the manuscript, its owners, and the publishing history of the story. Catherine Cooke deals with the geography. Nick Utechin considers Mycroft's rôle. Peter Calamai argues that Holmes devoted the decade after his return to government intelligence. Brent Morris examines card cheating. Ray Betzner's piece on "The Final Problem" actually throws new light on "The Empty House". Holmes's "resurrection" has parallels in religion and myth, as Lindsay Colwell & Chris Redmond show. Russell Merritt looks at Colonel Moran on screen. Maria Fleischhack surveys academic

explorations of the story. Only Lyndsay Faye's short story, though effective, seems out of place. But the essential thing is that we can all now examine the MS for ourselves!

**Sherlock Holmes and Arthur Conan Doyle in the Newspapers, Volume I: 1881-1892** by Mattias Boström and Matt Laffey. *Gasogene Books*. xiv + 306pp. \$32.95 + postage (pbk)

The editors have taken advantage of the wider availability of daily and weekly newspaper archives to compile a fascinating anthology of cuttings — a huge one too. The book covers aspects of Conan Doyle's life other than his writing, but at this stage it's the writing that's likely to interest most of us, and it is most interesting to read the first reviews of works that we know so well. "*A Study in Scarlet* ... is not at all a bad imitation, but it would never have been written but for Poe, Gaboriau, and Mr RL Stevenson. The hero of the tale is simply the hero of 'The Murder in the Rue Morgue'..." "Mr Conan Doyle has done better than in *The Sign of Four*, still, as a specimen of purely detective fiction, the tale has its merits..." Poe and Stevenson have lasted, but who reads Gaboriau for pleasure these days? I look forward keenly to subsequent volumes in the series.

**"Paddington" Pollaky, Private Detective: The Mysterious Life and Times of the Real Sherlock Holmes** by Bryan Kesselman. *The History Press*. 2015. 240pp. £12.99 (pbk)

Born in what's now Bratislava, Ignatius Paul Pollaky spent most of his life in England. His application for British citizenship wasn't granted until 1914, yet thirty years earlier he'd been the best known private detective in Britain, so famous that he's mentioned in Gilbert & Sullivan's *Patience*, specifically for his "keen penetration". For eight years he worked for ex-Inspector Field, the reputed model for Inspector Bucket in *Bleak House*, before setting up on his own in 1861. Six years later Pollaky himself served as a special constable at the time of the Fenian outrages. His cases included blackmail, impersonation, theft, child-abduction and "white slavery". Being multilingual, he did a good deal of work abroad and was employed by foreign governments. Much like Sherlock Holmes, really, and if that encourages you to read this book — good. But read it anyway, as an absorbing account of a real private detective whose career overlapped with Holmes's.

**Prince of the Realm: The Most Irregular James Bliss Austin** by Sonia Fetherston. *Baker Street Irregulars*. xiv + 174pp. \$21.96 + postage (pbk)

Morley and Starrett are well documented, and material can be found on Smith and Wolff, but there are important figures in the BSI's past whose lives and achievements are unknown to most of us. (Walter Klinefelter, Page Heldenbrand, and Luther Norris come immediately to mind.) This first volume in The Baker Street Irregulars Biographical Series is most welcome. Bliss Austin (1904-88) was a successful businessman,

an authority on oriental art, a great Holmesian collector, and a generous mentor. In Sonia Fetherston's book, I almost feel that I've met the man. His annual souvenir booklets were collected and published by Magico as *Austin's Sherlockian Studies*; the book is still in print, I understand (Magico, PO Box 156, New York, NY 10002-0156, USA). Less substantial is *Bibliomania*, Austin's columns from *The Northumberland Dispatch*, edited by Vincent Brosnan and published by the Battered Silicon Dispatch Box.

**Sources and Methods: A companion volume to the novel *Baker Street Irregular*** by Jon Lellenberg. Hazelbaker & Lellenberg Inc; <http://bsihistoryblog.blogspot.co.uk/>. xxiii + 154pp. \$20.00 + postage outside the USA (pbk)

*Baker Street Irregular* is now out of print, which is unfortunate, because it's a fascinating portrait of the BSI in its early years, a revelatory picture of America at a crucial time in world history, and a riveting account of intelligence work in World War II. It's also an important novel. In *The District Messenger* I said, "Fact and fiction sit so easily together that it's often hard to tell which is which. Real people, including those early Irregulars, come vividly and credibly to life. And through the sometimes extraordinary experiences of one man, Mr Lellenberg helps us to understand why things in America were as they were. *Baker Street Irregular* is an ambitious novel and a very considerable achievement." This new volume, unexpectedly but appropriately, forms part of the BSI Archival History Series. If you've read the *Baker Street Irregular* you'll find that the facts behind it add depth to your appreciation. If you haven't, I hope it will inspire you to find a copy. Like the novel, *Sources and Methods* follows Lord Reith's policy for the BBC: it informs, it educates, it entertains. Capital!

### In brief

In 1946, encouraged by Vincent Starrett, Russell McLaughlin founded a Sherlock Holmes society in Detroit. It has recently published a very congenial anecdotal record of its first eighteen years: *From the Lower Vault — Treasures from the Archives of the Amateur Mendicant Society of Detroit, 1946-1964* edited by Christopher Music (The Battered Silicon Dispatch Box; \$25.00; e-mail [amateurmendicantsociety@gmail.com](mailto:amateurmendicantsociety@gmail.com) for details). We owe a great debt to the Mendicants for commissioning and donating to Bart's Hospital the brass plaque, now on display in the hospital's museum, that records the first meeting of Holmes and Watson.

For the Paris première of the newly restored silent film *Sherlock Holmes*, the only complete recording of William Gillette in his own play, Thierry Saint-Joanis, President of La Société Sherlock Holmes de France, compiled a beautiful 64-page book, *Le guide du film Sherlock Holmes (1916)* ([www.sshf.com/boutique.php](http://www.sshf.com/boutique.php); €20.00 — which I think doesn't include postage). The text is in French, though nearly all the reviews and

articles reproduced are in English. Direct enquiries to [sshf@sshf.com](mailto:sshf@sshf.com).

*How to Instantly Size-Up Strangers Like Sherlock Holmes* is a clunky title (how many strangers like Sherlock Holmes have you encountered?) that doesn't reflect the research, discernment and dedication that Mark A Williams Sr has put into his book. As a detailed explanation of Holmes's mental skills and how we can apply them today, it may well be unbeatable. (Real Deal Publishing; £15.42 from Amazon.co.uk)

Dennis Hoey is destined, more than Rathbone and Bruce, to be identified with one character, though he was evidently far from limited as an actor — and now we discover that he was a writer as well. *The Drury Lane Theatre Mystery: An Original Sherlock Holmes Screen Treatment by Dennis Hoey, Inspector Lestrade of Universal's Sherlock Holmes, with an Introduction and Additional Comments by His Son Michael A Hoey* (Gasogene Books; \$12.95) was plainly written with Rathbone, Bruce and himself in mind, but unlike the twelve films that Universal did make it's set in the late Victorian period. As Michael Hoey says, "one must approach it as a curiosity piece," and a very unusual and entertaining one it is.

*The Oenologic Holmes: The Role of Wine in the Life and Times of Sherlock Holmes* by Steve Robinson (Battered Silicon Dispatch Box; Cdn\$20.00 + postage) is a charming little book, beautifully illustrated with photos by Jack Winn. In 46 pages it can't go into the sort of detail covered, for instance, by Patricia Guy in her excellent *Bacchus at Baker Street*, but it does take a fresh, intelligent look at the part played by wine (and its consumption) in Watson's chronicles.

In his thoroughly researched and updated guide, *The Mapped London of Sherlock Holmes* (London Secrets; £2.63 as a Kindle from Amazon.co.uk), Thomas Bruce Wheeler identifies the canon's 400 London sites, listing them by story and locating them on an interactive map created by the author. Also, each site's GPS address is hyperlinked to a street view photo, allowing us to 'visit' Holmes's London from our home computers. Those with GPS apps on smart phones or tablets can use the GPS addresses to get walking instructions from one site to the next, making the book both a travel guide and a computer app. It's amazingly cheap and very impressive.

*Sherlock Holmes as a Pipe Smoker* by Thomas Gwinner (MX Publishing; £8.99) is a nice little addition to the literature on Holmes and tobacco, but it's let down by poor reproductions of Sidney Paget's illustrations and by an odd tendency for words to split at the end of lines.

Again, far more new Holmesian fiction than we've space for, but let me recommend *The Egyptian Curse*, the third adventure of Enoch Hale and Sherlock Holmes by Dan Andriacco and Kieran McMullen (MX; £6.99), *Sherlock Holmes: Tangled Skeins — Stories from the Notebooks of Dr John H Watson* by David Marcum (MX; £8.99), and *Sherlock Holmes and the Baron of Brede Place* by Daniel D Victor, in which Holmes investigates the disappearance of the novelist Stephen Crane (MX; £8.99).