

“I AM AN OMNIVOROUS READER”

Book reviews by DAN ANDRIACCO, MARK MOWER, GAEL STAHL, JEAN UPTON,
NICHOLAS UTECHIN and ROGER JOHNSON

Arthur and Sherlock: Conan Doyle and The Creation of Holmes by Michael Sims. *Bloomsbury*. 2017. \$27. 246 pages.

I would read anything by Michael Sims. I own and have read more than a dozen biographies of Doyle and this one will sit well with that pile. It's better researched than some of them. Yet it's short, but an addictive read. I started in the middle and then realized I had to read every word. I went back to the beginning. I learned how much Charles Dickens admired detectives and wrote about them, how Emily Dickinson admired *Called Back*, a popular novella by Hugh Conway that was published a year before *A Study in Scarlet* and outsold it. She wrote a poem with that title, and her tombstone reads "Called Back, May 5, 1886."

Jean Upton in *The District Messenger* said newcomers to Sherlock would especially like this book. This 40-year Doyle veteran loved it. But I'll let you find out for yourself. You'll enjoy Michael Sims' style more than mine. It's the best researched Sherlockian writing I've seen in a very long time.

GS

Sherlock Holmes: The Story Behind the World's Greatest Detective edited by Jim Baker. *Life Books*. 96pp. £9.99 (pbk)

For veteran admirers of the supersleuth, or even well-read neophytes, there's little new in the five-chapter, 96-page book. But the story of the detective who never lived and so can never die is told in a very engaging fashion with no more than the usual number of minor errors. The writers may not be experts in the subject matter, but they talked to four Baker Street Irregulars who are: Otto Penzler, Leslie Klinger, Lyndsay Faye, and Mattias Boström. Most of the book is devoted to the story of Sherlock Holmes from the point of view of his creator, but chapter five concerns what might be called the sleuth's afterlife — fandom and dramatic presentations and re-imaginings. The weakness here is lack of attention to Jeremy Brett, although contemporary screen Sherlocks are covered. Not incidentally, this is a beautiful publication, lavishly illustrated throughout with striking photos, many of them new, and well worth revisiting just to look at. In short, it does not disappoint.

DA

Unmitigated Bleat: Selected Writings on Sherlock Holmes by Paul D Herbert. *Gasogene Books*. 2017.

xii+221B pp (*sic*). \$19.95 (pbk)

Devotees will recognize the title from "The Adventure of the Red Circle": "Dear me!" says Holmes, turning over the pages of newspaper agony columns. After reading a few examples out loud, he adds, "Bleat, Watson — unmitigated bleat!"

But this book is sheer delight! A long-time member of the Baker Street Irregulars, Herbert is a serious scholar who knows how to have fun with the Canon. Some of these essays are laugh-out-loud funny. Herbert is an expert on pastiches and parodies, having written a book on the theme in the 1980s called *The Sincerest Form of Flattery*. His lengthy essay on the topic in the present book is particularly insightful. Herbert himself is guilty of three hilarious parodies included in the volume. Other topics subjected to Herbert's magnifying lens include various problems in the Canon, movie scripts that were never produced, a play that perhaps shouldn't have been, bibliographical curiosities, people named Sherlock Holmes in real life, and some questions without answers. Several of these essays were originally presented as talks at Sherlockian conferences over the past four decades. It is good to have them preserved in print.

DA

His Everlasting Bow: Italian Studies in Sherlock Holmes edited by Alessandra Calachi & Stephen Knight. *Aras Edizione*. 2016. 249pp. €20.00 (pbk)

This admirable collection of essays, interviews and entertainments is a thirtieth anniversary gift to *Uno Studio in Holmes*, the Sherlock Holmes Society of Italy. (The fact that it's all in English is an unexpected bonus for the rest of us.) It's also a memorial to Nando Gazzolo, who in 1968 played Holmes in dramatisations of *The Valley of Fear* and *The Hound of the Baskervilles* for Italian television — the only Italian actor to portray the detective on screen. The chapters that particularly appeal to me, because I knew so little about it, concern the making of that series, partly in Italy, partly in England. Other chapters discuss the relevance of codes and ciphers, collecting, war, and even Feng Shui. *His Everlasting Bow* is a worthy companion to the BSI's 2010 *Italy and Sherlock Holmes*.

RJ

Canada and Sherlock Holmes edited by Peter Calamai & Mark Alberstat. *The Baker Street*

Irregulars. 2016. xi + 217pp. \$39.95 (hbk)

The latest volume in *The Baker Street Irregulars International Series* maintains its very high standard (apart from a few proofreading errors). Arthur Conan Doyle loved the country, so perhaps it's appropriate that the world's premier collection devoted to his life and work is in Toronto; its treasures are discussed here by its founder Cameron Hollyer, its present Curator Peggy Perdue, and others who have helped nurture it. Chris Redmond looks at ACD's own adventures in Canada, and others examine the Canadian character of *Murder By Decree*, the play *The Incredible Murder of Cardinal Tosca*, and the novels of LB Greenwood. The last and longest section, "Scholarship in the Great White North", includes essays by S Tupper Bigelow, Chris Redmond, Mark Alberstat, Michael Higgs, Janice McNabb and others — major Holmes scholars all — as well as verse, humour and satire. "What does man want more?"

RJ

Dancing to Death: A Facsimile of the Original Manuscript of "The Dancing Men" by Arthur Conan Doyle edited by Ray Betzner & David F Morrill. *The Baker Street Irregulars*. 2016. xi + 209pp. \$39.95 (hbk)

The first complete canonical manuscript to be published in facsimile was *The Priory School* in 1985. This (if you count a single chapter of *The Hound of the Baskervilles*) is the fourteenth, and the ninth in *The Baker Street Irregulars Manuscript Series*. Our Society's recent facsimile of *The Abbey Grange* is, as near as possible, an exact replica, with important accompanying essays; here a good clear monochrome image, with transcript and annotations, occupies half the pages, the rest being taken up with excellent thought-provoking essays on the manuscript itself and on aspects of the story. Two different approaches, each valid and each, crucially, enabling us to follow the author as he worked on the story. The annotations by Ray Betzner and Phillip Bergem are particularly valuable.

RJ

Sherlock Holmes and Conan Doyle in the Newspapers, volume 3 — July-December 1893 edited and annotated by Mattias Boström & Matt Laffey. *Gasogene Books*. 2017. xxi + 226pp. \$32.95 (pbk)

On the 20th November *The Dundee Advertiser* said of the Sherlock Holmes stories, "It will not be by these that Dr Doyle's name will live. They have neither the literary grace nor artistic touches of his other works, and it will be to Dr Doyle's advantage, and will add more to his reputation, when they are discontinued and the time and labour devoted to

them are employed on better work." Not all the critics agreed, nor the reading public, but that remark certainly echoed the author's own thoughts. The December issue of *The Strand Magazine*, featuring "The Final Problem", would shortly be on the station bookstalls. Just a week later *The Boston Daily Globe* observed, "Someone has said that the saddest thing in history is the death of Falstaff. Perhaps the saddest thing in contemporary history is the death of Sherlock Holmes." Messrs Boström & Laffey have undertaken a Herculean task with this series, and we are the beneficiaries.

RJ

Granada's Greatest Detective: A Guide to the Classic Sherlock Holmes Television Series by Keith Frankel. *Fantom Publishing*. 2016. viii + 277pp. £12.99 (pbk)

Peter Haining's *The Television Sherlock Holmes* is profusely illustrated, but shallow. Michael Cox's *A Study in Celluloid* is an excellent personal account that doesn't cover the episodes for which he wasn't producer or executive producer. David Stuart Davies's admirable *Bending the Willow* focuses as much on Jeremy Brett the man as on Brett the actor. This new book isn't as gracefully written, but it's intelligently conceived, readable and comprehensive, with more pertinent information about the series than has been gathered in one volume before. Mr Frankel both sees and observes (who else noticed Baron Gruner's little nod to Robert Browning?) and his assessments are sound — and sometimes challenging.

RJ

The Secret Diary of Mycroft Holmes by S F Bennett. *Belanger Books*. 2017. 102pp. £10.95 (pbk)

Do not be put off by the title: this is neither "just another pastiche" nor something with dubious content, but as expert a piece of humorous writing as I have seen in the Holmesian field for a long time. Mycroft ploughs his unique furrow at the beginning of the 1880s, extraordinarily rude about the politicians for whom he works and not overly pleased with life at the Diogenes ("Torn blinds, torn curtains, whisky on the carpets, wine on the rugs...it beggars belief that a group as sedentary as the club's members could be responsible for so much damage...") But above all, he groans mightily throughout this delightful book at "that constant source of irritation and anxiety otherwise known as my younger brother Sherlock". (There is another Holmes relative, usually chained to railings at Waterloo Station, but enough of him.) Sarah Bennett writes with flair and a genuine sense of comedic timing.

NU

Jack the Ripper: Case Closed by Gyles Brandreth. *Corsair*. 15 June 2017. 368pp. £18.99 (hbk)

Ten years ago Gyles Brandreth published *Oscar Wilde and the Candlelight Murders*, which teamed Oscar Wilde and Arthur Conan Doyle in 1889, to solve a series of inexplicable murders. In this, the seventh in this excellent series, Conan Doyle is the narrator, writing in 1924 about events beginning on New Year's Eve, 1893. Another murder has occurred in the style of Jack the Ripper. Oscar's neighbour in Tite Street was the detective in charge of the Ripper investigations, and he welcomes assistance from Oscar and Arthur. ACD's wife, Touie, is in Switzerland with the children, so, without the normal household responsibilities, he places himself at Oscar's beck and call. Scrupulously researched, Brandreth has drawn on new material discovered in the papers of George R Sims (celebrated Victorian journalist and friend of Oscar Wilde) who happens to be the first cousin of Gyles's grandmother. The story whips along, and what initially appear to be red herrings or pointless detours inevitably turn out to be crucial to the case. One gets an almost tangible feeling of the atmosphere of 1890s London and the eccentric characters of that era. I am not a Ripperologist, but I suspect that the solution is going to surprise many readers.

JU

The MX Book of New Sherlock Holmes Stories — Part VI: 2017 Annual edited by David Marcum. *MX Publishing*. 2017. xvii + 675pp. £24.99 (pbk), £37.99 (hbk)

It began with three volumes of new tales, handsomely presented, and all the royalties donated to the regeneration of Undershaw, Conan Doyle's Surrey residence. Editor, publisher and some sixty authors worked hard to make it a success, and *The MX Book of New Sherlock Holmes Stories* proved so popular with the readers and the contributors that two more volumes appeared last year. You'll certainly recognise some of the thirty-five authors represented in *Part VI*: Hugh Ashton, Tracy Revels, Mark Mower, Roger Riccard, Molly Carr, David Ruffle, Daniel D Victor, SF Bennett... I'm particularly pleased to find another of Jim French's grand radio scripts, and David Timson's ingenious and very funny "The Adventure of the Wonderful Toy". The stories range from good to superb, the book is very attractive, and the cause is excellent.

RJ

The Whole Art of Detection: Lost Mysteries of Sherlock Holmes by Lyndsay Faye. *The Mysterious Press*. 352 pp. £19.47 (hbk).

These fifteen stories, written with intelligence and wit, fill in some of the gaps in our knowledge of Holmes

and Watson's backgrounds and relationship, as well as providing full details of the cases that receive only passing mention in the Canon. Lyndsay Faye's novel *Dust and Shadow* set a very high standard for Holmes pastiche. This collection maintains that standard.

JU

Sherlock Holmes and the Eisendorf Enigma by Larry Millett. *University of Minnesota Press*. 240pp. £20.99 (hbk)

Larry Millett is a native of Minneapolis and an architectural historian. This is the latest in his series of mysteries in which Sherlock Holmes travels to various locations in Minnesota. A serial murderer, the "Monster of Munich", eluded capture by Holmes during the Great Hiatus. The Monster makes his presence known when Holmes, at Watson's recommendation, visits the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota for treatment of emphysema. Holmes is quickly on the trail, taking up residence in nearby Eisendorf for his investigation. Millett's knowledge of local history and topographical information makes this as fascinating and plausible as any story set in traditional London.

JU

Sherlock Holmes and the Nine-Dragon Sigil by Tim Symonds. *MX Publishing*. 2016. 364pp. £11.99 (pbk)

The frontispiece tells us that a sigil is an inscribed or painted symbol or occult sign considered to have magical power. It's an intriguing opener for an entirely captivating story transporting us back, effortlessly, to the Forbidden City of China in 1906. There is great attention to detail, demonstrating the author's clear love of both the Canon and world history. The tale revolves around an assassination plot and the well-drawn characters of Emperor Ch'ing and his aunt, the Empress Dowager Cixi. The pace is fast throughout, but Symonds is skilful at painting in lots of period features and fascinating facts which add great texture and encourage us to pause and reflect on the strange world that our heroes are thrust into. There is also a helpful glossary at the end. This is clever pastiche with a strong narrative and well-judged humour. A thoroughly enjoyable read from start to finish.

MM

The Sign of Fear by Robert Ryan. *Simon & Schuster*. 2016. 448pp. £7.99 (pbk)

In 1917, with no sign of an end to the war, Major Watson is back in London, a city subject to nightly bombing raids, and the shattering events of *A Study in Murder* have left their mark. His friend Mrs Gregson is dead, at the hands of an enemy agent, and his relationship with Sherlock Holmes is strained

to breaking-point. Then another friend, Staff Nurse Jennings, is reported lost when an ambulance-boat is torpedoed in the Channel — and his colleague Sir Gilbert Hastings is kidnapped. Mr Ryan knows his history, he knows his Watson, and he knows how to grab the reader's attention and not let go until he chooses. They used to say, "It is impossible not to be thrilled by Edgar Wallace." I feel that way about Robert Ryan.

RJ

Sherlock Holmes: To a Country House Darkly by NM Scott. *The Book Guild Ltd.* 2017. 221pp. £9.99 (hbk)

This is NM Scott's fifth collection of new stories featuring the famous detective. And what a delight it is. Twelve short pastiches, well-crafted, beautifully written and thoroughly engaging. Scott's style is reassuringly familiar with a real feel for the Canon. My favourite story was "The Curio", a wry and colourful tale featuring Mycroft Holmes and "the hand of Vladimir Chekovich". But there isn't much to separate any of the chapters as they're all written to such a high standard. His attention to detail is consummate, as is his clear knowledge of the history of the period, with every backdrop skilfully sketched in. In short, a great collection of stories told with much proficiency. I've just bought copies of his earlier volumes — can't wait to read them!

MM

Unquiet Spirits by Bonnie MacBird. *HarperCollins.* 27 July 2017. 400pp. £14.99 (hbk)

The four canonical "long stories" are little longer than novellas. Beside them Ms MacBird's new novel looks decidedly intimidating, but just start reading and you'll be hooked. Calling at 221B, Watson finds Holmes unfazed by an attempted assassination, but oddly disturbed by the attractive young lady who asks him to investigate a bizarre abduction and a purported haunting at a Scottish castle. Then comes an urgent call from Mycroft Holmes: Sherlock must go to the South of France, where vital scientific interests are threatened. A shocking discovery sends Holmes and Watson from France to the Scottish Highlands, and Holmes realises that to solve one mystery he must solve all three. Suspense, excitement, intellectual stimulation — and humour: it's all here.

RJ

The Riddle of Foxwood Grange by Denis O Smith. *MX Publishing,* 2016. viii + 260pp. £10.99 (pbk)

Denis Smith's use of the Watsonian voice here is not, I think, quite as assured as in his short stories, but this novel is a cracking good read nonetheless.

Farrington Blake has lived comfortably for three years at Foxwood Grange in rural Oxfordshire, once home to a member of the notorious Hellfire Club, one of several residents who left their mark on the house. It isn't the strange disappearance of Samuel Harley that Sherlock Holmes is asked to investigate, nor yet the enigmatic puzzle that Harley blazoned on the wall of the orangery. Instead, Blake is desperate to know who is spying on him, and why. That riddle, it emerges, is bound up with the mysterious history of the house. There's a rich cast of characters, the setting is splendidly evoked, and Holmes's solution to Harley's puzzle is a *tour de force*.

RJ

The Mystery of Briony Lodge by David Bagchi, *Barbican Press,* 2016. 157pp, £9.99 (hbk)

When Miss Briony Lodge calls at Baker Street in June 1889, she is shown up, not into the presence of Sherlock Holmes, but to the rooms of his fellow lodgers on the floor above, namely Harris, George and J, to say nothing of the dog, straight from the pages of Jerome K Jerome's *Three Men in a Boat*. What follows is a delightful, amusing and jolly good adventure, in which our three heroes tackle Miss Lodge's case in their usual bumbling but good-natured way. It helps if you know JKJ's work, but Bagchi knows his Sherlock Holmes and references to the work of both authors abound. It's great fun and Bagchi does a good job of capturing JKJ's voice. Thoroughly readable and heartily recommended.

SO-B

The Further Adventures of Sherlock Holmes: The Moonstone's Curse by Sam Siciliano. *Titan Books.* 2017. 320pp. £7.99 (pbk)

The Moonstone is up to its old mischief, and concern for his wife's safety brings Charles Bromley to Sherlock Holmes's door after he refuses an offer to sell the fabulous gem. Dr Henry Vernier takes up the tale and proves an able and engaging storyteller, having a good eye for details and investing his narrative with more romance than we have come to expect from Watson. A fascinating, well-crafted mystery follows, with strong characterisation and respectful nods to Wilkie Collins's 1868 masterpiece, which will delight fans of the original novel, whilst successfully continuing the seemingly cursed history of the Moonstone in a tale of theft and intrigue that tests Sherlock Holmes's powers to the limit.

SO-B

The Artie Conan Doyle Mysteries: The Gravediggers' Club by Robert J Harris. *Kelpies.* 183pp. £6.99/\$9.95 (pbk)

An entertaining story aimed at readers aged eight

to twelve, in which young Arthur and his friend Ham investigate what initially appears to be a case of grave-robbing, but turns out to be something far more complex. The author has also woven some of Edinburgh's social history into the story, referencing Burke and Hare and Greyfriars Bobby, and provides a good geographical feel for the city as the two boys progress through the streets during their investigations.

JU

For the record

In February PS Publishing issued *The Complete Adventures of Solar Pons* by **Basil Copper**, edited by Stephen Jones. The two-volume limited edition was priced at £175.00, and it sold out immediately. (The title is rather misleading: the "Sherlock Holmes of Praed Street" was created by August Derleth in 1929; six volumes were published before Derleth's death in 1971, and another four posthumously.) In his authorised additions to the canon — set, like the originals, in the inter-war years — Basil Copper caught the authentic tone in style and substance, bearing in mind Vincent Starrett's comment: "Solar Pons is not a caricature of Sherlock Holmes. He is, rather, a clever impersonator, with a twinkle in his eye which tells us that he knows he is not Sherlock Holmes, and knows that *we* know it, but that he hopes we will like him anyway for what he symbolises."

Copper's stories were issued over the years by various publishers, often with detrimental editorial adjustments. These splendid volumes bring the authentic texts together for the first time, with fascinating background information from author and editor, and many evocative illustrations. Basil Copper didn't live to see this definitive edition, and because of its rarity few others will. The publishers kindly provided me with a pdf file, but I hope that eventually the stories and the other material will become more widely available. They deserve it.

RJ

In brief

Cynthia Liebow is the editor and publisher of *Le Détective détraqué, ou les mésaventures de Sherlock Holmes* (Éditions Baker Street; €18.00). The import of the title is obvious, but this isn't a simple French edition of *The Misadventures of Sherlock Holmes*, though several of the stories are taken from Ellery Queen's classic anthology. Along with pastiche and parody by the likes of JM Barrie, Bret Harte, Robert Barr and O Henry, here are more recent tales from French, American and British sources. If you need encouragement to brush up your French, *Le Détective détraqué* should do it.

For *The Baker Street Journal* 2016 Christmas

Annual, entitled *The Day after Christmas: First Encounters with Gillette's Silent Sherlock Holmes* (only available with a subscription to the BSJ) **Russell Merritt** has assembled eight essays on aspects of the film and its relation to the original play: Donald Sosin on composing a new score, Lee Amazonas on the influence of fashion, Sonia Fetherston on the clever use of paper as a prop, Thierry Saint-Joanis on the actor Ernest Maupain... It's all enlightening and most interesting.

From MX Publishing come two nice little books by **Brenda Rossini**. *Sherlockian Ruminations from a Stormy Petrel* (£5.99) contains brief, stimulating papers on Christian Sacraments and "The Devil's Foot", the "Hebrew Rabbi" in "A Scandal in Bohemia", the doubtful behaviour of Mycroft Holmes in "The Greek Interpreter", and others. *Graceland Cemetery in Chicago: A Sherlockian Walk 'midst the Tombstones* (£5.99) suggests that a tour of the necropolis would be worthwhile. Here lie Allan Pinkerton, Vincent Starrett, the boxer Jack Johnson and others with Holmesian and Doylean connections.

Horrors of Sherlock Holmes (R'lyeh Texts, 78 Rowland Ave, Wollongong, NSW 2500, Australia; \$18.95 AU/\$15.95 US) is an attractive A4 paperback containing three weird tales by **Leigh Blackmore** with full colour illustrations by **Philip Cornell**, both eminent members of the Sydney Passengers (we've been proud to feature some of Philip's work in the SHJ). Others have imagined a synthesis of the Holmesian and the Lovecraftian, none more successfully than **Peter H Cannon**, who has written a foreword to this enticing book.

Although the plot of *Sherlock Holmes and the Menacing Monk* by **Allan Mitchell** (MX; £7.99) is yet another Holmes-vs-Ripper scenario, the narrative form, improbably, is epic verse. It isn't great poetry, but it scans and rhymes, and the galloping rhythm drives the story along.

Among the recent titles from Titan Books, *Sherlock Holmes: A Betrayal in Blood* by **Mark A Latham** (£7.99) throws new light on the story of Count Dracula, to reveal some very disturbing facts. The story is a bit too revisionist for my taste, but it's ingenious and well told. Even more unusual — and madly funny — is *Warlock Holmes: The Hellhound of the Baskervilles* by **GS Denning** (£7.99) in which the accidental detective gets better after being poisoned and shot dead, not to mention being psychically invaded by Professor Moriarty. But a regiment of supernatural foes waits to confront him, and the result is suspenseful surrealist comedy.

RJ