

“I AM AN OMNIVOROUS READER”

Book reviews by ALISTAIR DUNCAN, MATTHEW J ELLIOTT, PAUL THOMAS MILLER, MARK MOWER, SARAH OBERMULLER-BENNETT, VALERIE SCHREINER, JOHN SHEPPARD, JEAN UPTON, NICHOLAS UTECHIN and ROGER JOHNSON

Sherlock Holmes, Arthur Conan Doyle and Switzerland edited by Marcus Geisser, Guy Marriott and Michael E Meer. *The Reichenbach Irregulars of Switzerland*, 2021. 108pp (pbk)

There is no story in the Canon that carries greater resonance than “The Final Problem”: so much is involved in the tale of the Falls that you could write a whole book on the subject. And lo! Here is that book: the result of several Reichenbach Irregular conferences and meetings over the years — and a welcome addition it is to the scholarship that has gathered around matters Swiss. The editors have subtitled the volume “Serious and less serious musings!” and the content is certainly mixed.

At the scholarly end, there are important pieces involving the geography of Meiringen and its immediate surrounds that need to be pinned down to establish routes Holmes may or may not have taken in the immediate aftermath of the encounter with Moriarty. The role played by the Alpine guide Melchior Anderegg (1828-1914) is at the heart of articles by Eva Zenk Iggländ and Guy Marriott; an expert knowledge of the pros and cons of the Susten and Grimsel Passes is also to be recommended. I was impressed by Brian Stone’s knowledge of train times at Grindelwald and Interlaken.

Enrico Solito ushers readers away from specifically Swiss areas to highlight Florence, and Catherine Cooke does much the same for Nepal and Lama-esque escapades. Wider and wider do our Reichenbach Irregular editors venture in search of material that some *might* think verges on the less-relevant: a discussion of the maiden Heidi, lots of Doyle on skis and even more of Doyle in *The Stark Munro Letters* and his Brigadier Gerard stories (the latter *explicitly* stated to have no relevance to Switzerland whatsoever!)

We are returned to more practical offerings with Julie McKuras’s retelling (and none the worse for it) of the story of Philip Hench, the Norwegian Explorers’ society and their Reichenbach Falls plaque; a good piece of literary history by Marcus Geisser on how “The Empty House” came to be written; and a strong piece by Michael Meer pulling together general Doyleian and Davos threads.

This is an entertaining and informative

collection of writings encompassing just about everything a reader could wish to know about the subject. Published at £25.00, as I write this review at the beginning of November 2021, it is available *new* from Amazon.co.uk at £7.64.

NU

“I Should Like These Dates a Little Clearer”: A Chronological Study of the Recorded Cases of Sherlock Holmes by A.R. Colpo. *Independently published*, 2021. 352pp. £12.00 (pbk)

Alec R Colpo is American. He doesn’t appear to belong to any Sherlock Holmes society or to have contributed to any Holmesian journal — but why haven’t we heard of him before? His chronology is minutely researched and reasoned, and he sensibly chose not to consult earlier Holmesian chronologies beforehand. Afterwards, however, he compared his results with theirs, “noting when their arguments supported our conclusions and when our evidence disproved the theories for alternative dates proposed by others. This process resulted in our altering or refining some of our original dates based upon the finding of others; in all such instances, we have explicitly referenced the works that influenced us.” (The editorial “we” is slightly irritating, though it is, I suppose, appropriately Victorian.) Mr Colpo was unable to obtain Henry T Folsom’s chronology, and he evidently didn’t know about Vincent Delay’s and Paul Thomas Miller’s. Regarding *The Sign of Four*, I’d like to point him towards Bernard Davies’s “Dr Watson’s Deuteronomy” (included in *Holmes & Watson Country*, second edition now available) which definitively dates that case to July 1888. Nevertheless, this book is a first-rate example of Holmesian scholarship.

RJ

Sherlock In the Seventies by Derham Groves. *The Visible Spectrum* (printed by Amazon), 2021. 266pp. £10.99 (pbk)

The subtitle of this informative paperback is *A Wild Decade of Sherlock Holmes Films*, and, bookended by two classics — *The Private Life of Sherlock Holmes* and *Murder by Decree* — it is an

exciting Holmesian era to revisit.

Groves breezes chattily down the by-ways of the Peter Cook/Dudley Moore *Hound of the Baskervilles* (finding it funnier than most others have) and the John Cleese idiosyncrasy *The Strange Case of the End of Civilisation as We Know It*, by way of the excellent *Sherlock Holmes in New York* (Roger Moore is *good*) and the Gene Wilder spoof *The Adventure of Sherlock Holmes' Smarter Brother*. Then there was the oddity of the Stewart Granger *Hound*, the nearly-there *Seven-Per-Cent Solution* and the mini-masterpiece that is *They Might Be Giants*.

Good space is granted to background and plotline information, although Groves enjoys making occasionally tedious links between minor character actors and going into frankly unnecessary details (yes, I think we know there is a difference between the Ian Fleming who created James Bond and the Ian Fleming who was Arthur Wontner's Watson!) And while I'm being querulous, the proof-reading could have been better. But the author has tracked down some interesting people to talk to who were involved in the films and has picked up on press cuttings from the most recondite sources. Above all, he reminds those of us who 'were there' of all this extraordinary Sherlockian cinematic activity, and provides a valuable service to those who have come new to it more than forty years on.

NU

Sherlock Holmes: A Study in Illustrations, volume 1 by Mike Foy. *MX Publishing*, 2021. 400pp. £24.99/\$34.95/€29.99 (hbk)

Following Mike Foy's excellent reference tome on Holmesian characters, the subject of this first large volume in his new venture is the initial illustrators of the stories: Charles Doyle, David Friston, James Greig, Walter Paget, and, of course, Sidney Paget — as well as some whose names are unknown. For each there is a short biography, and then their illustrations, usually with the artist's name, the title of the story, the publication in which it appeared and even details such as the page on which the image was presented. Look upon this book as an illustration catalogue: it is not going into depth about the images or their creators. Nearly all the images are one per page, hence the length of the book.

It is in obvious competition with *The Complete Paget Portfolio* by Nick Utechin (reviewed in the Winter 2018 Journal) which scores over it in some areas. Utechin's enables us to compare some of the magazine illustrations with the original artwork, and his book is a lot more portable. However, Foy's book presents more artists than just Paget. The concept is not original, but in this sphere so little is. If you have *The Complete Paget Portfolio* you may not want to fork out for this volume, but if, like me, you're a completist, you probably will. The later volumes, featuring other artists, will be moving into territory where there is less competition. I look forward to their arrival.

AD

Sherlock Holmes: The Hero With a Thousand Faces by David MacGregor. *MX Publishing*, 2021. 354pp (vol 1), 348pp (vol 2). Each £17.99 (hbk), £10.99 (pbk)

This work is a significant achievement and clearly a labour of love. I am impressed at the quality of the research that has gone into it. Volume One, across six chapters, concerns itself with the creation of Holmes through to the films of the early 1930s.

Predictably it begins with the origins of Holmes, covering the initial public reaction to the first novels and the later success of the short stories. Conan Doyle's love/hate relationship with Holmes is spelt out succinctly, and an admirable job is done of explaining how the public sought a Holmesian 'fix' in rip-offs and imitators whenever he dared to lay down his pen.

Then MacGregor takes a wide look at the literature and events before and during Holmes's time, to see the potential influences on the adventures of the great detective. I've not seen any writer attempt it to the same degree of accessible depth. One great observation is that modern audiences have a fixed view, largely underpinned by screen adaptations, of Holmes and Watson as perpetual roommates in 221B Baker Street. However, to their original public, their fame took off when they were living apart. It was only with the short stories, when Watson was married and living away, that fame beckoned. I knew that Watson was not resident at 221B (from a publication perspective) from 1891 until the early years of the 20th century, but it had never been

presented to me quite so well.

Roughly at the half-way point, MacGregor moves on to the birth of Sherlockian scholarship, followed by the beginning of leading societies such as the Sherlock Holmes Society of London and the Baker Street Irregulars. Both subjects are handled well with just the right level of detail.

Chapter 5 covers William Gillette's play *Sherlock Holmes* in the early 1900s, pointing out that this is when real liberties began to be taken with Holmes. For people today who get hot under the collar about changes made to the stories and characters in modern adaptations it is a timely reminder that changes to Holmes have been going on for over a century, and some were even sanctioned by Conan Doyle himself.

Volume One concludes with a look at Holmes's initial outings on the silver screen. Barrymore, Brook, Norwood, and Wontner all get examined but we have to wait for the Holmes that everyone remembers from the mid-twentieth century.

AD

Basil Rathbone (for it is he) is covered in the first chapter of Volume Two, which dubs him "the definitive Holmes of film" — indeed, he became identified with the detective, to the extent that in the 1971 movie *They Might Be Giants*, a New York cop greets Justin Playfair, who believes himself to be Holmes, with the words, "Why, Mr Rathbone. It's an honour, sir!"

In the 1950s and '60s, despite faithful adaptations in other media, especially radio, it seemed, says MacGregor, that on film "a 'straight' Sherlock Holmes story was simply not viable as a cultural commodity." Hence the unnecessary tweaks to *The Hound of the Baskervilles* in Hammer's 1959 version, and the absurd American promotion that linked the dark and exciting *A Study in Terror* with the camp comedy of *Batman: The Movie*. The 1970s brought a different approach, showing and even celebrating the weaknesses in Holmes's character, flaws largely ignored in the Rathbone films. *The Private Life of Sherlock Holmes*, *The Seven-Per-Cent Solution* and *Murder by Decree* show how effective such an approach could be, though the three are very different creatures. Hero or antihero, Sherlock Holmes lived on, in comedy as well as drama.

A survey of the detective's career on television, from 1937 to 1984, precedes a thoughtful appraisal of the Granada TV series, which made Jeremy Brett

world-famous and featured some of the best screen dramatisations ever. Despite a few truly regrettable late episodes, the series is unlikely to be bettered in my lifetime.

Chapters 11 and 12 bring us up to date. The rare occasional error in *Sherlock Holmes: The Hero With a Thousand Faces* is far outweighed by the overall excellence of the work.

RJ

The Case of the Murderous Dr Cream: The Hunt for a Victorian Era Serial Killer by Dean Jobb. *Algonquin Books*, 2021. 432pp. £21.99 (hbk), £12.97 (pbk)

If you watched David Pirie's TV series *Murder Rooms*, with Dr Joseph Bell (the excellent Ian Richardson) and a perversely clean-shaven Arthur Conan Doyle, you'll remember a character called Thomas Neill, who was made out to be the "real" James Moriarty. By implication, as I recall, Neill and Conan Doyle were fellow-medical students at Edinburgh University. Actually, as Dean Jobb notes in his article in this issue, Neill, whose full name was Thomas Neill Cream, was already a qualified physician, and was briefly in Edinburgh working to qualify for the combined licence of the Royal College of Physicians and the Royal College of Surgeons, while Conan Doyle was in his first year at the University Medical School. *Murder Rooms* is fiction. Professor Jobb's book is factual, the work of a scrupulous researcher and compelling storyteller. In Canada and the USA, Neill Cream got away with murder; he was convicted of one killing in Chicago, but served only ten years of a life sentence. His luck ran out in London, thanks in part to the dedicated detective work of Inspector Frederick Jarvis, but not until four more women had died. It's the story of a doctor who really was "the worst of criminals"; of his victims; and of the failure and eventual success of the law. Highly recommended!

RJ

Baker Street Almanac 2021: An Annual Capsule of a Timeless Past & Future edited by Ross E Davies, Jayantika Ganguly, Ira Brad Matetsky & Monica Schmidt. *The Green Bag, Inc.*, 2021. 390pp. \$30.00 within USA (pbk) or download free at www.greenbag.org

The 2121 *Almanac* lives up to the high standard of its predecessors. Nearly 100 pages are devoted to

worldwide Holmesian activities in 2020, the great majority of them in America. Nearly as many are given over to Peter Blau's invaluable monthly newsletter *Scuttlebutt from the Spermaceti Press* for the year. We also have the 2020 issues of the BSI Trust's newsletter, *For the Sake of the Trust*; surveys of the Arthur Conan Doyle Collection at Toronto Reference Library, *Holmes and the Law*, *Sherlockian Numismatica*, the podcast *Doings of Doyle*, and more. There's Mike McSwiggin's list of worldwide Holmes societies (inevitably, already out of date) and the start of what will undoubtedly be an unending list of "Past Sherlockians". And much more, including a new annotated edition of "The Adventure of the Priory School". Capital!

RJ

Papers on the Sundial: A Collection of Writings about the Writings by the Members of The Five Orange Pips. *The Five Orange Pips*, 2020. 156pp. \$45.00 in US, \$60.00 overseas (jbk)

The Five Orange Pips are probably unique. The founders in 1935 were unaware of the recently established Baker Street Irregulars, and although they eventually became a certified scion of the BSI they tend to consider themselves a separate, equal society. The members are few, but the scholarly papers that individual Pips have contributed to many of the leading Holmesian publications are usually of the highest quality. Remarkably, this book is only their second publication. The first, *The Best of the Pips*, in 1955 is now an expensive and desirable rarity. (*The Best of the Pips, volume II: More Papers on the Sundial* was published by the BSI as *The Baker Street Journal Christmas Annual 1999*, and is still available from <https://bakerstreetirregulars.com/tag/xmas+in-stock/>.)

Contributors to *Papers on the Sundial* include several familiar names, such as Donald Pollock, Philip Shreffler, Robert Katz and Thomas Cynkin. Here is Jon Lellenberg's last substantial paper, in which he traces links between certain rather shadowy members of the Pips and US Military Intelligence in the 1940s. Equally fascinating is Russell Merritt's account of how *The Best of the Pips* nearly scooped the world with the first publication of Conan Doyle's play *The Crown Diamond*. (Our own Society has a part in the story.) This is a first-class collection, beautifully produced in a limited signed edition of a hundred. Copies are available from Donald Pollock, who says that

"purchase is probably easiest to manage through a service such as PayPal at my e-mail address: donaldkpollock@gmail.com."

RJ

Sherlock Holmes of Baking Street edited by Margie Deck and Nancy Holder. *Belanger Books*, 2021. 437pp. £21.95 (pbk)

There are several Holmesian cookery books, but this, I think, is the first devoted to baking. Except that it isn't really a cookbook: there are recipes, though only a few of them are seriously intended. Instead, we have stories by the likes of Mattias Boström, Jayantika Ganguly, Enrico Solito & Gianluca Salvatori, Robin Rowles, Julie McKuras, and Carole Nelson Douglas, whose "The Trouble with Truffles" may be the last tale of Irene Adler she wrote. And we have articles, serious or fantastic, by Doug Wrigglesworth, Paul Thomas Miller, Tim Johnson, Sonia Fetherston, Andy Solberg, Rob Nunn, Stephan Arthur, Bonnie MacBird, and others. The subjects include Inspector Baynes of the Surrey Constabulary; Watson in Afghanistan; baked goods from Meiringen to Florence; Holmes's childhood; Mrs Beeton, whose husband founded the immortal *Christmas Annual*; curried mutton; woodcock... And there's a most interesting interview with Jeffrey Hatcher, author of three successful Sherlock Holmes plays — and the screenplay of the film *Mr Holmes*. Baking does feature throughout, though its relevance is sometimes slight. It matters not, though: there really is something for everyone here. And net profits from the book go to the Beacon Society, whose aim is to bring Holmes to young people (and vice-versa).

RJ

The Seamstress of Peckham Rye by Jonathan Barnes. *Big Finish*, 2021. 3 CDs. £24.99 or download £19.99

The Big Finish audio production company is most famous for its ever-expanding range of *Doctor Who* titles, but its Sherlock Holmes series, starring Nicholas Briggs as Holmes and Richard Earl as Watson. has become an infrequent but very welcome addition to their output.

The latest instalment is a three-part mystery set during Holmes's latter years at Baker Street. Jonathan Barnes seems to prefer the post-*Return* era, possibly because it allows him freedom to toy with the fates of established characters (one of

whom meets an abrupt end in *The Ordeals of Sherlock Holmes*, released in 2014). Here, Holmes and Watson are apart for much of the mystery, the doctor having his own problems to deal with — namely, assisting his American fiancée to secure a divorce from her unsavoury husband. This plotline is by no means unconnected with the main mystery involving a double murder, a possible successor to the title “Napoleon of Crime” and a stage performer whose act involves her recounting the hideous indignities she endured some years earlier. It’s gratifying to see so much time and attention lavished on the character of Watson — certainly more than Conan Doyle managed in some of the tales in the *Casebook*.

After eleven years playing the detective duo for the audio medium, Briggs and Earl are more than equal to whatever challenges they are presented with by Barnes. Holmes is at his most Quixotic here, at first wishing to have nothing to do with the case, before later throwing himself into it both figuratively and literally — almost being run down by a cab at one point. Watson, meanwhile, is forced into a decision that tests his morality more than ever before. The plotting is deliberate and methodical, and puts one in mind of Russell Lewis’s work on *Endeavour*, drawing seemingly disparate elements together into a satisfying whole.

MJE

The MX Book of New Sherlock Holmes Stories — Part XXV (1881-1888), Part XXVI (1889-1897), and Part XXVII (1898-1928), edited by David Marcum. *MX Publishing*, 2021. 508pp (Part XXV), 508pp (Part XXVI), 528pp (Part XXVII). Each £28.99 (hbk), £17.99 (pbk)

Pastiche is a funny thing. You know you’re not going to be satisfied that it’s a proper Holmes story when you open the cover, but they still have value. We’re never going to have the thrill of reading a real Holmes story for the first time again, but a well written pastiche can show you how other people see the Canon and, often, what they think was missing, through their own additions. And, in a way, seeing the Canon through these other eyes is perhaps the closest we’ll get to being able to read the Canon for the first time again.

The latest three volumes in this series continue David Marcum’s selection of traditional Sherlock Holmes short story pastiches by different authors. Sherlockian pastiches aren’t everyone’s cup of tea

and quality in collections such as these is often somewhat variable. However, Marcum’s displays evident passion for this project and it is clear he has put a good deal of effort into the curation of his books. The stories collected here are all good and several are even better (one of my personal favourites was “Dial Square” by Martin Daley). While it is true that no one will ever perfectly match the tone of a truly Canonical tale, the writings here make a good go of it and the authors should certainly feel proud of their achievements. Acknowledgement must also go to Brian Belanger, whose cover designs tie this series together into some very smart looking tomes fit to ornament any Sherlockian book shelf.

PTM

Grandville L’Intégrale by Bryan Talbot. *Jonathan Cape*, 2021. 608pp. £40.00 (hbk)

Here are all five *Grandville* graphic novels, in one sumptuous volume. The high price-tag is justified. *But* — Amazon.co.uk offers the book for £24.99. Or there’s a Kindle edition for £9.99.

Our member Bryan Talbot is an exceptional artist. His full-colour illustrations are always striking and often beautiful. He’s also an outstanding writer, with a literally fantastic imagination. The setting is a Steampunk world in which England recently gained independence from France, having been conquered by Napoleon two centuries ago, along with the rest of Europe. Nearly 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, J.J. Grandville, whose depictions of people as hominid animals inspired these stories). Our hero is a badger, Detective Inspector Archie LeBrock of Scotland Yard, who has something of Dirty Harry about him, and more than a touch of Sherlock Holmes, having been mentored by the very Holmesian DCI Stamford Hawksmoor — who is, of course, a hawk. LeBrock tackles gang warfare, espionage, political corruption, a powerful religious cult... These are genuinely serious issues, whose gravity isn’t muffled by the wit and sly humour of the telling. The whole saga is a genuinely exciting drama — and the often grotesque characters are impressively credible.

There are thirty-five pages of previously unpublished annotations, and an introduction by Ian

Rankin, who says, “I’ve never come across a fictional world as fully-realised as Bryan Talbot’s Grandville.” I’ll go along with that!

RJ

The Meeting of the Minds: The Cases of Sherlock Holmes & Solar Pons, Part II edited by David Marcum. *Belanger Books*, 2021. 353pp. £36.95 (hbk), £18.95 (pbk)

The stories of Solar Pons — “the Sherlock Holmes of Praed Street”, created by August Derleth — have been favourites of mine since my schooldays, and I’m delighted that Derleth’s heirs have approved the reissue of his books *and* the commissioning and publication of new exploits for Pons and his friend Dr Parker.

It was evident from the start that Pons knew Holmes and had been his protégé, but any details were discreetly unmentioned. That’s rectified here, in ten stories by Mark Mower, Jayantika Ganguly, Chris Chan and others, in which we learn, for example, that years after the “Yellow Face” affair Grant Munro faced a further mystery; that Dr Watson saved Parker’s life after a murder attempt; and that a summons to Wisconsin to investigate the legendary monster called the *Hodag* brought the two detectives face to face with the young August Derleth. I think Pons’s creator would like that, and I think he’d be impressed by the collection altogether.

RJ

Sherlock Holmes and the Mystery of the Three Monks by Johanna M Rieke. *MX Publishing*, 2021. 165pp. £8.99 (pbk)

It’s summer of 1890, and Dr Watson has taken a holiday with his wife to a village in the sleepy East Sussex countryside. Before long, he is surrounded by ghosts, distressed women and dead canines. To add to his trouble, he finds himself being followed by a mysterious man. As the situation deteriorates, Watson writes to Holmes, who remains conspicuous by his absence. However, fear not, for Holmes’s presence looms large over this story. Very soon he is on the scene, making sparkling deductions as the case moves beyond the confines of the village to take on a more sinister aspect, and the adventure races to a dramatic climax in which Watson comes to the rescue. Rieke has again successfully recreated the mood of the original

stories in this intriguing mystery, while remaining faithful to the spirit of the canon.

SO-B

Sherlock Holmes and the Egyptian Tomb Mystery by Johanna M. Rieke. *MX Publishing*, 2021. 143pp. £8.99 (pbk)

Following on from Rieke’s previous novel, *The Mystery of the Three Monks*, we find ourselves back in 1890, and Dr Watson has returned to London after his eventful holiday in East Sussex. Holmes is bored, but soon finds a diversion when a professor of archaeology calls seeking justice for his nephew, falsely accused of murder. What appears to be a straightforward case soon becomes more complex, involving stolen papers from foreign climes, Egyptian mummies, theatre performers and nefarious goings-on at the British Museum. One of Rieke’s strengths is in bringing canon characters into her stories and breathing fresh life into their depictions, so it is a treat to see familiar faces making their entrances to add to the mystery. The climax of the story is thrilling as our intrepid duo find themselves in a fight for their lives. Overall, another gem from Rieke, who weaves an intricate tale with flair to create a thoroughly enjoyable adventure.

SO-B

A Case of Royal Blackmail by Sherlock Holmes [sic]. *Affable Media*, 2021. 304pp. £7.50 (pbk)

The actual author is our member Ian Strathcarron, and his novel is intelligently written with a refreshingly light touch. The 24-year-old Sherlock Holmes recounts how he untangled the web of blackmail and deceit surrounding the “complex romantic endeavours” of the Prince of Wales, later King Edward VII, those of Lillie Langtry and her various suitors, and the morass of “scandal sheets” and libel cases surrounding the Prince’s court of the time. Set in July 1879, eighteen months before Holmes met Dr Watson, the action takes place in the vividly described London of Queen Victoria. Also revealed is the full story behind three previously untold cases: “Vamberry the Wine Merchant”, “Ricoletti of the Club Foot and the Abominable Wife” and a new discovery, “The Curious Case of Oscar Wilde’s Amethyst Tie-pin”.

JU

Sherlock Holmes and the Eye of Heka by David Marcum. *MX Publishing*, 2021. 283pp. £17.99 (hbk), £12.84 (pbk)

David Marcum is a very prolific writer of Holmesian pastiche, and needs no further introduction. This is a full-length novel of depth and subtlety. The plot blends together classic detection, Watson's personal life, some high ideals, and a lot of the usual skulduggery; in other words, there is something for everyone. The narrative moves seamlessly between authentic extracts from the Canon and Mr Marcum's own inventions and interpretations, and, because it is so delightfully well written, it all makes perfect sense. As well as the sound Canonical links, there are some nice touches of late-Victorian life.

As seems to be sadly inevitable in pastiches, there are occasional outbreaks of twenty-first century attitudes and values which do sound odd coming from Watson and his contemporaries, but these lapses are so infrequent here, that they are soon forgotten in the enjoyment of quality writing.

All in all, an excellent piece of work which will be enjoyed by all its readers.

JS

The Only One in the World: A Sherlock Holmes Anthology edited by Narelle M Harris. *Clan Destine Press*, 2021. 257pp. £22.01 (hbk), £15.99 (pbk)

Narelle Harris has edited a truly remarkable collection of thirteen tales by fourteen writers. She is herself a prolific writer in many different genres, frankly too many to mention here.

This eclectic and intriguing anthology is not Holmesian pastiche — it is beyond pastiche! Holmes and Watson are re-imagined in time and space; times from 1230 BC to AD 2051, and places including South Africa, Russia, Poland, England, Australia and New Orleans. Different genders and sexualities are by no means neglected either.

Many of these short stories are clever and ingenious. All of them explore cultural and historic experience in ways that are sharp and occasionally grotesque, and that might be challenging to many Holmesians. As an exercise in “what if” this book probably has no rivals, but it could well be described as a “Marmite” book; you will either love it or hate it.

JS

Sherlock Holmes: The Three Brothers by S.F. Bennett. *Belanger Books*, 2021. 229pp. £18.95 (pbk)

“Come what may, Watson, Thursday morning you get married.”

“With your brother missing and who-knows-what happening with the government?”

That brief exchange effectively sums up the plot of this briskly-paced, if occasionally over-written, pastiche by Sarah Bennett. Mycroft is at the heart of the story, Watson has to deal with his brother's debts, and there are train crashes and potentially murderous goings on near Chislehurst. I missed the author's clever humour as shown in her previous outing, *The Secret Diary of Mycroft Holmes* (2017), but this is a very serviceable adventure.

NU

Sherlock Holmes and the Pandemic of Death by Daniel D Victor. *MX Publishing*, 2021. 154pp. £14.99 (hbk), £8.99 (pbk)

Daniel D Victor is a prolific writer of Holmesian pastiche, whose output has a distinct tendency towards literary connections, and this is the seventh book on that theme. As is so frequently the case, it is based on a manuscript found in that evidently huge, and seemingly inexhaustible, despatch box in the vaults of Cox and Co. I will not do anything to spoil the plot for you, since it is an enjoyable read in many different ways. Not only are there literary characters involved, but medical ones too, and accordingly this book is both interesting and topical. Watson comes out all right in the end, once Holmes has brought his skills to bear on the problem. There are sufficient Canonical references to keep things adequately grounded.

However, I must say that I feel that Mr Victor lapses occasionally in his role as “editor”, by having Watson, and another character of his generation, using both traditional and contemporary American phrases. This did not endear the book to me, and I suspect that others, at least on this side of the Atlantic, would share my opinion.

JS

A Continuum of Sherlock Holmes Stories by Jayantika Ganguly. *MX Publishing*, 2021. 338pp. £11.95 (pbk)

A welcome volume of thirteen short stories that are very much in the style of the original tales.

There are racy plots, colourful characters, and well-paced action throughout this collection, and healthy doses of both humour and intrigue. The two stand out tales for me, were: “The Adventure of the Impossible Murders” and “The Adventure of the Obsessive Ghost”. The first relates the story of the “Archangel Murders” — a case in which Dr Watson’s medical expertise comes to the fore in helping to uncover the nefarious activities of “The Left Hand of God.” The latter sees our heroes investigating the appearance of a seemingly supernatural figure which is threatening to murder a Captain James Morgan in the run up to the birth of his first-born child. The book contains frequent nods to the stories of the original canon and some of our favourite *untold tales* — two good examples of which are also featured in this fine collection. Overall, a well written and engaging volume which does not disappoint.

MM

Sherlock Holmes and The Adventure of The Elusive Ear by David MacGregor. *MX Publishing*, 2021. 164pp. £8.99 (pbk)

Irene Adler is an elusive figure in the Sherlock Holmes canon. Was she more than the only woman who played Holmes at his own game — and won?

David MacGregor has written three Holmes plays, now adapted as a series of short novels, taking the relationship of Adler and Holmes to a new level, under the overall title of *Sherlock in Love: The Holmes-Adler Mysteries*. The first, *The Adventure of the Elusive Ear*, introduces the reader to a whole new living situation at 221B: imagine if Mrs Hudson was Dr Watson’s creation to replace Miss Adler — the infamous duo are actually a trio! In this first story, the artist Vincent Van Gogh arrives in London, where he had lived for a while in the 1870s. Holmes receives a surprise visit from the great painter, and from the daughter of his arch-nemesis, Professor Moriarty. A third visitor is the one and only Oscar Wilde, who provides a helping hand in the case. The presence of the familiar historical figures of Van Gogh and Wilde enhances the atmosphere of 19th century England — and Europe.

An avid reader can’t go wrong with adding this different and fun story to the Sherlock Holmes world.

VS

Tales of Scotland Yard: Lestrade by Bianca Jenkins. *Orange Pip Books*, 2020. 170pp. £8.99 (pbk)

A captivating tale focused on the early career of a certain Giles Lestrade. It provides us with a fascinating insight into the private life of this much-loved Canonical character. Lestrade is a newly promoted rookie inspector who takes the lead in investigating the disappearance of a young boy. As the case unfolds, he convinces his seasoned inspector colleagues to lend their weight to a wider investigation of a gang of “slavers”.

The characters in the book are very well drawn. I particularly liked the inclusion of Lestrade’s sister, Kristina, who helps to hold up a mirror to her talented, but socially awkward, brother. Through their relationship we learn lots about Lestrade’s difficult childhood and determination to see that justice is done. This is a great first novel and I look forward to reading subsequent tales of the very capable Inspector Lestrade.

MM

Sherlock Holmes: A Yorkshireman in Baker Street by Robert V. Stapleton. *MX Publishing*, 2021. 360pp. £10.99 (pbk)

This book contains eleven traditional pastiches. Rather neatly, two are told from the perspective of canonical characters other than Holmes and Watson: “Larceny in the Sky with Diamonds” is narrated by Professor Moriarty, while “You Only Live Thrice” is presented by the very capable Inspector Baynes of the Surrey County Constabulary (who we first came across in “The Adventure of Wisteria Lodge”). The stories are true to the style and character of the originals. Each plot is carefully crafted, and the tone and pace of each story makes this a fine read. The best of the bunch is “Dr Agar and the Dinosaur”, which introduces us to a character alluded to in “The Devil’s Foot”, namely Dr Moore Agar of Harley Street. He enlists Holmes and Watson in locating the whereabouts of a stolen fossil — the impressive and newly-unearthed head of a Triceratops. This is a lively tale which also features a villain from Dr Watson’s military past.

Stapleton clearly writes from the heart, for these are tales told with great skill and deep affection for the canon. Let’s hope there are lots more to come.

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In brief

Our good friend **Charles Hall** is a long-time collector and dealer in items pertaining to Sherlock Holmes (and other interests). He recently published a fascinating 60-page booklet, *A Lifetime Dealing and Collecting*, (Charles Hall, 12 Paisley Terrace, Edinburgh EH8 7JW; phone 0131-258-5629; £5.50 + £1.50 postage within the UK) filled with entertaining anecdotes and loaded with colour illustrations, the majority relating to Sherlockian collectibles. Charles is having a bit of a clear-out, so it would be worth contacting him to see what's available to add to your own collection.

Covid-19 and lockdown have prevented "Don't Go Into the Cellar!" from touring with the well-regarded Holmesian and other productions that are their speciality, but as the company's actor and writer **Jonathan Goodwin** says, the pandemic did open the door to the online performance and a new fan base, not least for his recent interpretation of Jeremy Brett as Holmes. The five scripts in his new book *Don't Go Into the Cellar, Mr Holmes! Sherlock Holmes Stories Re-imagined for the Stage* (MX, 2021; £6.99, pbk) include an impressive reworking of "The Mazarin Stone", a fantasy that introduces elements from other Conan Doyle stories, and adaptations of three stories by Tony Reynolds. I hope to see them performed before too long!

Luis Rodriguez Sol is a lawyer who understands the importance of evidence. Intrigued by the fact that none of the various published plans of the sitting-room at 221B really matches the canonical descriptions, he decided to create a faithful model. There are many difficulties, including the lack of bow windows along Victorian and Edwardian Baker Street, but, while his solution may not completely convince, it is elegant and acceptable. It's published in a charming booklet, *221B Baker Street: A Profound Study on Sherlock Holmes's Sitting-room* (The Author, 2021; £6.00/\$9.00, pbk).

In the preface to *A Sherlock Holmes Commentary*, one of the truly great works in our field, D Martin Dakin wrote: "... while I have been rereading some of the classics, including past issues of *The Sherlock Holmes Journal*, I have found to my mortification that in several instances where I

thought I was being original, I had been anticipated by other scholars." His curiosity piqued, **Bruce Harris** scoured the SHJ and the BSJ up to 1972, when Dakin's book was published, and, as a possible stimulus for other researchers, he compiled an 86-page book, *Anticipations in D Martin Dakin's A Sherlock Holmes Commentary* (The Battered Silicon Dispatch Box, 2021; \$15.00, pbk). It's available from Mr Harris at 384 Fawnridge Drive, Scotch Plains, NJ 07076, USA; e-mail marxman@comcast.net; or from the publisher at george.vanderburgh@gmail.com.

A couple of years ago I hailed *Too Many Clues* as the tenth in the consistently delightful "McCabe and Cody" series by **Dan Andriacco**. Yet the cover of *No Ghosts Need Apply* (MX, 2021; £9.99, pbk) declares it to be "Book Ten". What's going on? Well, the new book is actually the tenth *novel*. Sebastian McCabe, BSI and his brother-in-law Jeff Cody have investigated a surprising number of homicides in the small university town of Erin, Ohio, but the problem of an impossible murder in Erin's haunted gastropub, a former speakeasy, during filming for a popular TV show, *Dining (Way) Out*, is compounded by the restrictions necessitated by Covid-19. Besides the novels, there have been two volumes of shorter cases: *Rogues Gallery* and, late last year, *Murderers' Row* (MX, 2020; £6.99, pbk). Long or short, the plots are ingenious, the characters engaging, and the narratives both compelling and witty. As I said, consistently delightful!

Perhaps *The Rise and Fall of an Eighties Sherlockian* by **Brad Keefauver** (The Author, 2021; £7.30, pbk) does, as the cover says, offer "the sort of details that only another Sherlock Holmes fan would love", and perhaps it helps that for me the world of Holmes opened fully on our Society's second Swiss Pilgrimage shortly before the 1980s began — also that the first Sherlockians I had contact with were, like Mr Keefauver, American, and that the '80s brought us Jeremy Brett as the great detective. Mr K's experience was different from mine in many ways, but there were overlaps, especially in the people who, mostly, helped nourish our appreciation (Shaw, Blau...), and he writes in a frank, friendly style. I can't guarantee that you will, but I enjoyed his book — and if he did fall he's certainly risen again.

Far From Holmes: An Irreverent Guide to All the Sherlock Holmes You Really Don't Want to Watch Yourself by **Nicko Vaughan** (Telos Publishing, 2021; £12.99, pbk) is great fun, though perhaps the subtitle is rather misleading. It implies that all the fifteen films and TV programmes covered are pretty poor — which some certainly are (and the Cook-Moore *Hound* is dreadful). Dr Vaughan's criticisms are forthright and entertaining, but so are her favourable comments on the John Cleese *Elementary*, *My Dear Watson* and the Anthony Higgins *Sherlock Holmes Returns* (I prefer the Michael Pennington *Return of Sherlock Holmes*, but it's a matter of taste, after all).

Hounded! My Lifelong Obsession With Sherlock Holmes and the Hound of the Baskervilles by **Vince Staddon** (Orange Pip, 2021; £14.99, hbk; £12.49, pbk) is mad, intelligent, and endearing. Mr Staddon's chosen project during lockdown was to reread the novel and any number of related pastiches, watch every screen adaptation he can find, listen to every audio version, and play

the occasional *Hound* game. His comments are balanced — if that's the right word, which it isn't — by remarks about his own life, interspersed with verses, songs, gloriously silly scripts, and more. He “makes deductions, adopts disguises, sends anonymous ‘Beware the moor’ letters to Canadians, steals footwear, learns Sherlock Holmes's favoured martial art, and he tracks the Hound across the melancholy moor during those dark hours when the forces of evil are exalted.”

Back in 1970 the, er, adult magazine *Mayfair* featured a selection of Sidney Paget's illustrations with new comic captions, and Lord Donegall reprinted a few in that year's December SHJ. Many have had a go at re-captioning Paget since then, and **Mike Foy** is well-placed to do so (see the review of *Sherlock Holmes: A Study in Illustrations, volume I*, above). Hence ***Sherlock Holmes: The Man With the Twisted Script*** (MX, 2021; £6.99, pbk). It made me chuckle!

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