

“I AM AN OMNIVOROUS READER”

Book reviews by MARK JONES, GUY MARRIOTT, SARAH OBERMULLER-BENNETT, JOHN SHEPPARD and ROGER JOHNSON

Stimulating Medicine: More Nerve and Knowledge: Doctors, Medicine and the Sherlockian Canon, edited by Robert S Katz, MD, BSI, and Andrew J Solberg, MHS, BSI. *The Baker Street Irregulars*, 2022. 240pp. \$39.99 (hbk)

For this sequel to the first volume in the BSI's exemplary Professions Series, the editors have commissioned twenty-one essays from a refreshingly varied set of contributors. Some are medically qualified, so we may, for instance, take Richard Sveum's analysis of "The Sussex Vampire", Richard Witlin's study of ophthalmic issues in the canon, or Marina Stajic's consideration of inhaled insanity in "The Devil's Foot", as authoritative. But an intelligent interest in the effects of medicine and health doesn't require a medical degree. Jen Eaker asks whether Mary Sutherland was short-sighted or just dim; Mark Jones compares the impact of *The Stark Munro Letters* to that of another ex-doctor's novel, A.J. Cronin's *The Citadel*; Ira Brad Matetsky looks at homicidal physicians, from Roylott to Shipman... Maria Fleischhack ponders the reasons for the detective's early retirement, though she seems to miss the fact that his apparent weakness at the Cunninghams' house was feigned; and Monica Schmidt, surveying the canonical prevalence of spousal abuse, assumes that in "The Abbey Grange" Stanley Hopkins is a member of the local (Kent) constabulary, perhaps forgetting Cyril Overton's remark in "The Missing Three-Quarter": "I've been down to Scotland Yard, Mr. Holmes. I saw Inspector Stanley Hopkins. He advised me to come to you." But those are very minor points. All these papers deserve your attention.

RJ

The Haven Horror: A Facsimile of the Original Manuscript of "The Adventure of the Retired Colourman" by Arthur Conan Doyle, with Annotations and Commentary, edited, with an introduction, by Phillip Bergem, BSI. *The Baker Street Irregulars*, 2022. 221pp. \$39.95 (hbk)

The fourteen essays in the latest BSI Manuscript volume — the title is borrowed from Bernard Davies's masterly study, which you'll find in our Society's book, *Holmes & Watson Country: Travels in Search of Solutions* — are both informative and enjoyable. Particularly interesting for me are Dan Andriacco on prosthetic limbs; Catherine Cooke on Holmes's books of reference; Andrew Malec on the original American

illustrator, Frederic Dorr Steele; David Marcum on Coptic Patriarchs; Paul Singleton on a gentleman's proper dress for the theatre or concert-hall (his observation that the evening waistcoat was "limited to white or ivory" is contradicted by the period illustration of two gents in full evening dress, one with a white waistcoat and one with a black); Nicholas Utechin on the identity of "Little Purlington" (he argues that the Revd J.C. Elman was actually a Methodist minister, though in that case he would not have lived in a vicarage and, crucially, would not have been listed in *Crockford's Clerical Directory*); Burt Wolder on Steele's British counterpart, Frank Wiles; Doug Wigglesworth on Victorian detectives... The heart of the book, though, is the manuscript, handsomely and appropriately reproduced in full colour. Phillip Bergem's annotated transcription is, as always, admirable, and the history of the manuscript is told by the other essential member of the team, Randall Stock.

RJ

Bending the Willow: Jeremy Brett as Sherlock Holmes by David Stuart Davies. *Kaleidoscope Publishing*, 2022. 214pp. £20.22 (hbk)

This is *the* book on this particular subject, first published in 1996, when it was enthusiastically reviewed by Nick Utechin, and now available in a handsome, well-illustrated and judiciously revised edition. Twenty-seven years on, my sagacious predecessor's comments are no less pertinent:

"The impact of Jeremy Brett on our public perception of Sherlock Holmes has been too great and too obvious to detail anew here. His portrayal of the Master in the Granada adaptations was magisterial, controversial and vital. No-one reading this review needs reminding of the subtleties of characterisation or personal attention to Sherlockian detail which were Jeremy Brett's special contributions. The author is able to draw on his several exclusive talks with Brett, and insights and memories from Michael Cox — the instigator and first producer for Granada — are a highlight. Mr Davies has also talked to a couple of the TV directors who not only provided such sumptuous backdrops for the actors, but also were often instrumental in getting the very best performance out of Brett. The book is not a paean of closed-minded praise: it would be ludicrous to suggest that the final episodes starring Brett were on a par with the

wonderful films of the '80s, and the author, while explaining, does not condone. Nor does he shrink from discussing the actor's darker side and the terrible private problems of health and mind which tracked Jeremy Brett in his later years. This is a fine memorial and a fine book."

Absolutely!

RJ

The Science of Sherlock: The Forensic Facts Behind the Fiction by Mark Brake. *Skyhorse*, 2023. 240pp. £10.99 (pbk)

Some statements in the first few pages of Mark Brake's book are not encouraging: Sherlock Holmes is the first fictional detective; Arthur Conan Doyle looked much like Hercule Poirot; Holmes "explored Norway" during the great hiatus... All wrong, and the last clearly a misreading of "the remarkable explorations of a Norwegian named Sigerson". But then the book starts to improve. A comparison of Holmes with *Doctor Who*, *Star Trek* and Harry Potter, and an introduction to the four points of the "Deduction Diamond" (effects, techniques, context and meaning) which apparently give "a reliable and reusable formula for coming to sound conclusions about particular works", bring us to aspects of science as related to the Holmes stories, canonical and otherwise.

We learn how the lives of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, Edgar Allan Poe, Dr Joseph Bell and Sir Isaac Newton contribute aspects of science in Holmes's character, including his deductive, inductive and abductive reasoning. More concrete science includes the evidence of fingerprints and footprints. Chemistry is important in Holmes's work, notably regarding poisons, though we should also remember the phosphoric Hound of the Baskervilles — and was he perhaps seeking to revitalise the British dye industry with his research into coal tar and its derivatives? The last chapter, discussing lenses, astronomy, cryptology, mathematics and ballistics, is followed by a chronology of the life of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, the dates of some of the more important dramatisations, and Mark Brake's own proposed chronology of the canon. Finally, there is a very welcome index — but no list of works consulted by the author.

GM

Writing Holmes! edited by Derrick Belanger, Richard T Ryan, Robert Katz, BSI & Brian Belanger. *Belanger Books*, 2022. 232pp. £16.95 (pbk)

Not everyone is interested in the creative process behind their reading matter, but the real devotee will almost certainly be curious. For *Writing Holmes!* the

editors have invited thirty authors to describe why and how they prepare and execute their stories, plays, essays and reviews. To give an idea of the distinguished names involved, here's a selection of those contributing to each section in the book:

Catherine Cooke and Peggy (Perdue) MacFarlane on *Commentary and Criticism*; Dan Andriacco and Bonnie MacBird on *Pastiches and Stories*; David Stuart Davies and Jeffrey Hatcher on *Plays/Radio Plays/Films*; Mark Jones and Paul Chapman on *Podcasts and Webpages*; Brian Belanger, Steve Emecz, and Mattias Boström on *Editing/Publishing*; Howard Ostrom and Monica Schmidt on *Film/Play Analysis*; Derrick Belanger on *Reviewing the Writings*; Vincent Wright and Brad Keefauver on *Chronology*; Steve Mason and Andrew Lane on *Young Adult & Children's Literature*; and Mark Alberstat on *Sports*.

Different aspects, different viewpoints, but the same dedication and love of the subject. Not a dud among them! I'd like to have something on Sherlockian topography, but that's my only negative comment,

RJ

Steel True, Blade Straight: The Belanger Books Journal of Sherlock Holmes and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle Inspired Stories, Poems and Scholarship, 2022 Annual, edited by Derrick & Brian Belanger. *Belanger Books*, 2022. 441pp. £20.95 (pbk)

Four introductions, a foreword and thirteen essays; thirteen stories, and eight short poems. It seems a fair balance between scholarship and stories, but the latter take up three times as many pages as the former. Even so, this impressive tome is evidence that the ACD Society doesn't have a monopoly on Conan Doyle studies. True, a good half of the book concentrates on Sir Arthur's most famous creation, but "Sherlock Holmes and Spiritualism", for instance, relates to both author and character, and "There Is Nothing So Important as Trifles" discusses the influence of "The Abbey Grange" on the way in which an important feminist story and play interpret the facts of a controversial murder case. "Arthur Conan Doyle Versus the Evil Holmes", however, concerns the American serial killer Herman Mudgett, who called himself H.H. Holmes.

Conan Doyle's varied interests and versatility as a writer are reflected in this book's stories. He actually features in a few, sometimes alongside his fictional characters — Holmes and Watson in "The Unintended Offences" and Professor Challenger in "Thunderbeard", for example. All the tales are intelligent, respectful without being humourless, and

engaging. *Steel True, Blade Straight* is well worth investigating.

RJ

Sherlock Holmes and Conan Doyle in the Newspapers: Volume 6, October 1894, Edited and Annotated by Mattias Boström and Mark Alberstat. *Gasogene Books*, 2023. 266pp. \$38.95 (pbk)

1894 was a newsworthy year for Conan Doyle. Volumes 4 and 5 covered January-June and July-September respectively, but October merits a whole book to itself. The author arrived in America on the 2nd for a three-month lecture tour, which inevitably became rather more than that. From New York he travelled to Chicago (where he was introduced as “Canon Doyle”), Indianapolis, Detroit, Cincinnati (where the *Tribune* reported that he “longed to see a real American lynching” — surely a misunderstanding), back to Chicago and Detroit, then Milwaukee, Brooklyn, and Boston. Everywhere, he was asked about Sherlock Holmes, and his replies seemed already to suggest a possible resurrection. The American journalists, as the editors note, found the man himself fascinating, and their reports “give us the best possible real-life experience of that everlasting, healthy-looking, extremely modest, friendly giant.” Here too are articles from Australia and, of course, Britain, where Henry Irving was touring with great success in Conan Doyle’s play *A Story of Waterloo*. Sir Arthur would doubtless be astonished, but this series is invaluable.

RJ

The Sherlock Holmes Review: 2022 Sherlockian Annual, edited by Steven Doyle. *Gasogene Books*, 2022. 88pp. \$24.95 (pbk)

As we noted last year, these annuals bring back one of the best independent Holmesian journals, as a yearly anthology. This issue opens with “An Actor’s Search for Sherlock Holmes” by Curtis Armstrong, whose lifelong love of the great detective finally paid off professionally when he was cast as Inspector Gregson in the long-running Audible podcast series *Moriarty: The Devil’s Game*. His BSI investiture is “An Actor and a Rare One”. Steven Doyle writes about Conan Doyle and vampires; Dan Andriacco considers Holmes and the supernatural; Rich Krisciunas defends Beppo against the charge of murder; Bob Sharfman finds that the law sometimes lacks justice; Fabienne Courouge searches for the assassin’s boulevard; Regina Stinson notes the importance of disguise in the canon; Bruce Harris looks at the etiquette of the visiting card; Darrel Stevenson reminds us that Holmes had his failures;

Cindy Brown contributes a most welcome account of Edith Meiser’s inestimable contribution to Sherlockian drama... There’s more, and the whole book is enhanced by Mark Gagen’s expertise as Art Editor.

RJ

The Duration Debate: A Sherlock Holmes Chronology by Bruce Harris. Independently published, 2023. 120pp. £8.27 (pbk)

This is a companion to *It’s Not Always 1895: A Sherlock Holmes Chronology*, reviewed in the last issue, and according to the number of days taken to complete an investigation, the author has had to adjust a couple of the dates previously assigned. As he remarks, “Given Dr Watson’s inconsistent, erratic, and often contradictory accounts of The Master’s exploits, it’s no surprise we find days, months, and years all over the map.” In some cases, naturally, the duration is much easier to calculate than the date. In others, the duration is a valuable step towards at least provisionally identifying the date. The calculations involved are fascinating, and I’m wondering now what effect Mr Harris’s findings will have on the researches of other chronologists.

RJ

The Hound of the Baskervilles: A Sherlock Holmes Reader by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, illustrated and embellished by N.R. Reekie. *MX Publishing*, 2022. 198pp. £14.99 (pbk)

Five years on from Mr Reekie’s impressive “illustrated and enhanced” edition of *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* comes this handsome second volume, containing “the classic story, plus questions and answers, writing tasks, research exercises, original play, historical and social backgrounds, and much more”. The illustrations include portraits of the *dramatis personae*, mostly adapted from late Victorian photos and pictures of appropriate-looking actors (Peter Cushing and Andre Morell as Holmes and Watson, with Rondo Hatton as Selden, John Carradine as Sir Charles, and others); plus atmospheric pictures from the period and clever mock-ups. The additional material consists of “a who’s who; location lists; writing tasks; research exercises; a crossword puzzle; histories of Queen Victoria, Victorian childhood, transport and travel, Scotland Yard and the Metropolitan Police Force; a guide to Sherlock Holmes’ London; a history of Sherlock Holmes on the stage, screen, and radio; an original audio play for four aspiring young actors; colourful characters from the Sherlock Holmes canon; the life of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle; and a Victorian timeline”.

It's all very nicely done and, like the story, enticingly illustrated.

RJ

Railway Crimes Committed in Victorian Britain by Malcolm Clegg. *Pen & Sword*, 2023. 160pp. £19.69 (hbk)

While offences on iron rails are no different from those committed elsewhere, the smoke and soot of stations and carriages add a certain frisson to railway crimes. In his latest work, Malcolm Clegg draws on his thirty-years' experience in the British Transport Police to catalogue crimes from the earliest days of the railways in handy thematic chapters. The incidents themselves range from the sublime ("Greedy Shunter Stole a Bottle of Wine") to the horrific ("Other Gruesome Railway Packages"), though one is usually forewarned by the subheadings. Of greater interest are the cast of real-life characters, from a Moriarty-worthy Edward Agar, architect of the first great train robbery (p.53), to the incompetent carter whose supply of silver ingots was stolen while he breakfasted. Among them is York's own notorious George Hudson, the Railway King (p.108), who provides a salient reminder that money and friends in high places are the best insurance against the long arm of the law. One wonders at a selection process that includes "Boy Stole Oranges" and "Station Master Catches a Fare Dodger" but is grateful for the appearance of "A Duel Between Locomotives", which made this reviewer smile.

MJ

Sherlock Holmes on Radio and Television, edited by Simon Coward, Richard Down & Chris Perry. *Kaleidoscope Publishing*, 2022. 107pp. £24.99 (pbk).

This little reference book from Kaleidoscope will undoubtedly prove useful to those who, like me, are especially interested in dramatic interpretations of the great detective, but there are drawbacks. It's an alphabetical list by title of British dramatisations and documentaries in the specified media, so TV productions of *The Hound of the Baskervilles* are listed chronologically, followed by radio productions. There's no index, though, and the many performances by Carleton Hobbs, for instance, are scattered throughout the book, while Martyn Read's play *221B* starring Nigel Stock is listed simply as *Afternoon Theatre*. There is information among the oddities, errors and omissions that was new to me, but the really exciting feature is a 55-minute DVD, *Sherlock Holmes: Depictions on Screen*. It includes an episode from the 1971 Dutch TV programme *Avroskoop*, featuring interviews (in English) with Tony Howlett,

Christopher Lee — and Peter Cushing, talking about the 1968 BBC TV series. And there are clips from missing episodes of that series, discovered in Belgium!

RJ

Baker Street Almanac 2022: An Annual Capsule of a Timeless Past & Future, edited by Ross E

Davies, Jayantika Ganguly, Ira Brad Matetsky & Monica Schmidt. *The Green Bag, Inc.*, 2022. 380pp. \$40.00 within USA (pbk) or download free at www.greenbag.org

Understandably, publication of last year's *Almanac* was delayed well beyond the intended date, but its contents remain both valid and interesting. Tributes to the late Michael Whelan, head of the Baker Street Irregulars for twenty-three years, are followed by over 150 pages of reports on worldwide Holmesian activities in 2021, in-person and virtual, the great majority of them in America. Next is the complete year's run of Peter Blau's invaluable monthly newsletter *Scuttlebutt from the Spermaceti Press*. Denny Dobry continues the inventory of his wonderful 221B sitting-room. There are articles about Sherlockian music, numismatics, recipes and more — and the *Almanac* concludes with a new annotated edition of "The Adventure of the Abbey Grange". Capital!

RJ

You Know My Methods, Watson: The Illustrious Clients Third Case-Notes, edited by Andy & Shelly Gage. *The Illustrious Clients of Indianapolis*, 2023. 120pp. \$19.99 (pbk)

Besides their six *Case-Books* — substantial anthologies of writing by members and non-members — The Illustrious Clients have published three slimmer volumes of *Case-Notes*, the contents drawn only from their members. That's a policy that's proved successful, as in this attractive, instructive and enjoyable book. Mark Ward unwinds the thread that lead Sherlock Holmes to ex-Professor Moriarty. Joe Eckrich identifies the worst woman in the canon. Michael T Schaefer finds evidence of Holmes's "hated rival" in several cases before "The Retired Colourman". Regina Stinson visits the Turkish bath. Louise Haskett is a keen collector (I know the feeling). Alan Schmetzer re-creates the famous sitting-room in miniature. The editors and Steven Doyle explore the history of The Illustrious Clients. And that's just a sample of the good things here!

RJ

The Baker Street Journal 2022 Christmas Annual: “A Lady Ventures into the Sacred Precincts” — Women on the Periphery of the BSI, 1940-1960 by Julie McKuras and Sonia Fetherston. *The Baker Street Irregulars*, 2022. 64pp.

Since its foundation in 1934, the Baker Street Irregulars has been organised on very different lines from our own Society: different and sometimes controversial. I consider myself doubly honoured to have received my BSI investiture in the year when women were first admitted with full rights and privileges — unlike Lenore Glen Offord and Lisa McGaw, who had been invested earlier but were never invited to BSI functions. However, the influence of women had been evident through the decades. Julie McKuras and Sonia Fetherston introduce us to, or remind us of, some fifty such, including Lillian de la Torre, Gypsy Rose Lee (yes, honestly), Edith Meiser, Gladys Mitchell, ZaSu Pitts, Dorothy L Sayers, Madeline B Stern and Eve Titus. It’s a fascinating read, but note that the *Christmas Annuals* are available only to subscribers to *The Baker Street Journal*. Details are at <https://bakerstreetirregulars.com/the-baker-street-journal/>.

RJ

Victorian Murderesses by Debbie Blake. *Pen & Sword*, 2022. 224pp. £20.00 (hbk)

The subject of the 2021 Richard Lancelyn Green Lecture was “London’s Femmes Fatales”, five of them. *Victorian Murderesses* concentrates on seven more women — wicked, mad, or possibly innocent — four in England and three in America. The most notorious are Mary Ann Cotton, executed in Durham for poisoning her stepson, and believed to have killed eleven of her own children and three of her four husbands; Kate Webster, hanged at Wandsworth for killing and dismembering her employer; Kate Bender, the attractive, manipulative daughter of a family that murdered at least twelve travellers at their “road house” in rural Kansas (the fate of the Benders is unknown); and Lizzie Borden, acquitted of killing her father and stepmother in Fall River, Massachusetts, though she’s still widely believed to have been guilty.

Many Holmesians don’t wish to know about the real crimes committed in the great detective’s time, but others will find much of interest here. (They may, perhaps, wonder whether Holmes could have discovered what became of the “Bloody Benders”, or whether Lizzie Borden was in truth innocent.)

RJ

The MX Book of New Sherlock Holmes Stories — Part XXXIV: However Improbable (1878-1888),

Part XXXV: However Improbable (1889-1896), and Part XXXVI: However Improbable (1897-1919), edited by David Marcum. *MX Publishing*, 2022. 427pp (Part XXXIV), 490pp (Part XXXV), 485pp (Part XXXVI). Each £28.99 (hbk), £17.99 (pbk)

The latest in the series of the *MX Books of New Sherlock Holmes Stories* feature ghosts, ghouls and things that go bump in the night. Editor and contributor, David Marcum, has again assembled an impressive collection of contributors for a superb selection of fifty-eight new tales spread over three volumes. Some of those names will be familiar to readers of past offerings — Arthur Hall, Paul D Gilbert, Mark Mower, to mention a few — in addition to a host of new authors, proving that Holmes’s popularity shows no sign of waning. As ever, the stories are spread over the course of Holmes’s career and follow his principle that “No ghosts need apply.” For every alleged paranormal problem that comes to Baker Street, the explanation proves to have a very earthly solution. Each story has something different to offer, and several favourites of mine included Marcia Wilson’s “The Monster’s Mop and Pail”, in which Holmes is on sparkling form to relate one of his early cases where a bucket of water provided the clue to the mystery, and Craig Janacek’s “The Adventure of the Restless Dead”, in which the coffins in a locked crypt have an unnerving habit of moving all by themselves.

SO-B

An Investees’ Anthology: Selected Contributions to The MX Book of New Sherlock Holmes Stories by Members of The Baker Street Irregulars, edited by David Marcum. *MX Publishing*, 2022. 400pp. £28.99 (hbk), £16.05 (pbk)

By the time you read this, thirty-nine volumes of *The MX Book of New Sherlock Holmes Stories* will have been published. The contents help satisfy the appetite of the many who want more than the sixty canonical accounts, and the royalties have so far raised over £80,000 for Undershaw, the house that Conan Doyle built for himself and his family, now an outstanding school for children with special educational needs and disabilities. *An Investees’ Anthology* stands outside the numbered sequence. All but a couple of the stories, verses and forewords are reprinted from earlier volumes and all — of course! — are the work of true Holmes devotees, among them David Stuart Davies, Lyndsay Faye, Sonia Fetherston, Jayantika Ganguly, Bonnie MacBird, Christopher Redmond and Nicholas Utechin. Need I say more?

RJ

Sherlock Holmes and the Unmasking of the Whitechapel Horror by Frank Emerson. *MX Publishing*, 2023. 166pp. £8.99 (pbk)

This is the first Holmesian pastiche of its kind that I have read. I assume that there have been others on this theme. The narrative brings together the eternal mystery over the identity of Jack the Ripper and the successful prosecution and subsequent execution of a multiple murderer. In other words, Jack the Ripper is, in this book, satisfactorily dealt with albeit only indirectly. The police detectives are, as usual, ably assisted by Sherlock Holmes with Watson acting as usual as a mere chronicler. The book is full of Canonical references which the author no doubt hopes will ground it in Holmesian reality. However, there are so many such references that I feel it's been rather overdone. There are the seemingly inevitable lurches into modern, and therefore inappropriate, phraseology and transatlantic expressions. Whether these are instinctive and thoughtless on the author's part, or a deliberate policy to appeal to his fellow American readers, is a moot point. Overall, it is an enjoyable piece of work and deserves the same success as Mr Emerson's other contributions to the Holmesian world.

JS