"I AM AN OMNIVOROUS READER"

Book reviews by LISA BURSCHEIDT, GUY MARRIOTT, MARK MOWER, JOHN SHEPPARD, JEAN UPTON, NICHOLAS UTECHIN and ROGER JOHNSON

A Study in Postcards: Sherlock Holmes in the Golden Age of the Picture Postcard by Sarah Obermuller-Bennett. *The Sherlock Holmes Society of London*, 2019. 40pp. £6.00 including postage (pbk)

Has this particular topic been covered in depth before? Sarah Obermuller-Bennett presents some gems from her collection of classic Holmesian postcards, beautifully reproduced, with fascinating background details. There are advertising cards for *The Strand Magazine*, and other, less obvious products. I love the cards publicising plays: William Gillette is here, of course, and H.A. Saintsbury and Eille Norwood, but do you know the French actor Firmin Gémier, or the Icelandic Bjarni Bjornsson? A 1907 picture of Exeter Theatre Royal shows that Kenneth Rivington was playing the lead there in *Sherlock Holmes* — but the 1917 photo of a Hastings cobbler with his prize marrows is extraordinary: in his shop window is a poster for Gillette's play, starring H Hamilton Stewart! Its inclusion in this book demonstrates Sarah's acute eye, as does the 1921 picture of the Town Hall in Wivelscombe, featuring a poster for the long since lost 1914 film *A Study in Scarlet*. I'm delighted to see light shed on this rather obscure aspect of Sherlockiana.

RJ

The Controversity: Was Sherlock Holmes at Oxford or Cambridge? compiled and edited by Nicholas Utechin. *Nicholas Utechin*, 2019. 40pp. £10 *including postage** (pbk)

Nick Utechin's early monograph, *Sherlock Holmes at Oxford,* was first published in 1977, and he has long argued for Oxford as Holmes's university. (I must declare an interest, as I have argued for Cambridge in debate with Nick on three occasions.)

Here are texts and summaries of the arguments on each side. Nothing of consequence is missing, and Nick added no further thoughts of his own beyond those in his earlier monograph. In itself, this approach is good and useful, but the author's conclusions seem problematical. He says that "it is hard to see what piece of stunning new evidence or deduction may be offered after more than a century." This is close to saying that the subject is closed. And, having reviewed the commentaries, Nick proposes to settle the argument by noting that eighteen commentators have favoured Oxford, against eight for Cambridge. I shall just make two observations:

Nick's Oxford votes include those of Michael and Molly Hardwick, who wrote in 1962: *"… we will merely plump for Oxford. In spirit we have encountered Holmes in the High; we have never yet so much as caught the flutter of his undergraduate's gown in Christ's Pieces,"* and Martin Edwards, who said in 2018: *"I'd like to claim that he was a Balliol man… Trouble is, evidence is rather thin on the ground. Perhaps I'll have to make some up."* (I don't believe the Hardwicks or Martin Edwards claim that these contributions offer much in the way of scholarship.) And Roger Johnson observed in writing about our first debate, at the 2009 BSI Dinner: *"I've long believed that Sherlock Holmes was an Oxonian, but Guy's ingenious argument for Cambridge, based on the forbidden, dangerous and undeniably exciting practice of 'night climbing' there, easily trumped Nick's outrageous fabrication of evidence for Oxford."*

But overall this is a useful summary, and I would urge all those interested in the arguments to purchase this monograph whilst stocks last. (*The Controversity* is published in a limited edition of 100 copies. Contact Nick Utechin at highfieldfarmhouse@gmail.com.)

GM

*[*Not, as in the printed* Journal*, £10 plus postage. Apologies for the error. Ed.]*

Watson Does Not Lie: A Chronology of Sherlock Holmes and John H Watson by Paul Thomas Miller. *Wildside Press*, 2019. 184pp. £11.99 (pbk)

"Too many chronologists resorted to claiming either Watson lied, or could not read his own notes," says Paul Miller. "Such ideas are

scandalous. I wanted a chronology built upon the idea of Watson's words as facts. Since I could not find one, I created one." The result is a valuable addition to the chronologies of Bell, Christ, Zeisler and the others, though the dogma of Watson's invariable veracity will certainly prove controversial.

For instance, the assertion that Watson had *six* wives is far less believable than the "impossible" notion that he was occasionally lax or economical with the truth. As Father Brown observed, "Tell me that the great Mr Gladstone, in his last hours, was haunted by the ghost of Parnell, and I will be agnostic about it. But tell me that Mr Gladstone, when first presented to Queen Victoria, wore his hat in her drawing-room and slapped her on the back and offered her a cigar, and I am not agnostic at all. That is not impossible; it's only incredible. But I'm much more certain it didn't happen than that Parnell's ghost didn't appear…"

Nevertheless, the book is a significant contribution to Holmesian scholarship, despite one careless error: "*The Sign of the Four* takes place four months before the first known publication of *A Study in Scarlet*, and yet in it, Watson tells us he had already 'embodied it in a small brochure with the somewhat fantastic title of *A Study in Scarlet*.'" Sorry, no. *Sign* is (correctly) dated here to July 1888, eight months *after* the publication of *Study* in November 1887.

RJ

Sherlockian Musings: Thoughts on the Sherlock Holmes Stories by Sheldon Goldfarb. *MX Publishing*, 2019. 300pp. £11.99 (pbk)

Dr Goldfarb surveys each of the sixty stories, lighting upon all sorts of points that others may not have considered. The style is friendly and informal, but always intelligent and thoughtful. Of "The Empty House", for instance: "Watson's bereavement, presumably the death of Mrs Watson, is almost a cheery note. The gesture towards grown-up living, marriage, domesticity — that can all be forgotten now. Watson and Holmes can be adventuring boys again, and will be." Of "Lady Frances Carfax": "Poor Watson. He's feeling old and rheumatic, and look how Holmes treats him: Go to Lausanne, track down Lady Frances, keep me informed — But then I'll show up unexpectedly and tell you you've done everything wrong (but has he? most commentators say no). And for good measure you'll get beaten up by the savage stalker, who I'll then tell you is the good guy…" The "musings" were first published in *The Petrel Flyer*. This wider publication in more permanent form is well merited.

RJ

Sherlock Holmes Goes Forth, 2018. 207pp. £7.99 (pbk)

Upon the Chaldean Roots of the Ancient Cornish Language, with Observations on the Early Tin Trade in West Cornwall, 2019. 86pp. £4.81 (pbk)

Sherlock Holmes' 'The Art of Detection', 2019. 395pp. £12.14 (pbk)

Sherlock and Porlock: A Study of Literary Influence in the Sherlock Holmes Stories, 2019. 188pp. £7.32 (pbk)

The Sherlock Holmes Ultimate Smoking Companion, 2019. 287pp. £8.54 (pbk)

All five titles, published by Cunning Crime Books, are the work of the almost legendary Kelvin I Jones. For the Society's recent excursion to Kent, Bob Ellis printed a special edition of Kelvin's 1980 monograph *Sherlock Holmes and the South Eastern*, which has prompted him to plan a revised and enlarged version covering all Holmes's rail connections. Meanwhile we have these recent volumes. In *Sherlock Holmes Goes Forth* are fifteen essays, selected from the many published in journals and anthologies on both sides of the ocean. *Upon the Chaldean Roots…* is presented as the thesis that occupied Holmes before the dramatic arrival of Messrs Roundhay and Tregennis, and *Sherlock Holmes' 'The Art of Detection'* purports to be the book to which Holmes said he would devote his declining years. Both are convincing, in style and substance. The subtitle of *Sherlock and Porlock*, revised and expanded from the original 1984 edition, is self-explanatory. The *Ultimate Smoking Companion* reprints the 1981 monograph *"Thank You, Watson — The Matches!"*, with additional articles by Al Shaw, Wendy Heyman-Marsaw, James C O'Leary, John L Hicks, R.D. Sherbrooke-Walker and Mr Jones, plus stories by David Marcum, Roger Johnson and Mr Jones. There's plenty of interest and

entertainment here (though my "Disjecta Membra" may confuse, as it wasn't intended for publication).

RJ

Keep Clear: My Adventures With Asperger's by Tom Cutler. *Scribe*, 2019. 352pp. £14.99 (pbk)

Tom Cutler is a bestselling author of humorous books, including the Amazon number-one *211 Things a Bright Boy Can Do*. In 2016 he was identified as being on the autism spectrum. This, he says, was the happiest day of his life. The diagnosis enabled him to make sense of many aspects of his life, including obsessions with road-sign designs, magic tricks and Sherlock Holmes. Honest, witty and informative, this is an important and valuable book on many levels. Along with recounting his own experiences, he makes convincing arguments that Sherlock Holmes exhibited "the Asperger's aloof and seemingly unempathic detachment". If you have a friend or family member who is on the Autism Spectrum, this book will go a long way toward helping to understand the immense effort it requires to try to fit into a "neurotypical" world.

JU

[See also "Did Sherlock Holmes Have Asperger's Syndrome?" in this issue. Ed.]

Elementary Art: 100 Years of Sherlock Holmes by William S Major. *Silver Screen Collectibles*, 2017. 167pp. £21.31 (pbk)

This nicely produced offering provides full-colour reproductions of photographs, posters, lobby cards, and programmes, from America, Britain and elsewhere , for a wide range of Sherlock Holmes films, plus Sherlockian artwork used in advertising for other films, from *Sherlock Brown* and *Der Mann, der Sherlock Holmes War* on. (Who remembers a 1956 Benny Hill comedy called *Who Done It?*) The book begins with an appreciative nod to William Gillette on stage, leading into his recently restored film, and concludes with the latest blockbusters starring Robert Downey Jr. All the classics are here, and many non-classics too — but no TV series. The text is informative and the reproduction quality is excellent.

JU

Cut to: Baker Street — The On-Screen Adventures of Holmes and Watson by Nicko Vaughan. *MX Publishing*, 2019. 190pp. £12.99 (pbk)

Dr Vaughan says that she's always written with young and "casual" readers in mind. Her new book should appeal to them; it certainly appeals to me. As a dedicated veteran reader, with a special interest in dramatic and comedic presentations of Holmes and Watson, I find *Cut to: Baker Street* a helpful reference source, alongside Alan Barnes's *Sherlock Holmes on Screen* and others (including the invaluable IMDB). The text doesn't include full credits, but it covers the essentials, and it's complemented by Georgia Grace Weston's witty drawings. Exceptionally useful is the inclusion of internet-only and computer game productions, though their episode lists are classed with "Television", which is a bit confusing. Such a book will never be complete, so in a few years' time an updated edition would be welcome.

RJ

The Further Adventures of Sherlock Holmes (The Complete Jim French *Imagination Theatre* Scripts) Part 1: 1881-1891 (440pp); **Part 2: 1894-1999** (428pp); *and* **Part 3: 1900-1903** (362pp); by Jim French, edited by David Marcum. *MX Publishing*, 2019. Each £26.99 (hbk), £14.99 (pbk).

Twenty years ago Jim French — writer, actor and producer — decided to redress the decline of good popular drama on American radio: he set up *Imagination Theatre* to create quality series and single plays. Sherlock Holmes was only a part of it, but a very important part, and it began with *The Further Adventures*, a series gratifyingly reminiscent of the days when listeners tuned in every week to hear Rathbone and Bruce as Holmes and Watson. The main difference is that IT's Watson, played by Lawrence Albert, is not only brave and loyal, but intelligent. Jim French assembled a team of writers that includes M.J. Elliott, John Hall, Matthew Booth, Gareth Tilley — and David Marcum, who has prepared this very handsome three-volume edition of French's own splendid scripts. Jim French died in 2017, but *The Further Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* continues, with 135 programmes recorded to date.

All royalties from these books will go towards the preservation of Undershaw, Conan Doyle's former Surrey home, which now houses Stepping Stones School.

RJ

The Adventures of Maud West, Lady Detective by Susannah Stapleton. *Picador*, 2019. 320pp. £20.00 (hbk)

Maud West was a professional detective whose career overlapped with that of Sherlock Holmes. Susannah Stapleton's book is a detective story: her narrative of how she went about gathering information on her elusive subject is a masterclass in the art of historical research. Chapters are interspersed with self-publicising articles written by Maud West herself, many of which, as Ms Stapleton indicates, should be taken with the proverbial grain of salt. As a woman in what was very much a man's world, the lady detective had to create a new personality for herself as well as a career; her success is a tribute to her intelligence and her courage. Rather satisfyingly, Susannah Stapleton had the opportunity to meet her subject's grandson to present him with her research and tie up a few loose ends. The result is enlightening and highly entertaining.

JU

Madness, Murder and Mayhem: Criminal Insanity in Victorian and Edwardian Britain by Kathryn Burtinshaw and John Burt. *Pen & Sword*, 2018. 182pp. £19.99 (hbk), £12.99 (pbk)

Actual insanity doesn't feature largely in the canon, though Selden's death sentence had been commuted due to some doubts as to his complete sanity, Mme Fournaye was reckoned to be insane, and Isadora Persano became stark staring mad. More immediately relevant is Holmes's prediction that Josiah Amberley is likely to end up in Broadmoor, founded in 1863 as a Criminal Lunatic Asylum, and the oldest of England's three high-security psychiatric hospitals. Its Scottish equivalent then was the Criminal Lunatic Department at Perth General Prison, which also features in this fascinating book. The case studies show that the plea of not guilty by reason of insanity was not unique to murder trials, and the accused might be presented by the defence as a dangerous lunatic, an imbecile, an idiot or merely weak-minded. The treatment of patients could be harsh, but the thinking behind the asylums was compassionate; however, to reach that stage medical experts had to convince a judge and jury, and they didn't always succeed. How would Josiah Amberley have fared, I wonder?

RJ

The Best of Friends – A selection of essays and articles from The Friends of the Sherlock Holmes Collections Newsletter. *The Norwegian Explorers of Minnesota*, 2019. 224 pp. $25.00 (pbk.)

This is how it works: people collect Sherlock Holmes; a library makes itself available to receive donations; people donate material or their collections; a newsletter is started to record such donations and the people behind them; a book is published to carry the best of the newsletter contributions.

The Sherlock Holmes Collections of the University of Minnesota in Minneapolis constitute the largest of their kind in the world (Toronto's holdings are somewhat smaller and their name is specifically The Arthur Conan Doyle Collection); and since 1997 its contents and acquisitions have been celebrated four times a year in slim, quality, newsletters, with Julie McKuras at the helm. There is, unsurprisingly, a close bond between the Collections and the leading scion The Norwegian Explorers; and this book, with its fifty diverse contributions, is an altogether fascinating and educative example of a niche publishing venture which pulls together Sherlockian bibliography (occasionally beyond usual boundaries), profiles of individuals and collector-mania.

Copies may still be available: check with Phillip Bergem at pgbergem@gmail.com

NU

Interpreting the Ripper Letters: Missed Clues and Reflections on Victorian Society by M.J. Trow. *Pen & Sword*, 2019. 192pp. £19.99 (hbk)

The author of the wickedly funny Inspector Lestrade mysteries is also a notable crime historian, as his fourth book about the Whitechapel murders testifies. On the 27th September 1888, three weeks after the murder of Annie Chapman, a letter beginning "Dear Boss" was delivered to the Central News Agency, and

subsequently reproduced on handbills by the police; it was signed "Jack the Ripper". There followed more than 200 letters and postcards, in wildly differing hands, from as far away as the United States, all claiming to be written by the killer. The police suspected that the "Dear Boss" letter was a hoax, and the journalist George R Sims debunked it, on grounds that Sherlock Holmes would surely have approved, but it left an indelible mark. Among the missives, many of which disappeared from the archives long ago, there may be one or two that are genuine, but the rest were written by people who today might be internet trolls or disseminators of fake news. This intelligent, engrossing book casts light on a disturbing corner of Holmes's world, one that we too rarely consider.

RJ

Sherlock Holmes Is Everywhere! edited by David Marcum, Sonia Fetherston BSI and Derrick Belanger. *Belanger Books*, 2019. 304pp. £16.99 (pbk)

Thirty-eight enthusiasts — mostly American, only a few known to me — tell how they discovered the great detective and how he fits into their lives. For Nancy Holder it began with a mouse; Dan Payton finds Holmes in his local children's library; Margaret Walsh found the man behind the detective in a classic film; to Mark Levy, Holmes is like a bigger brother; James O'Leary delights in the Higher Criticism; for Clarissa Ackroyd, Holmes is the spirit of London, while others encounter him in Jerusalem, Paris, Baltimore… Others again let Holmes into their lives as a Bohemian, as a woman, as a gay man, as a husband… The Holmesian world is wonderfully diverse!

The book is attractively presented, except for Arthur Guiterman's doggerel: "To Sir Arthur Conan Doyle", and ACD's response: "To an Undiscerning Critic", which are mistranscribed, with words and even lines missing.

RJ

Gillette Castle: A History by Erik Ofgang. *Arcadia Publishing/The History Press*, 2017. 144pp. £23.46 (hbk), £17.63 (pbk)

I stumbled upon this book entirely by accident. It has apparently had so little publicity that you won't even find a review on Amazon. The author is a senior writer for *Connecticut Magazine* and has done a considerable amount of research on his local landmark. Very sensibly, this included consultation with local Sherlockians Tyke and Teddie Niver, who regularly impersonate Mr and Mrs William Gillette for events held at the Castle. The book covers Gillette's career and how his success made it possible to purchase the 184-acre estate where he built his own version of a medieval-style castle. There are plenty of photographs, plus an epilogue that describes the discovery and restoration of Gillette's long-lost film *Sherlock Holmes*.

JU

The Cambridge Companion to Sherlock Holmes edited by Janice M Allan and Christopher Pittard**.** *Cambridge University Press*, 2019. 284pp. £14.99 (pbk)

Cambridge University Press was headed between 1922 and 1948 by S.C Roberts, later our Society's first President, and as this book briefly notes, in 1929 the CUP published Sir Sydney's early monograph *A Note on the Watson Problem* in a limited edition of 100 copies.

This new book claims to explore "Holmes's popularity and his complex relationship to the late-Victorian and modernist periods." The Editors' introduction precedes fifteen essays by academics, mostly British, categorised as "Contexts", "Case Studies" and "Holmesian Afterlives". Some are a bit too academic to be read for either enjoyment or instruction. There are also signs of sloppy editing; certainly none by anyone well-versed in the stories and in Conan Doyle. "Doyle, Holmes and London" (which mentions ACD's acquiring his knowledge of London from a Post Office map) wrongly places 23 Montague Street, Bloomsbury, in north London, Norwood in south-west London, and London's "prestigious medical specialist quarter" in a location called Devonshire Square.

However, Christopher Pittard writes well on Sidney Paget and "Visual Culture in the *Adventures* and *Memoirs of Sherlock Holmes*". Two of the best essays are Neil McCaw's on "Adapting Holmes" for the theatre, film and television, and Roberta Pearson's on "Sherlockian Fandom", where she asks if the Baker Street Irregulars are perhaps more "fandom" than "literary society". She also

briefly explores the history of the Great Game, and deals with the controversy over the admission of women into the BSI. The Sherlock Holmes Society of London is briefly mentioned, but connections to, and differences from, the BSI are not described.

In short, this book is a bit of a curate's egg and adds a little, but not much, to the serious writings upon the canon as literature.

GM

The Charles Hall Scrapbook by Charles Hall. *Charles Hall Productions* (12 Paisley Terrace, Edinburgh EH8 7JW), 2019. 40pp. £4.50 plus postage (pbk)

Charles Hall is known to collectors as the creator of many unusual high-quality collectibles, such as miniatures of Laurel and Hardy dressed as Holmes and Watson. This booklet is effectively an illustrated retrospective of his work, including military memorabilia as well as Sherlockian items. Charles is running a special offer: If you purchase this book along with *Sherlock Holmes and Conan Doyle in Edinburgh* you can have both for £7.00 plus postage. Only 100 copies available.

JU

Sherlock Holmes — Jazz Age Parodies and Pastiches II: 1925-1930 edited by Bill Peschel. *Peschel Press*, 2019. 355pp. £12.31 (pbk)

This is the eighth and last volume in the excellent "223B Casebook" series of Holmesian apocrypha written during Conan Doyle's lifetime, which began in 2014 with *The Early Punch Parodies of Sherlock Holmes* and continued through the late Victorian and Edwardian years, and the Great War. The quality of the stories varies greatly, of course, but their context makes them far more interesting than the great majority of today's pastiche. Bill Peschel has unearthed choice items, including comic strips and advertisements, from both sides of the Atlantic, some freshly translated into English (names you may recognise include Edgar Wallace, Frederic Dorr Steele, August Derleth and Edmund L Pearson). His notes and annotations are exemplary, and there are many nicely reproduced illustrations. The whole wonderful series deserves and gets my highest recommendation!

RJ

The Devil's Due by Bonnie MacBird. *HarperCollins*, 2019. 384pp. £14.99 (hbk)

Like Bonnie MacBird's previous two pastiches, *The Devil's Due* is rich in action, moves at a good pace, and is lots of fun. Watson gets even more to do than before, as Holmes suffers an injury, allowing us to see some Victorian medical practice as well as Watson's caring side. I always want to see Watson do something inadvisable or off-script as a result of being kept in the dark so much, and I wasn't disappointed with developments towards the climax of the story, when he uses Holmes's own drugs on him as a last resort towards restraining his friend.

There's a great cast of characters. My favourite was "Heffie", a sixteen-year-old East End orphan girl with the peculiar skillset and attitude afforded by an upbringing on the mean streets. She's like a cross between Wiggins and Kitty Winter but more fun than either. The characters span the breadth of Victorian society, all ranked around a bigger and more ambitious case than those of the earlier books. Someone appears to be killing people in alphabetical order: *The ABC Murders* is definitely an influence, but the story is not a straightforward lift. There are many twists and turns to keep readers on their toes, and we see many different sides of Victorian London as our heroes investigate backstage at the opera, mix with aristocrats, and employ Heffie for some spy work at a girls' school.

I very much enjoyed the conspiracy nature of the mystery. In a high-society case with possible international connections, Mycroft Holmes must show up at some point; I was delighted at what MacBird does with the character and with the brothers' relationship. I can certainly see Watson being completely bewildered by it.

This book gets a definite recommendation from me. MacBird is sure-footed with atmosphere and voices, there's lots of action and a solid mystery, but no shortage of real tenderness between Holmes and Watson, and the conclusion is as satisfying as anything Conan Doyle wrote. If you're looking for a Sherlockian Christmas present for someone, introduce them to Bonnie MacBird's series.

LB

The MX Book of New Sherlock Holmes Stories — Part XVI: Whatever Remains… Must Be the Truth (1881-1890) (432pp); **Part XVII: Whatever Remains… Must Be the Truth (1891-1898)** (472pp) *and* **Part XVIII: Whatever Remains… Must Be the Truth (1899-1925)** (436pp); edited by David Marcum. *MX Publishing*. 2019. Each £28.99 (hbk), £17.99 (pbk)

As in Parts VII and VIII, subtitled *Eliminate the Impossible*, contributors were instructed to honour Holmes's statement: "The world is big enough for us. No ghosts need apply" — and to present him with a challenge that appears to be supernatural. The results are forty-nine atmospheric tales of darkness and dread; we may sometimes wonder whether even Sherlock Holmes can dispel the darkness and expose the truth, but of course he can and does. The authors include Mark Mower, Kelvin I Jones, Jayantika Ganguly, Paul D Gilbert, S.F. Bennett and David Marcum. There are radio scripts by Bert Coules, M.J. Elliott, Gareth Tilley and Hugh Ashton. Kareem Abdul-Jabbar contributes a foreword. And none of them will make money from it, as all royalties go towards the preservation of Undershaw.

RJ

Dans la tête de Sherlock Holmes, Tome 1 : L'affaire du ticket scandaleux by Cyril Lieron & Benoit Dahan. *Ankama éditions*, 2019. 52pp. £12.20 (hbk)

This French graphic novel is strongly recommended by Thierry Saint-Joanis — and now by me. With my schoolboy French and some assistance from Google, I found it a straightforward and highly enjoyable read. The title and the superb cover illustration of Holmes's head as a building, inside which he is consulting the contents of a vast library of crime, recall the Mind Palace in *Sherlock*, but the real origin is the "brain attic" of *A Study in Scarlet*. The story is ingenious and exciting: a former colleague of Watson's has been found wandering the streets, clad only in his nightshirt and suffering from loss of memory; his experience seems to be connected to strange disappearances in London and the performance of a Chinese magician at the Lyric Theatre… Now I want to know what happens in the second volume! M. Dahan's illustrations successfully incorporate naturalism, surrealism and, in the wonderfully imaginative depiction of Holmes's reasoning, elements of steampunk. Just as an object, the book is a treasure. I hope there'll be an English edition very soon!

RJ

Too Many Clues by Dan Andriacco. *MX Publishing*, 2019. 232pp. £10.99 (pbk)

The small town of Erin, Ohio seems to attract characterful residents and visitors, including Professor Sebastian McCabe, BSI (magician, crime-writer) and his brother-in-law, would-be crime-writer Jeff Cody, who serves, sometimes reluctantly, as Watson to his Holmes. Erin should be used to crime by now, and when complaints about "inappropriate behaviour" at St Benignus University are followed by two murders on campus, there are plenty of clues. Too many clues, in fact, and the killer seems to be invisible… Can McCabe's expertise in magic help him to solve the case? I hailed the first of the McCabe & Cody mysteries as "a clever, exciting and witty romp". *Too Many Clues* is the tenth, and that opinion holds.

RJ

The Sherlock Holmes Escape Book – The Adventure of the London Waterworks by Ormond Sacker. *Ammonite Press*, 2019. 128pp £9.99 (pbk)

This is the first in a new series of puzzle books inspired by the current trend for "Escape Rooms", in which participants are locked in rooms and must solve a series of puzzles to enable their escape. Here, the book becomes the locked room and the pages become the path. The book is very nicely produced with plenty of helpful illustrations. Its clever design incorporates a "code wheel" in the front cover, which is put to use throughout the escape exercise. There are puzzles, mazes, brain-teasers, riddles, references to the original Sherlock Holmes stories and mathematical problems that provide the code to guide you along the correct path — plus some red herrings. In some cases, if you get it wrong the first time, you receive a second chance to redeem yourself. If you really get stuck, there are hints provided to help you get back on track. And the solutions are given at the back of the book.

JU

Sherlock Holmes: The Baker Street Legacy by Mark Mower. *MX Publishing*, 2019. 182pp. £8.99 (pbk)

These eight stories are presented by our Watson's nephew, Christopher Henry Watson MD, writing in 1948, and are to be accepted as "overlooked gems" from the older Watson's collection. Mark Mower works hard to capture the elusive atmosphere of "1895 and all that" , and largely succeeds. The plots are varied and ingenious, and there are plenty of allusions and references to our beloved Canon. The final one of these stories is a particularly nice sequel to the affairs of a certain builder from Norwood. In conclusion, this book is a pleasing and entertaining read, and a worthy contribution to the seemingly endless flow of Holmesian pastiche.

JS

Mrs Hudson Investigates by Susan Knight. *MX Publishing. 2019*. 219pp. £10.99 (pbk)

I believe this is Susan Knight's first collection of stories about the investigative abilities of Sherlock Holmes's esteemed housekeeper, Mrs Martha Hudson. And a triumph it is too. The book contains seven tales, all told with great clarity and affection. Not all are full-blown investigations, but each has its place in helping us to understand the character — and hitherto unrecognised talents — of dear Mrs Hudson. Throughout the volume we have occasional glimpses of "the doctor" and "Mr H", but it is Mrs Hudson who rightly remains centre stage. This is an extremely humorous book that shines a light on the domestic arrangements at 221B which we rarely get the opportunity to read about. Let's hope the author has further stories planned.

MM

Sherlock Holmes: The Sign of Seven edited by Martin Rosenstock. *Titan Books*, 2019. 528pp. £7.99 (pbk)

Another great volume in Titan's series of Holmes pastiches. This features seven brand-new novellas edited by Martin Rosenstock, an accomplished writer of extra-canonical stories in his own right. The range of tales and settings is suitably broad: Holmes and Watson exploring the Capital's sewer system in pursuit of the killer of a mudlark; making sense of two corpses in a Millbank Street mortuary; uncovering the truth behind a deadly séance; revealing the shocking secret of a tobacco dealer; romping through subterranean London to find an unusual carnival; solving the murder of an Egyptologist's butler; and travelling to America to investigate the death of a cult leader known as the "Floridian Messiah". Pick of the bunch, however, is an inventive story by Lindsay Faye, cleverly revealed through a series of diary extracts written by Inspector Geoffrey Lestrade!

The other contributors will be well known to fans of the well-observed, affectionate pastiche: James Lovegrove, Andrew Lane, David Stuart Davies, Derrick Belanger, Amy Thomas and Stuart Douglas. These are all solid stories, neatly told.

MM

Artie Conan Doyle and the Scarlet Phantom by Robert J Harris. *Kelpies*, 2019. 240pp. £6.99 (pbk).

In this third novel, the twelve-year-old Artie, along with his loyal, cake-loving companion Ham Hamilton and the smart young girl scientist Peril Abernethy, attempts to solve a series of robberies committed by a jewel thief who appears to have supernatural powers. Along the way they enter the murky world of bogus mediums and spiritualism. Victorian Edinburgh is atmospherically (and accurately) evoked, the characters are appealing, and, like its predecessors, the story is amusing, exciting and — dare I say it — educational.

JU

Sherlock Holmes: These Scattered Houses by Gretchen Altabef. *MX Publishing*, 2019. 229pp. £10.99 (pbk)

A previously untold adventure of the "Great Hiatus". Holmes, travelling in the guise of Professor Keevan Sigerson, is being pursued across Europe by Moriarty's henchmen. Narrowly escaping death for the umpteenth time, he resolves to return to London, but is forced instead to take passage to New York. Seriously injured, he finds his way to Poughkeepsie and takes refuge in the Vassar Women's College, where he is soon embroiled in a mystery.

The pace of this novel is well-judged. From

the outset it is a gripping and colourful adventure with lots of action. Clear respect for the Canon is demonstrated in the many neat references and affectionate nods to the characters, stories and intrigues of the original texts, and some real-life characters, such as Harry Houdini and Samuel Morse, add further colour to the plot. The author demonstrates a comprehensive knowledge of Poughkeepsie history and the significance of Vassar College. It provides a splendid backdrop to a fast-paced story told with great care and affection.

MM

Sherlock Holmes and the Christmas Demon by James Lovegrove. *Titan Books*, 2019. 384pp. £12.99 (hbk)

It begins with the arrest of Father Christmas at a department store (a thief in disguise, of course) and quickly moves into stranger territory. Holmes is consulted by a young lady who says that her isolated family home in Yorkshire appears to be haunted by the Black Thurrick, a legendary demon — the antithesis of Santa Claus, who steals the toys of naughty children and replaces them with bundles of birch twigs. If no gift is put out for him, he will kidnap and kill the children. Miss Allerthorpe will soon turn twenty-one and will inherit a fortune, provided she is of sound mind, but she has seen the Black Thurrick and found bundles of birch twigs around Fellscar Keep. Is someone trying to drive her mad? When Holmes and Watson join the family's Christmas gathering at Fellscar and a member of the household is found dead, the situation becomes urgent. Atmosphere, setting, plot and style combine in a compelling tale.

RJ

The Art of Sherlock Holmes: USA Edition 1 conceived and curated by Phil Growick. *MX Publishing*. 2019. 208pp. £39.99/$49.95 (hbk)

This second volume in Phil Growick's project to commission new paintings as illustrations for new Sherlock Holmes stories is big and handsome, like the first. Seven of the thirteen stories have been published before, and you'll recognise some of the authors who have contributed: Mark Mower, Denis O Smith, Tracy Revels, Mike Hogan, Tim Symonds, the ubiquitous David Marcum. The painters' names and their work may be less familiar. There's a remarkable variety of style and medium: each painting is unique, and as Mr Growick says, art is in the eye of the beholder. A share of the proceeds from the book goes to Stepping Stones School at Undershaw, the Happy Life Children's Home in Nairobi, the American Cancer Society and the World Food Programme.

RJ