"I AM AN OMNIVOROUS READER"

Book reviews by CATHERINE COOKE, MATTHEW J ELLIOTT, MARK JONES, GUY MARRIOTT, PAUL THOMAS MILLER, MARK MOWER, JOHN SHEPPARD, JEAN UPTON and ROGER JOHNSON

My Scientific Methods: Science in the Sherlockian Canon, edited by Dana Richards, BSI. *The Baker Street Irregulars*, 2022. 256pp. $39.95 (hbk)

For this latest volume in the BSI's *Professions Series*, Professor Richards has assembled writers on aspects of science either directly related to the Sherlock Holmes stories and characters, or to Conan Doyle, or more generally related to a particular branch of science as it was practiced and understood in — usually — Victorian times. As is to be expected, the nineteen articles take different approaches to their chosen subject.

Dana Richards himself addresses the history and philosophy of science prior to 1880 and the arrival of Sherlock Holmes. Marshall S Berdan considers the scientists in the canon, including doctors of medicine, Hatherley the hydraulic engineer; naturalists, such as the Sumatran planter Culverton Smith, and Dr Leon Sterndale, lion hunter and explorer; and of course Professor Moriarty, mathematician and astronomer. Next is Michael W Homer, on Arthur Conan Doyle's long-standing interest in pseudo-science — spiritualism and the like. Bernard Lightman discusses "Holmes and Biology", and Christopher A Zordan examines Holmes as chemist, reminding us that when we are first introduced to Holmes in *A Study in Scarlet* he is, as a chemist, conducting his experiments on blood stains. Our own Calvert Markham writes on "Holmes and Physics", noting that the apparent certainty of physics as understood at the end of the nineteenth century has now become less certain, mirroring Conan Doyle's own journey from man of science to man of mysticism. David R Zauner surveys the beginnings of forensic medicine, such as fingerprinting techniques. Mark Schwartz looks at "Archaeology in the Canon", and Carlina de la Cova investigates "Anthropological Thought in the Canon", including criminal anthropology — the now defunct belief that criminality was heritable and congenital. "Science, Sociology, and Holmes" is Ketaki Dwivedi's subject, and Monica M Schmidt suggests that Holmes may have developed *mindfulness* in Tibet.

In "Asteroids, Comets and the Structure of the Solar System", William A Walsh considers a possible inspiration for Professor Moriarty's *The Dynamics of an Asteroid.* Randy Cerveny writes on meteorology and the dating of the stories; and S Brent Morris writes on Holmes as a mathematician. David Richards considers engineering in the canon. Toward the end of the book, we have "Sherlock Holmes and the Art of Software Testing" by Melinda Caric; and Mark Jones and Paul M Chapman jointly examine Conan Doyle's complicated relationship with science and scientists. Anastasia Klimchynskaya questions the relationship between literature and science in Holmes's day; and we conclude with Ashley D Polasek noting how interpretations of the character have developed into the artistic, cultural and literary genre known as Steampunk.

Briefly, each writer invites the reader to consider the characters, the canon and Doyle himself in ways that lead to new connections. The purpose of the "writings about the writings" should be to entertain, to encourage discussion and to further new interpretations of Sherlock Holmes. These essays succeed in this endeavour.

GM

The Essential Sherlock Holmes, Volume Two: Milestones, edited by Dan Andriacco. *Belanger Books*, 2022. 256pp. £18.95, pbk

Here are three stories, chosen as the most significant in the mid-period of Holmes's life and career. In *The Sign of Four*, Mary Morstan brings romance to 221B; "A Scandal in Bohemia" introduces *the* woman; and "The Greek Interpreter" marks the first appearance of Mycroft Holmes. Dr Andriacco introduces each story, Brian Belanger provides stylish illustrations, and nine Holmes scholars contribute seven thoughtful, sometimes challenging essays, two of them written in partnership.

Ray Betzner notes the egoism in Holmes's complaint that *A Study in Scarlet* is tinged with unnecessary romanticism: "The only point in the case which deserved mention was the curious analytical reasoning from effects to causes, by which I succeeded in unravelling it." Daniel L and Eugene B Friedman say that "Holmes is a dreamer — imbued with deep-seeded romantic passions and emotional inclinations." That observation is based on the records of later cases than *The Sign of Four*, and it reflects Holmes's increasing social maturity, itself a result of his association with the "hopelessly concrete" Watson, who the Friedmans say "is only able to perceive things in their basic, blandest, and most uninspiring forms."

Of the other essays, I'm particularly impressed by Regina Stinson's on Holmes's dramatic talents, Anne Margaret Lewis's on his respect for Irene Adler, and Maria Fleischhack & Jessica Fliss's on his attitude to women generally. There's one volume to come in this very worthwhile series.

RJ

Sherlock Holmes: A Study in Illustrations, volume 3 by Mike Foy. *MX Publishing*, 2022. 392pp. £34.99/$56.00/€53.99 (hbk)

There are fewer pages here than in Volume 1 or Volume 2, so why is this one more expensive? The answer is full-colour printing, essential to appreciating many of the pictures here. This volume introduces the work of Frederic Dorr Steele, many of whose

outstanding illustrations are intended to appear in colour — and Mr Foy takes the opportunity to include photographs, paintings and drawings of Steele's inspiration, William Gillette (he should, I think, have named the artist of the famous *Vanity Fair* caricature: Leslie Ward, alias 'Spy'). Steele's work for *Collier's*, *Liberty* and other publications takes up the greater part, but here also are the well-known Turf cigarette cards, featuring twenty-five of Conan Doyle's characters, all but six from the Holmes stories, and there's an interesting Spanish set of cards, the work of Joaquin Coll Salieti, included in boxes of chocolate, and variously illustrating "The Musgrave Ritual", "The Speckled Band", and *The Sign of Four*. Other items include W.T. Benda's nice illustrations for "The Sussex Vampire" in *Hearst's International* — though the artist's name is mis-spelt as 'Brenda' and the publisher's as 'Heart'.

Mike Foy and MX's momentous project couldn't have been achieved without assistance from Alexis Barquin and his amazingly comprehensive *Arthur Conan Doyle Encyclopedia*, which you'll find online at https://www.arthur-conan-doyle.com. There are more volumes to come. Bring 'em on!

RJ

The Finest Assorted Collection: Essays on Collecting Sherlock Holmes, edited by Peter Eckrich and Rob Nunn. *Gasogene Books*, 2022. 240pp. $26.95 (pbk)

Many — possibly most — Holmesians are collectors to a degree. It takes more than the canonical sixty stories to satisfy us. None of us can own everything relating to the great detective; even the great public collections at Minneapolis, Toronto and Portsmouth can't manage that. We may not aspire to collect everything in a specific field — first editions, foreign editions, art, toys, theatre memorabilia, autographs, and the rest — but it's quite possible to create, like Nathan Garrideb, a *good* collection, even if not a very valuable one.

The editors invited twenty-seven Sherlockian collectors to write about their own specialisms and experiences. Some names will be familiar (Steven Doyle, Ashley Polasek, Mattias Boström, Leslie Klinger, Paul Thomas Miller) and others less so, but all have something interesting to say. Besides those mentioned above, the subjects include greeting cards, numismatics, news reports, LGBT interpretations, and erotica. I like (but shan't follow) the advice on the back cover: "Mark pages to *prove* to family and friends that you are *not the only one* with this affliction."

RJ

The Game is Afoot: The Enduring World of Sherlock Holmes by Jeremy Black. *Rowman and Littlefield*, 2022. 248pp. £18.99 (hbk)

We are all familiar with books that trade on the Sherlock Holmes brand, but perhaps few with an identity crisis quite like this. The inside blurb suggests it might be the story of Conan Doyle, an assessment of Victorian writings, or even a biography of Sherlock Holmes. In fact, it is a social and economic history of turn-of-the-century Britain with frequent references to popular literature, the canon and Conan Doyle's wider work.

After a shaky introduction that repeats the usual Conan Doyle biography, Black settles into thematic discussions including London, society, politics and Empire. This, home ground for the author, is where he excels, effortlessly cantering through the major themes. But too often the Doylean references are superficial, reverting to lists of occasions when trains are mentioned, or dodgy colonels, or secret societies…

Occasionally, Black engages more substantively with the intersection of Conan Doyle's writings and views, on tariff reform for example. But divorce law is discussed without assessment of his campaigns or reasons for his views, and sweeping statements such as South London being "a particular dislike" in the Sherlock Holmes stories omit any consideration that Conan Doyle lived in the southern suburbs.

This is unfortunate, as many topics can be enriched by a deeper examination of Conan Doyle's work. Black's thoughts on Empire, environmentalism and science, for example, would all benefit from assessing the Professor Challenger stories, which fare particularly badly. One wonders if references to "Dr Challenger" are a judgment on the Professor's academic credentials.

Of Black's, there is no doubt, and there is much to appreciate in his thoughts on the era. It was a rare pleasure to see Conan Doyle's wider oeuvre considered, plus the inclusion of works by Buchan, Wells and others. But a clearer definition of the purpose of this book would go a long way to making it a better read.

MJ

A Demi-Decade of The Shingle of Southsea: The World's Greatest Sherlock Holmes Society by Paul Thomas Miller. *The Shingle of Southsea Press*, 2022. 397pp. £9.99 (pbk)

"In 2022, The Shingle of Southsea (the world's greatest Sherlock Holmes society) celebrates its fifth year of existence... Like all self-published Kindle Direct Publishing books, it really does suffer from a lack of editing, proof-reading and talent."

Paul Thomas Miller is not quite your usual Holmesian scholar. For a start, he is the sole member of The Shingle of Southsea, and therefore author of the entire contents of this bizarrely entertaining book. I first encountered his work in "The Adventure of the Missing Tail", a Winnie-the-Pooh parody (first published in the Summer 2019 issue of the SHJ). In this book are both zany humour *and* good serious articles on Mrs Hudson, Holmes's attitude to women, Watson's marriage and other topics. Paul's 2019 book *Watson Does Not Lie* is a serious contribution to Holmesian chronology, based on the assumption in the title; but here's an addendum:

"Watson Is Full of Crap", which argues from canonical minutiae that the Doctor's records are wholly untrustworthy! There's no lack of talent here!

RJ

It's Not Always 1895: A Sherlock Holmes Chronology by Bruce Harris. Independently published, 2022. 124pp. £8.62 (pbk)

It's always interesting to know upon what evidence a Holmesian chronologist decides to date a specific case. The 2nd August 1914 for "His Last Bow" is, I think, the only printed date that's universally accepted; otherwise it's a free-for-all. Was Watson married at the time, and if so to whom? Is that even relevant? Bruce Harris, an enthusiastic member of the Sherlockian Chronologist Guild, chooses, with few exceptions, to ignore the good doctor's marital state, along with his observations on the weather. Mr Harris's conclusions may differ from those of other such scholars, but that's the nature of the Game. As he says, "The bad part about undertaking the Canon's chronology is there are no right and wrong answers. That's also the good part." I am in awe of Mr H and his fellow-chronologists, and I welcome his addition to that particular sub-section of canonical research.

RJ

An Irregular Life by Mark F McPherson, BSI. *MX Publishing*, 2022. 538pp. £29.99 (hbk)

The author is probably best known in the UK for his masterful one man show as Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, which he performed at the *Weekend with Arthur Conan Doyle* in Tunbridge Wells in 1992. The performance was memorable: Mark bears an uncanny resemblance to Sir Arthur and had worked hard, collaborating with Dame Jean Conan Doyle, to prepare the material. As one who witnessed that performance, the reminiscences about it in this autobiography bring back happy memories and shed new light on the process.

There is much more in this book. There are stories of meeting our Sherlockian forebears as a young man both in the US and the UK. There is a delightful tale of meeting Pip Dalton, Charles Merriman and others in 1969, and an account of the result: Mark's foray to Dartmoor and Brook Manor, coming much closer than many Sherlockians have managed. There are reminiscences of time spent with Basil Rathbone, Jeremy Brett and Douglas Wilmer, as well as others less related to Sherlock Holmes. Mark has made a career of investigating mysteries; those with an interest in subjects such as James Bond, King Arthur, Camelot and Loch Ness will also find many stories to their taste and reflections on how life can offer surprising correlations.

Although there is a chapter list, an index would have helped, for those who like to dip back in and follow up a specific subject.

CC

The New Sherlockian, edited by Kelvin I Jones. *MX Publications*, 2022. 208pp. £12.99 (pbk)

The first issue of *The Sherlockian* was published by Magico in 1986. Intended as a regular independent journal, like *Baker Street Miscellanea* or *The Sherlock Holmes Review*, it folded after five issues, but there was good material there: articles, stories and poems from distinguished commentators, such as Catherine Cooke, David Stuart Davies, Michael Hardwick, Denis O Smith and the editor, Kelvin Jones — as well as the less celebrated, including Robert F Fleissner, George Cleve Haynes, Grant Healy, A Godfrey Hunt and, er, me. Contributions by all these are reprinted in this book, along with newer offerings by Ray Betzner, Wendy Heyman-Marsaw, David Marcum, Barbara Rusch, and others. (Glen Miranker's name appears on the back cover, though there's nothing by him inside.)

I could wish I'd had the chance to help with editing *The New Sherlockian*, particularly the layout. Nevertheless, there's much here to enjoy and to ponder over. I am very pleased to have contributed to this book.

RJ

Bryant & May's Peculiar London by Christopher Fowler. *Doubleday*, 2022. 400pp. £18.99 (hbk)

Fans of Fowler's series of mysteries will already be familiar with Arthur Bryant and John May, "the nation's oldest serving detectives," along with their off-beat and sometimes disreputable friends and colleagues. In this book, they all pitch in to take us on a walking tour of "odd buildings, odder characters, lost venues, forgotten disasters, confusing routes, dubious gossip, illicit pleasures and hidden pubs… We hope to capture something of the city's restless spirit by shamelessly and wilfully wandering off course." Not unexpectedly, there's a good amount of Sherlockian interest. Besides, you've got to love a book that advises, "Watch out for the man in the top hat with a flaming tuba."

JU

Hidden Threads in Sherlock Holmes, Volume 1 by Ted Stetson & Gail Stetson. *Three Door Publishing*, 2022. 218pp. £15.00 (pbk), £4.00 (Kindle)

Long ago, Pope R Hill, Sr published *Part One* and *The Sherlock Holmes Hoax*, supposedly extracts from a forthcoming book called *Dating Sherlock Holmes*. As Brad Keefauver has written (at https://sherlockpeoria.blogspot.com/2021/09/?m=0): "His theory is based on three supposed facts: 1) The Canon is full of errors. 2) The chronology of the stories makes no sense. 3) Pope himself had worked out alternate plots for each of the sixty stories from the clues within said stories. Conan Doyle, therefore, did all of that on purpose, creating a new kind of detective story that offered the reader a second layer of mystery."

This new book applies a similar notion to the first twenty-four short stories. The "Hidden Thread" in "A Case of Identity", we're told, is boxing, evident from mention of "the four weight classes established in 1880 by the Amateur Boxing Association — feather, light, middle (here, middle-sized) and heavy," along with

"many other boxing hints", including "advertised", "ring", "purple plush", "glancing" and "separate". When we reach "The Final Problem" we get religion, philosophy and science as the underlying themes. I admire the authors' diligence and tenacity. They give us much to think about, but many of their assertions go beyond the credible, and there are errors of fact. The self-styled Count Von Kramm *"is really Wilhelm Gottsreich Sigismond von Ormstein, Grand Duke of Cassel-Feister and heir to the Bohemian throne. Conan Doyle had fun creating the name of this aristocrat; it means 'fat, rich, rotten liar'."* Not so. 'Feister' does mean 'fatter', but ACD wrote 'Felstein', which means 'rock'. 'Reich' means 'rich', but 'Gottsreich' means 'godly'. I don't know where "rotten liar" comes in.

It'll be interesting to see what the Stetsons derive from the rest of the Holmes canon.

RJ

The Monstrum Opus of Sherlock Holmes: A Compendium of Horrors Dr Watson Dared Not Tell, edited by Nathaniel Barker-Harris, Brad Keefauver and Rob Nunn. Independently published, 2022. 131pp. £8.10 (pbk)

This anthology is also based on the idea that the truth lies *behind* the stories we know and love, but it goes beyond the mundane suppositions of Pope Hill and the Stetsons. The seventeen contributors — who include such luminaries as Ray Betzner, Steve Mason, Phillip Bergem, Elinor Gray, Nancy Holder and Paul Thomas Miller — ask us to reject Holmes's disbelief in ghosts, vampires and the like, as either short-sighted or simply untrue. In these pages, we're told that Elsie Cubitt was a zombie, and Edward Rucastle a lycanthrope; that Grimesby Roylott was himself the "swamp adder"; that Herr Heidegger was killed by the monster of Blue John Gap; that the Cornish Horror was the work of Great Cthulhu… The clues are there in the stories; interpreting them is the reader's responsibility and privilege.

The whole of the *Monstrum Opus* (great title, cracking cover design) is fascinating, amusing and fiendishly clever. Recommended, especially to lovers of flamboyant Holmesian fantasy, delivered with a straight face.

RJ

What Child is This? A Sherlock Holmes Christmas Adventure by Bonnie MacBird. *Collins Crime Club. 2022*. 228pp. £14.99 (hbk)

An enthralling and heart-warming book, full of Christmas cheer. This is the fifth in MacBird's series, which sees our heroes pursuing two cases: an attempted kidnapping and the search for a missing person. While the plotlines are not as lengthy or complex as those of the earlier books, they are well-crafted and enchanting. Alongside the action, the story features lots of well-judged humour and is told with great clarity and affection. Character-wise, the portrayal of both Holmes and Watson felt familiar and reassuring. And it was a neat twist to once again feature Miss Hephzibah O'Malley — otherwise known as 'Heffie' — in the story. The intelligent and streetwise seventeen-year-old is proving to be a very capable detective in her own right, and we learn a lot more about her past. I hope that continues in future adventures. An additional feature of the book, which contributes enormously to its strong festive flavour, is the inclusion of some wonderful line drawings by the talented comic book artist Frank Cho, who has been a long-time fan of Sherlock Holmes and is also a member of the Baker Street Irregulars. That affection comes through loud and clear.

All in all, another worthy addition to a fine adventure series.

MM

The MX Book of New Sherlock Holmes Stories — Part XXXI: 2022 Annual (1875-1887), Part XXXII: 2022 Annual (1888-1895), *and* **Part XXXIII: 2022 Annual (1896-1919),** edited by David Marcum. *MX Publishing*, 2022. 572pp (Part XXXI), 524pp (Part XXXII), 548pp (Part XXXIII). Each £28.99 (hbk), £17.99 (pbk)

David Marcum's latest volumes add sixty-two new stories to his impressive series of New Sherlock Holmes Stories. My single difficulty in reviewing them is coming up with something new to say. The foreword, "We Can But Try", summed up better than I could why I am such a fan of these books: Marcum is rightly proud of the quantity of "True Holmes" stories his now thirty-three volumes have given the Holmesian community. What he is too humble to mention is the quality. He has compiled a huge number of authentic-feeling short pastiches which all deserve your attention. There is some variable quality in the stories, but none fall below an acceptable standard. As ever, there is something here for everyone. Stories range from 1875 to 1919 and include the truth about the Grosvenor Furniture Van, ornithophobic dreams, a naïve homage to the rough plot of "The Six Napoleons", Holmes's unusual birthday treat, and a gothic-horror Park Lane murder. By far my favourite was Mark Wardecker's telling of the truth regarding the Politician, the Lighthouse and the Trained Cormorant, which was incredibly canonical in feel and plot. As I have said before, it is clear that the thing which makes David Marcum's series stand out from its contemporaries is his enthusiastic diligence. I recommend them all to the attention of those who continue to crave enjoyable short Holmesian pastiches.

PTM

Sherlock Holmes: The Fiends of New York City by Jonathan Barnes. *Big Finish*, 2022. 3 CDs. £24.99 or download £19.99

Nicholas Briggs and Richard Earl make a very welcome return as Holmes and Watson in Jonathan Barnes's latest audio play. In the summer of 1901, an American calls at 221B, claiming to be a detective and requesting help in catching a multi-murderer; the man

he accuses protests that the 'detective' himself is the criminal. Watson's new wife, an American actress, makes her West End debut as Cordelia, but her triumph is disturbed by a nightmare visitor. Mycroft Holmes demands Sherlock's aid with a potentially troublesome MP. We meet the elusive Seamstress of Peckham Rye, whose presence as a force in the underworld was sensed but not experienced in the drama named after her. Colonel Moran, released from gaol in *The Master of Blackstone Grange*, finds her less easy to deal with than Professor Moriarty. As listeners to these adventures will know, Mr Barnes weaves an elegant and complicated web, whose threads are elegantly and satisfactorily untangled. Under Ken Bentley's direction, the cast — nine actors besides the two leads — and crew all do justice to the script. It's exciting, intriguing and intelligent. Capital!

RJ

Sherlock Holmes and the Crystal Palace Murder by Johanna M Rieke. *MX Publishing. 2022*. 173pp. £8.99 (pbk)

An enthralling tale, which begins by unpicking what we thought we knew about the events leading up to, and beyond, Holmes's encounter with Professor Moriarty at the Reichenbach Falls. That our heroes will continue to be challenged by Moriarty's successors is writ large from the very start of this traditional pastiche. The central part of the plot is concerned with the murder of Joseph Healy, a well-regarded employee of the Crystal Palace in Sydenham, whose body is discovered on a bench within a privet hedge maze. As the action unfolds thick and fast, we get to see Holmes's deductive capabilities used to full effect.

The book is well researched and full of accurate period detail. Most importantly, the characters in the book are familiar and consistent. A neat touch is the inclusion of both Inspector Gregson and Inspector Lestrade, vying for authority in what the latter erroneously believes to be a trivial matter needing "no cool intellectual deductions". This is Rieke's sixth Holmes novel, and a very worthy addition to her booklist.

MM

Observations by Gaslight – Stories from the World of Sherlock Holmes by Lyndsay Faye. *Head of Zeus*, 2022. 320pp. £20.00 (hbk)

Watson gets to take a break while other familiar names from the canon share their experiences with and impressions of Sherlock Holmes. We hear from Irene Adler, Wiggins, Inspector Lestrade, Stanley Hopkins, Lomax the sub-librarian and, of course, Mrs. Hudson. Originally published in the United States, there are, inevitably, some Americanisms that slipped through the editor's net. However, they do not detract from an enjoyable read. Each chapter is a stand-alone story, so it's fun to dip in-and-out when there isn't time to settle down with a full-scale novel. A good Christmas stocking-filler for your favourite Sherlockian.

JU

Holmes Coming by Kenneth Johnson. *Blackstone Publishing*, 2022. 305pp. £21.81 (hbk), £5.99 (Kindle)

It's thirty years since the TV movie *Sherlock Holmes Returns* first aired in America. It boasted a strong script by veteran writer/producer Kenneth Johnson, and a winning performance by Anthony Higgins as a Holmes who, having defeated Moriarty at the Reichenbach Falls, finds that the Victorian era holds no further challenges for him, and so leaves England for San Francisco, where he places himself in suspended animation, to reawaken in the twentieth century. Higgins, who had previously portrayed the villain in the 1985 film *Young Sherlock Holmes*, is teamed up with Debrah Farentino as Dr Amy Winslow, to solve a series of crimes committed by a descendent of Moriarty. The concept, sadly, did not lead to a series, and not for the first time: a 1987 movie, *The Return of Sherlock Holmes*, starring Michael Pennington, utilised a similar gimmick, and also failed to ignite sufficient interest.

The film might have remained a minor curiosity had not its writer revisited the plot for this novel. He updates Holmes's resurrection to the present century, and inserts many references to current technology and trends that serve to remind anyone familiar with the TV movie how much our world has changed in just three decades. The story is narrated by Amy Winslow, which causes some minor difficulties as she is obliged to describe in perfect detail a number of scenes in which she does not appear. But Johnson's wit and skill at presenting believable deductions make this slight tale a most enjoyable read, and the book even ends with the promise of a sequel — which, by necessity, will be an original tale. Additionally, a portion of the profits from *Holmes Coming* will go to Doctors Without Borders, if you needed any more incentive to purchase it.

MJE

Sherlock Holmes and the Ciphered List by Simon Trelawney. *Breese Books*, 2022. 340pp. £10.99 (pbk)

Breese Books have been publishing Holmesian adventures for some time, but this is Simon Trelawney's very first book. It is no business of mine to spoil the plot for readers, so suffice it to say that the story is set in the world of intelligence and counter-intelligence, with all the obvious potential for twists and surprises. One might describe it as the world of Smiley and Co transported back to 1895. Hardly anyone in this book is telling the truth, except of course the narrator, Watson.

Many of our familiar and much-loved characters make their appearance in the narrative, and, many familiar situations are similarly included, all of which serves to keep it all suitably grounded in our beloved canon.

The author has a nice way with words, which works

to create a literary atmosphere that is both familiar and pleasing. That this is the work of an Englishman is both perfectly clear and perfectly delightful. It is an infinitely more convincing evocation of the period than any other pastiche I have reviewed. All in all, I thoroughly approve of, and heartily recommend, this book.

JS

Dark Music by David Lagercrantz, translated by Ian Giles. *Quercus Books*, 2022. 384pp. £20.00 (hbk)

Upon the death of Stieg Larsson, Lagercrantz continued the *Millennium* series, beginning with *The Girl in the Spider's Web*, so I was intrigued when the publishers first approached me about *Dark Music*. At face value, it's not a Sherlock Holmes story, nor even a pastiche. However, it is a solid homage to the character of Holmes, placed in modern times. In an interview, the author stated: "I wanted to create a modern Sherlock Holmes. I wanted to bring together a well-educated man from the upper classes with a young local police officer from Stockholm's suburbs." Not realising the storm this comment would create, as soon as the interview was printed, publishers around the world began bidding for his book. "Everyone suddenly wanted to buy something that didn't exist. I should have been worried, or at least felt like a bit of a fraudster. But somehow, as soon as I mentioned them in public, my characters came to life. I could see them before me: Hans Rekke, tall, graceful, hawk-like — and bipolar. In his manic state he observes the world in a razor-sharp light…Micaela Vargas is short, powerful — and a fighter. She often finds herself struggling against headwinds, in her job as a police officer, with her family and against the prejudices that surround her. She's streetwise, and she hasn't had the time or the means to afford weakness." Vargas, the daughter of Chilean refugees, is more Wiggins than Watson. Quick, smart, and determined to advance in life, she is the perfect apprentice for Rekke, who, between periods of genius, passes through the shadows of mental illness and dependence on a cocktail of drugs. There's even an influential (and somewhat menacing) older brother. The plot is an intriguing murder involving the Taliban and classical music. There are indications that this could be a series, and I am looking forward to the next instalment.

JU

Mrs Hudson and the Wild West by Barry S Brown. *MX Publishing*. 2022. 190pp. £9.99 (pbk)

This is the seventh in a series of novels by Barry S Brown, who seems to have taken upon himself the task of exposing the unjust treatment of Mrs Hudson. This alleged unjust treatment consists, we are told, of a conspiracy among crime writers to maintain Sherlock Holmes as the Great Detective, whereas, according to Mr Brown, the real but virtually unacknowledged "great detective" is Mrs Hudson! In Mr Brown's world, Mrs Hudson founded the consulting detective agency and recruited Holmes and Watson to provide the male figureheads a woman needed in order to start her own business. His literary style is distinctly of the USA: Holmes and Watson frequently lapse into an American idiom in their speech, and giving Mrs Hudson a dubious version of the cockney accent is equally unconvincing. Overall, I have to say that the book lacks atmosphere and authenticity, but it is hugely entertaining, and it will no doubt be as successful as the author's earlier work.

JS

In Brief

Dan Andriacco's second short Holmes novel, after *House of the Doomed*, is a corker. ***The Sword of Death*** (Gasogene Books; $18.95, pbk). A woman trapped in a loveless marriage; her cruel husband savagely murdered in his Mayfair mansion; an abundance of close-mouthed upper-class suspects; an enigmatic Indian servant — a link to the dead man's unsavoury past. It's a devilish complex case, and an ingenious story. Dr Andriacco gives us the real Holmes and Watson, and the real late Victorian London. "It is so long a chain, and yet every link rings true."

The 2020 Cameron Hollyer Memorial Lecture, presented by the Friends of the Arthur Conan Doyle Collection at Toronto Public Library, was ***Sherlockian Collecting: A Tour of Clever, Creative and Weird Pursuits***, by rare-book dealer **Rebecca Romney**. The text is available as a booklet, priced US$15.00, including postage; e-mail info@acdfriends.org. You can watch the lecture online at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9-6kaMJFDkU.

Admirers of "the Sherlock Holmes of Praed Street" will find much to delight them in ***The Novellas of Solar Pons***, edited by **Derrick Belanger** and **Brian Belanger** (Belanger Books, 2022; £19.95, pbk). There are four new long stories of Pons and his friend Dr Parker: "The Adventure of Mack the Chipper" by Chris Chan, "The Adventure of the Immortal Dead Man" by David Marcum, "The Devil's Book" by Nick Cardillo, and "The Goblins of Faegan Hill" by Derrick Belanger (the third and fourth are each long enough to be published separately, as short novels). All capture the spirit and the style of August Derleth's classic original stories, one of which, "The Adventure of the Late Mr Faversham", concludes the book, but in the form of a radio play, dramatised by Catherine Behrens. After many decades of neglect, Pons and Parker are well and truly back!

Whether or not you get to see Blackeyed Theatre's ***Sherlock Holmes: The Valley of Fear***, currently on tour and reviewed elsewhere in this issue, the script by **Nick Lane** makes fascinating reading. It's published by our friends at MX as an attractive 136-page paperback for £9.99, or £3.19 for the Kindle edition.

Even before *A Study in Terror* and *Murder by Decree*, writers had Sherlock Holmes investigating the most notorious murders of the late Victorian age. On a more sober level, researchers — including Michael Harrison — have applied detective logic in attempts to identify the butcher of Whitechapel. New this year is

Jack the Ripper — The Policeman: A New Suspect by **Rod Beattie** (Pen & Sword; £20.00, hbk). The idea that the murderer might be a policeman isn't new (it's the basis of Lyndsay Faye's excellent 2009 Sherlock Holmes novel *Dust and Shadow*). Mr Beattie's suspect is Bowden Endacott, who, after a miserable childhood and dissolute youth, was hardly the ideal copper. Having arrested a woman he accused of prostitution, he was himself charged with perjury; he was acquitted, but debt-ridden and assigned to less public police work. Perhaps he did then take to slaughtering women in Whitechapel as revenge against prostitutes, but I'm not convinced.

J Lawrence Matthews, whose novel *One Must Tell the Bees* was favourably reviewed in the Summer *Journal*, is the author of an appealing seasonal novella: ***The Case of the Disappearing Beaune: A Sherlock Holmes Christmas Mystery*** (Not Making This Up LLC; £5.95, pbk). On Christmas morning, Watson visits Holmes to invite him to dinner. Holmes declines, and gives him a bottle of wine — but the wine has been replaced with sand. Several old friends feature in the ensuing investigation, which leads to an unexpected and satisfactory solution. A few Americanisms, and questionable 'facts' about London don't prevent one's willing suspension of disbelief.

RJ