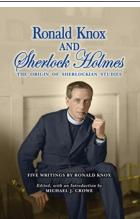




2011

Communication No. 303

The Pleasant Places of Florida



A popular pastime among followers of Sherlock Holmes is to treat his adventures as though they were real. Unique in all literature, this pursuit is known as the "Grand Game," an intellectual exercise played in order to discover a deeper knowledge of the tales by examining clues in the stories themselves, or by correlating the Sherlockian Canon with historical fact. It's an unprecedented phenomenon that began with one man—Monsignor Ronald Knox—and his 1912 essay *Studies in the Literature of Sherlock Holmes*.

But this wasn't Ronald Knox's only written work about Sherlock Holmes. Here you will find all five ground-breaking Sherlockian pieces by Ronald Knox. These classic works are sure to enhance the reader's enjoyment and understanding of The Great Detective. By providing documented (and sometimes surprising) answers to a perceptive series of questions, Michael Crowe reintroduces us to the very origin of "The Great Game" of Sherlockian Studies, a game that, as he says "brought the great detective back from the non-living." \$32.95 www.wessexpress.com

Different Millennia: Three Plays

Hardcover book, Writer's Workshop, E-mail: prodsky@cal.vsnl.net.in 2009, by Vithal Rajan

This is a collection of three plays, each set in a different millennium. The review is only about the play which refers to the Master. It may only be purchased through the publisher, via E-Mail.

Sherlock Holmes and the Pirates of the Horn provides the only familiar environment for most readers. The events take place at several locations in London and at Lady Oving's Manor near Chichester, all in the Spring of 1888.

The characters are mostly familiar, with Dr. Watson providing prefatory remarks for each scene. There is a collection of the "Doyle Company": Mrs. Hudson, Inspector Lestrade, Sherlock Holmes, Dr. Watson, Billy the Page and Mycroft Holmes, along with a raggle-taggle crew of police, suspects and other raff and scuff.

The mystery to be solved is the odd activities of a band of pirates operating off the Horn of Africa. These pirates demand ransom for ships captured, but

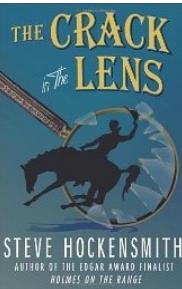
fail to act in the expected blood-thirsty manner. There are no corpses, no raped womenfolk, no plank-walkings and no beaten or even harmed servants and sailors. Further, they seem to be able to dodge the Royal Navy at will and to attack only when merchant ships are unguarded and vulnerable.

As events progress, Holmes and Watson follow clues into odd corners and occurrences in England seem to have more influence than those in the Indian Ocean. A peculiar gold Mohur turns up in quite a wrong place and a ship owner manages to disappear leaving no trace but only a bloody shambles behind him.

When the truth comes out, it is puzzling and worrisome. Sherlock and Watson are perplexed and unsettled, while the pirates' victims are looking toward a profitable future. It seems that only the insurers are losers and that Europe is united against the pirate hordes.

Somehow, I feel that the solution is not quite worthy of the players. Perhaps something a bit more imaginative would have been expected of our villains. In any case, it should provide a lively and amusing evening, even if Holmes and Watson are disappointed.

Reviewed by: Philip K. Jones, March, 2011



The Crack in the Lens

Softcover, Foolscap & Quill, LLC, 2010, by Darlene A. Cypser

This book is the first of a series of novels in which Ms. Cypser is planning to describe Sherlock's life through University and his early career as a detective.

In contrast to a number of recent Sherlockian efforts, this book was written and edited by a professional. I found only one trivial error, although I am sure there are a few more. The writing is clear and direct, with prose that evokes the Yorkshire Dales and the people who have lived there from time out of mind. For a while I found myself recalling the first seasons of the series "All Creatures Great and Small" with its lovely scenery and wonderful characters.

The story is sad, with Sherlock going through a late adolescence and having to cope with a very demanding tutor, one Professor James Moriarty. We are introduced to Mycroft and to their older brother, Sherriford as well as to Squire Siger and Mrs. Holmes. The wild and lovely scenery is a backdrop for a tale of madness, love and deceit with a few side trips (cont. on page 2)



(cont. from page 1) into the normal world of family and friends. Sherlock's sickly childhood and family relations are explored in some depth as part of coming to understand his nature.

There are several questions left unanswered, but I suspect that the author has a few more facts to pass along at opportune times. Certain actions by Squire Holmes and Professor Moriarty require explanation, and the fates of several introduced characters leave room for growth and development. The story ends with a recapitulation of the events in "The Gloria Scott" that put Sherlock firmly on path to be the world's first consulting detective.

This is not a happy book nor is it light reading. It is a tale about forging a boy into a man, as one heats, pounds, tempers and quenches steel. It took me several sittings and I read it in the dead of winter, a bad time to face snow in the fells and bitterness in the heart. This is a book that provides explanations for some of the odd qualities we have all remarked in the Master. Those qualities could not have come easily or pleasantly.

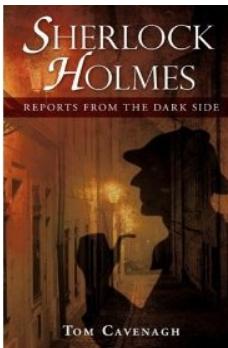
Reviewed by: Philip K. Jones, January, 2011

Sherlock Holmes: Reports from the Dark Side

Trade Paperback, iUniverse, Bloomington, IN, 02/2009 by Tom Cavenagh

This is a novel that begins in a novel fashion. Watson's publisher, Mr. Nevin Wainwright, Managing Director of *The Strand*, arrives at Baker Street requesting an interview with Holmes. It seems that he has received a remarkable manuscript for publication. It tells the story of a twelve year old unsolved case of embezzlement in Scotland as if it were actually a case of theft and murder by another person. It goes further and gives specifics, including the place of interment of the corpse. The embezzlement case is real and still unresolved so Holmes, Watson and Wainwright troop off to Scotland, find the body and pass the author's name to the police. Before the waves of this bomb have subsided, the author submits a second story, this time of a fraudulent bank loan scam some five years before in Zurich.

By the time this second crime is verified, the author demands that the stories be published under threat to send them elsewhere if *The Strand* does not comply. Again, the facts seem to agree with the author and the *Strand* prepares to publish. A third story is submitted, this time in segments, while Holmes and the police scramble to find the perpetrator(s?) of the first two tales. This story is of a crime yet to be committed, the theft of a



gem on loan from a German museum to the British Museum. Holmes and Watson, along with police and Editors descend on the British Museum to be told that "The Green Fire of the Incas" is secure and in no danger.

Inquiries are pursued, more story elements are verified when the second installment of the gem theft story arrives, to reveal that the theft is already complete. Expert appraisal confirms this and things begin to get confusing. Mycroft is involved, the supposed author of the tales is found and the cheated banker arrives from Zurich, threatening to buy *The Strand* and to sack the managing director if he publishes the second story. At this point, the first segment of the fourth story arrives as a threat to kill Holmes, the Prime Minister and the Queen/Empress.

All this occurs while Watson casually mentions the various tales he is completing and sending off to *The Strand* and Holmes pursues obscure trails of evidence. Mycroft alerts the Government to the threats and all parties agree that the soon-to-occur wedding of the Prince of Wales at St. Paul's Cathedral presents a perfect opportunity for the threatened assassinations.

This novel is a real nail-biter. It takes quite a while before the villain becomes apparent and, in fact it takes a fair time to figure out that there really *is* a villain. The editing is reasonably well done, with only a few errors in spelling, capitalization and punctuation. A few of the characters' activities and attitudes may be suspect, but that is a debatable subject. In summary, this is a riveting and intriguing mystery, solved in true Sherlockian fashion.

Reviewed by: Philip K. Jones, March 2011.

CALENDAR SHERLOCKIANA

May 28 - 30th Annual Spring Gathering The Pleasant Places of Florida. A Corner of England Tea Room, 6297 Central Avenue, St. Petersburg. 11:00am - 2:30pm. Please contact Wanda Dow. \$3 to cover costs. Order lunch from menu. See flyer.

May 29 - July 1 - Malice Domestic Mystery Convention 23 at the Hyatt Regency, Bethesda, MD. www.malicedomestic.org Note: Panel discussion: *Game's Afoot: SH influence on modern sleuths*.

Sept. 18 - Buchercon Convention, St. Louis, MO bouchercon2011.com

Oct. 13-14 - The Friends of Arthur Conan Doyle Collection Symposium, Toronto.

Nov. 3 - Gasfitters' Ball, The Diamond Jubilee Celebration of Queen Victoria. South Pasadena Women's Club. Contact Chrys & Jerry Kegley ccbsla@social.rr.com or cfkovacic@aol.com

Nov. 11-13 - From Gillette to Brett conference, Indianapolis, IN.



The Displaced Detective Series is a science fiction Holmes "pastiche," in which the brilliant hyperspatial physicist, Dr. Skye Chadwick, discovers that there are alternate realities, and said alternates are often populated by those we consider only literary characters. Her pet research, Project: Tesseract, hidden deep under Schriever AFB, is her means of looking in on these continua. In one particular reality, continuum 114, Sherlock Holmes (who exists in several continua) is to have died along with Moriarty at the Reichenbach. Knee-jerking, Skye intervenes, rescuing Holmes, who inadvertently flies through the tesseract wormhole connecting his universe with ours, while Moriarty plunges to his death. Unable to send Holmes back without causing continuum collapse due to non-uniqueness, he must stay in our world and learn to adapt to the 21st century.

Meanwhile, the Schriever AFB Department of Security discovers a spy ring working to dig out the details - and possibly sabotage - Project: Tesseract.

Can Chadwick help Holmes come up to speed in modern investigative techniques in time to stop the spies? Will Holmes be able to thrive in our modern world? Is Chadwick now Holmes' new "Watson" - or more?

Go to www.stephanie-osborn.com for details. This book has been recently picked up by Twilight Books and a release date is in negotiation.



CITY LIT ANNUAL SPRING TEA Chicago, IL

Please join us on **May 14th at 2:00pm** for City Lit Theater's **Annual Spring Tea Fundraiser** at the Edgewater Beach Cafe (in the big pink building one block east of City Lit).

We will be serving High Tea, holding a silent auction, and performing a one-time-only concert reading of *His Last Bow: An Epilogue of Sherlock Holmes* by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, featuring Don Bender as Mr. Sherlock Holmes and Jerry Bloom as Dr. John Watson with Shawna Tucker and George Segebrecht.

Call or email for tickets
773-293-3682 or info@citylit.org
Single Tickets - \$25
Pair of Tickets - \$45

DON'T MISS!!!
CityLit's production of
Sign of Four
May 27 - 31



The Strange Return of Sherlock Holmes

Softcover, Severn House Publishers Ltd. , 2010, By Barry Grant

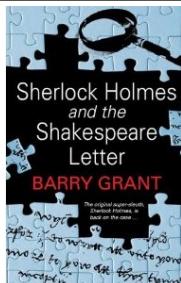
This book is the first of a series of novels which feature Sherlock Holmes, who was lost on a mission for the King in 1914 in Switzerland. He has apparently been recovered, resuscitated and is recuperating as Cedric Coombes in Wales. James Wilson, a retired newspaper correspondent who was wounded in Afghanistan, meets an old friend who tells him that Coombes is looking for a roommate, as is Wilson, and so begins a tale.

The 'facts' about Coombes come to Wilson slowly. He is skeptical and fascinated. Holmes seems very much Holmes, attempting to sop up ninety years and more of details and marvels. Meanwhile, Holmes is asked to help the local police with a puzzling little mystery. It seems that a chief Inspector Lestrade, of Scotland Yard was assigned by the Bureau to aid in Holmes' recovery. His grandfather (yes, rat-face) was involved with Holmes many years before and seems to have passed along some tips for making use of him. There seems to be a large government presence involved in the matter, which argues against the 'simple' explanation nominally provided.

The mechanics of Holmes' disappearance and revival are sketchy and bear the marks of a government cover-up, besides being almost impossible to believe as presented. The key word here is 'almost.' The story is crisp and well-written and the writer has a real gift for catching characters. His scenes are lively, his comments are few, but well-chosen and the situations seem to develop naturally. Wilson remarks at one point that Holmes seems to exhibit many of the symptoms of "bi-Polar disorder." This is not a physician speaking, but it does seem to catch the essence of the Holmes of The Canon. This Holmes is a bit more human than Dr. Watson's version, but is also quite believable.

The mystery proceeds apace and Holmes and Wilson, together, manage to muddle through. The clean, sharp answers of The Canonical tales are not in evidence, but this Holmes and Watson (oops, Wilson!) are much more believable and likeable. They relate to one another and they actually compliment each other. It makes for a very interesting book. This edition is new and, possibly, revised from the original 2007 version. It is well-edited and imaginative.

Reviewed by: Philip K. Jones, March, 2011



Sherlock Holmes and the Shakespeare Letter

Hardcover, Severn House Publishers Ltd., 2010, by Barry Grant

This is the second in the author's series of tales of Sherlock Holmes as he adjusts to the 21st Century. Since it does not contain and explain the details of Sherlock's return, it is less encumbered by difficulties than the previous book in the series. In fact, this book presents a thoroughly engrossing mystery. A friend of Wilson brings the existence of a letter, supposedly written by The Bard, to Holmes' attention and he and Wilson agree to investigate the claim. This simple act seems to set off a string of unrelated events, including murder, theft and all sorts of huggermugger.

Holmes' investigations lead him and Wilson into some odd places, with a raft of interesting and mysterious characters, all of who seem to be related, somehow, to one another. Some of the psychological trimmings seem a bit overdone to me, but then, I do not place much faith in psychological theory. On the other hand, this character set seems to have enough "psychology" about them for any three well-thought-out novels.

Holmes exhibits his ability to fit right into the new world and to function effectively, albeit, wistfully. Wilson, of course, is right at home and is rapidly recuperating from being left for a younger and more successful man by his wife of many years. In fact, Wilson seems to be adapting quite well to the single state, while Holmes still struggles to understand the nuances of the "lighter" emotions. The other characters are all exhibiting more emotions than can be easily listed, some of which are quite suspicious.

Of course, in the end, it turns out that several of the more baffling mysteries encountered are interrelated and the actual "bad guys" are limited to a few rather than the crowd that seem to be "suspects." Holmes makes a few mistakes, as does Wilson, but the villain of the piece is thwarted and Wilson seems to have acquired a fiancée, although this process is not explained in any depth. The characters continue to go their own ways and Scotland Yard remains satisfied with their "investment" in Sherlock Holmes.

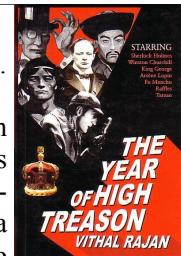
Reviewed by: Philip K. Jones, March, 2011



The Year of High Treason

Softcover, Rupa Publications India Pvt. Ltd. 2011, By Vithal Rajan

This book is the third Sherlockian publication by this author. Others include his collection of novellas about Holmes and Watson in India titled *Holmes of the Raj* and a play, "Sherlock Holmes and the Pirates of the Horn," which was published in his collection, *Different Millennia: Three Plays*. *Raj* and *Treason* are available on several book services: Abebooks, Biblio and Alibris.



This book is a sharp contrast to his *Holmes of the Raj*, which I reviewed some years ago. Where *Raj* is a celebration of the richness and splendor of India and its people, *Treason* is a celebration of 19th Century popular heroes hanging on into the 20th Century. The story involves discovery of a threat to the King-Emperor at the 1911 Durbar, to be held in Delhi. This event attracts all of the rulers of parts of the Subcontinent to one spot and draws most of the heroes and prominent people of the age as well, for various reasons.

I am fortunate in that I have most of the relevant books in my library, so I did not have to check elsewhere for the Raffles stories of E. W. Hornung, the Arsene Lupin tales of Maurice LeBlanc and the Tarzan sagas of Edgar Rice Burroughs. I also had both of the "Strelitzau" books by Anthony Hope and most of the "Fu Manchu" books by Sax Rohmer. I couldn't place my copy of *Michael Strogoff: Courier of the Czar*, but I have read it and remembered its "flavor." I was surprised that none of H. Rider Haggard's heroes showed up as well.

This deluge of heroes and villains is overwhelming. Each segment employs characteristic narrative styles, with references to earlier adventures and acquaintances. The problem is that people are often not what or who they seem. Separating friend from foe is more than difficult, it is impossible. Familiar characters wander in and out of the tale and one is never quite sure just which face or "avatar" each is wearing. Indeed, this is a new Century and Victorian stereotypes no longer apply. The shadow of the Great War looms over all and the participants each view its onset from their own, limited positions and experiences. All have interests they wish to protect and all can only see bits and pieces of each others' views and, finally, none can see the total upheaval that the War will bring to their world.

This book would be a romp through nostalgia for people who love these icons of Victorian fiction were it not for that impending 'East Wind' that will blow away so much and so many. In seven years, the world will have changed out of recognition and new heroes and villains will be required. Some of this sadness permeates what would otherwise be a fine story of "Good Guys" and "Bad Guys." As it is, we are forced to realize that it is a world of half-good and half-bad guys and gals.

Reviewed by: Philip K. Jones, March, 2011



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