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SHERLOCKIANA: PART 3

by Dale Speirs

Supporting Characters: The Two Mrs. Watsons

Dr. Watson was married twice, first to a woman he met during one of Holmes's cases, and the second to a woman he never mentions himself but who is referred to in passing by Holmes. Loren Estleman considers "Dr. and Mrs. Watson At Home" (NASH) and what their home life was really like. A henpecked Watson has a bit of aggravation from the missus about his habit of running off with Holmes all the time. And why can't he buy her a mink coat like other doctors do for their wives? Amusing.

In "The Dollmaker Of Marigold Walk" by Barbara Hamley (MSH), the story is narrated by the first Mrs. Watson, who solves the disappearance of a woman.

The second Mrs. Watson makes her appearance in "The Riddle Of The Young Protestor" by Michael Mallory (MSH). The Doctor is away on a lecture tour when an old friend of Mrs. Watson draws her into a treasure hunt for hidden loot sequestered after the failed Monmouth Rebellion. The story is helped along by two blatant random turns in the plot, so much so that the author has to have Mrs. Watson muse about their significance in an unsuccessful attempt to mollify the reader.

June Thomson wrote a speculative fact article “Appendix: An Hypothesis Regarding The Identity Of The Second Mrs. Watson” (SJSJH). She deduces that Watson had a thing for governesses, the first Mrs. Watson being one, and him remarking overly sympathetically in some of his stories about others. On this basis, Thomson narrows down the likely second wife as one of the governesses in a subsequent story.

Supporting Characters: Inspector Lestrade.

This Scotland Yard detective had to put up with Holmes interfering with his cases. “And The Others ... “ by C.D. Ewing (MSH) is the point of view of several people who tangled with Holmes. Inspector Lestrade, for example, who bitterly complains that: “*The man was a constant thorn in the side of Scotland Yard, a pest and a nuisance ...* “. Lestrade points out that it was all very well for Holmes to solve a case and shout “J’Accuse!” at the culprit and then walk away, with Watson following behind him frantically scribbling notes for a STRAND story. That, however, left the police with the problem of making a case sufficiently airtight to gain a conviction before a judge.

As a digression, Holmes and the Miss Marples of mystery fiction would not be tolerated by any police force in real life. Today, Holmes would have long been run out of business by court order,

or at least confined to divorce cases and skip tracing. -2-
And any village with a murder rate that would depopulate it within a decade would certainly put elderly lady detectives as the number one suspect.

M.J. Trow has published a dozen novels about Inspector Sholto Lestrade, of which I have four. They started off reasonably well written but I just haven’t been motivated to complete my set of his books. Holmes and Watson make only cameo appearances, which is just as well, since Lestrade bitterly resents the libelous remarks about him penned by Watson in the canon stories (who called him “ferret-faced”). Trow, like many pastiche writers, has a bad habit of introducing too many real-world characters into the story even though they have little relevance to the plot or Lestrade’s milieu. Lestrade meets up with Bram Stoker and Rudyard Kipling, the young Winston Churchill, the Kaiser, and others dragged into the story for the sake of name-dropping.

The first book in the series is **The Adventures Of Inspector Lestrade** (2000), in which he investigates a series of murders which are at first glance unrelated. After each murder, he starts getting letters from someone bragging in doggerel about the events. As he zigzags about England, looking at bodies and trying unsuccessfully to find some common thread, he becomes increasingly frustrated.

This was an era, in the 1890s, when forensic science was still struggling to be born. Village constables still had to be reminded not to trample everything at the scene of the crime, and crowd control did not extend to stopping rubberneckerers from taking souvenirs off the corpse. Lestrade asks one of the lab boys back at Scotland Yard if fingerprints were taken, and gets the answer "What's a fingerprint?". The serial killer, however, is not unmasked by any clues but only while attempting to murder Lestrade himself.

Brigade: The Further Adventures Of Lestrade (2000) is the second volume in the series and picks up not long after the first one. It is the time of the Great Hiatus, but Lestrade understandably is not too terribly put out at the news of Holmes's death. Lestrade's first case in this volume is to wander the wilds of Cornwall to find the culprit responsible for slashing throats and mutilating large numbers of sheep and, as it turns out, a shepherd. The case is solved with relative ease, as it appears to be the work of a wild animal. Lestrade's second case is a matter of cyanide poisoning, the third is a lighthouse keeper suffocated, and the fourth is the strychnine poisoning of a poorhouse inmate, none of them with any solutions. Scotland Yard begins to wonder if this might be a serial killer on the loose, because all the victims had only one thing in common. They had all been part of the charge of the Light Brigade at Balaclava, Crimea.

With the fifth case, it becomes a matter of discovering who and why. Unfortunately the tale degenerates into a typical Hollywood plot where the good cop (Lestrade) is falsely accused and suspended from the police force but continues investigating on his own to clear his name and solve the murders. Finally he discovers a vast conspiracy behind it all. No, not the Brotherhood, but the Order of the Golden Dawn. Enough loose threads are left dangling to set up the next volume.

In this novel, Trow develops the personality of Lestrade and fleshes out his character, an insecure Cockney from the Bow Bells who is never quite certain how to conduct himself in the presence of his social superiors, even if they are the suspects. Trow also introduces Inspector Gregson from the original canon, and at first makes him a humorous rival of Lestrade. But Trow exaggerates the paranoia of Gregson to the point where he is one of the culprits, an unnecessary plot device in my opinion.

Lestrade And The Hallowed House (1999) is about a series of murders during the first year of King Edward, the old Queen finally having keeled over. The murders are almost entirely of M.P.s (hence the reference to the House of Commons in the title), done to death by assorted methods. It still being the Great Hiatus, Lestrade does not have Sherlock to annoy him, but does cross paths with Mycroft and a newly-introduced blind cousin, Aumerle Holmes.

The murderer is impersonating Sherlock, and the dead M.P.s are piling up at an alarming rate. Trow continues his methodology of having Lestrade bounce around helplessly from one case to another, then solve the whole thing in the last few pages without any help from the clues. This book did have one amusing reference, for me if not other readers, to Calgary. My home city is seldom used as a setting for novels by outlanders, although many Canadian authors have used it in forgettable Canlitcrit novels. Trow falls into one anachronism though, as the Calgary Stampede rodeo did not originate until 1912.

The fourth Lestrade novel by Trow that I have is **Lestrade And The Sawdust Ring** (2001), from a different publisher (Ian Henry Publishing, Ireland) than the previous three. I mention this because the book is so badly typeset that it detracts from the reading of it. The font, whatever it is, has thin letters and almost invisible single quotes that look more like apostrophes. Dialogue is in these single quotes instead of double quotes, and is often unattributed or in orphan paragraphs, confusing the reader as to who is speaking. Words are occasionally double-spaced from each other at random. The kerning of letters follows no discernable pattern and is often illogical. Some sentences are repeated from the bottom of one page to the top of the next, and paragraph spacing is wobbly. All of this detracts from the novel, and is unfair to both the author and the reader.

The novel is about the disappearance of the -4-
French Prince Imperial, who was a cadet in England. The young Lestrade (the story is set in 1879 when he was a sergeant) is investigating a series of murders in a circus. The Prince has disappeared into the circus as a performer, but because Lestrade has no description of him, due to careless police work, he can't find out who is murdering the performers one by one. To cover up the Prince's disappearance, the Prime Minister authorizes a story that he was fighting in the Zulu War down in South Africa. When the Prince is discovered to be the circus murderer, and is dispatched by a gun instead of being mentioned in despatches, a cover story is concocted about him being killed in action.

This is the novel that convinced me not to bother carrying on with the series, not because of the atrocious typesetting (for which the author can't be blamed) but because Trow's writing flaws become conspicuous. He is fond of inserting anachronistic puns which rely for their meaning on events that take place long after the milieu of the novel. Such puns would not be uttered by someone in 1879, and they jar the reader out of the story. It also becomes tiresome when the bodies keep piling up without any clues to help either the reader or Lestrade, and the murder is then solved by random chance. The first volume in the series is a good read for anyone wishing to sample Trow's writing, but beyond that I don't recommend the series unless you are a completist Sherlockian.

Supporting Characters: The Extras And Walk-Ons.

One nice fill-in of a minor character is “Sherlock Holmes And The Muffin” by Dorothy Hughes (NASH). This is a case for Holmes of stolen gems from an Indian potentate. The flow of the narrative is interrupted by an infodump about the history of diamonds. Mrs. Hudson’s tweeny is spotlighted in this story. Her name is Muffin and she plays an interesting part in the events.

Another household spear-carrier was Billy the page boy. Gerard Dole’s story “The Witch Of Greenwich” (MSH) has Billy involved with Holmes and Inspector Gregson to stop a French plot to spread bubonic plague throughout London. The story jumps about like some cut-and-paste New Wave fiction from the 1970s, the plot is unbelievable, and the dialogue is distracting.

An amusing spear-carrier in the Holmes canon tells his side of the story in “A Hansom For Mr. Holmes” by Gillian Linscott (Murder). Holmes was always hailing hansom cabs hither and yon, and had a reputation among the cab drivers of London. This story is about one such cabby who is hoping for an early evening so that he can get away to a betting event. He is stymied when Holmes not only hails him for a ride but drags him right into the case. The cabby inadvertently helps Holmes solve the case.

The best Holmes pastiche ever written by my opinion is “The Other Tenant: Extracts From A Diary” by John Sherman (Baker Street Jour., 1983 March). This hilarious account concerns the unfortunate fellow who moves into 221C Baker Street (the flat above 221B), and is driven half-mad by the constant trouble from the rowdy tenants in 221B. All manner of strange characters and street ruffians come and go from 221B, occasional shots are fired, and the two tenants are continually pounding up and down the stairs and slamming doors. The 221C tenant has hopes when Scotland Yard shows up, but unfortunately the two troublemakers apparently buy them off. There are street urchins roaming the hallway, telegraph messengers at every time of day, and no quiet for the upstairs tenant. Finally, near a nervous breakdown because of these two tenants from Hell, he makes a decision and decides to move to a place where Holmes could not possibly appear. The tenant chooses a quiet cottage on the Sussex Downs.

Throwaway Characters: James Phillimore.

Watson made a throwaway remark about “*James Phillimore, who, stepping back into his own house to get his umbrella, was never more seen in this world.*” This has attracted the attention of a number of pastiche authors. “The Adventure Of The Forgotten Umbrella” by Mel Gilden (MSH) is narrated by the missing man himself, as he explains how it was necessary for him to arrange his disappearance.

He was in an awkward situation due to a difficulty with bigamy and embezzlement set up by his wife's first husband. The ending relied too much on a neat coincidence of the villain being shot in a tavern brawl.

Phillimore reappears, or should I say, re-disappears, in "The Adventure Of The Highgate Miracle" by Adrian Conan Doyle and John Dickson Carr (Exploits). Here he is desperate to escape a shrewish wife, so he stages his disappearance by disguising himself as a milkman. He first sneaks out of his house unseen, then returns as the milkman, who conspicuously clatters up to the front door. After going inside the house to deliver the milk, he changes clothes and walks out of the house as himself. He then makes a show of going back inside for his umbrella, changes back into the milkman, and drives away, leaving others to wonder what happened to Phillimore. He is found out by Holmes because he made the gross social error of driving his milk wagon up to the front door instead of using the tradesmen's entrance at the side of the house.

Tim Heald's story "Doctor Tudor Cornwall And The Disappearance Of James Phillimore" (New Strand Mag, 1999 November) is set in modern times when Dr. Tudor Cornwall, Reader in Criminal Studies, University of Wessex, is approached by the great-grandson of Phillimore. He wants an investigation to establish the locale and date of death of the missing man for legal

reasons. Since the original Phillimore was never declared legally dead, the great-grandson's branch of the family never inherited the estate as the will specified. Instead, everything went to Phillimore's wife, who willed it when her time came to a charity for distressed pit ponies. It turns out that Phillimore had vanished with the parlour maid, who had later taken much of the estate (portable items such as diamonds, etcetera) despite her bigamous relationship with him having no standing in law.

It seems to be pushing it for this magazine to have another Phillimore story in the next issue, "The Disappearance Of Daniel Question", by Barrie Roberts (New Strand Mag, 2000 April). However, this one is set in the proper Victorian time period, and Holmes fills in the back story of Phillimore, whose disappearance is shortly followed by the failure of the bank his family owned. But was it actually Phillimore who disappeared? Holmes discovers that the vanished man was a look-alike imposter, and the real Phillimore is still around.

Mrs. Hudson And The Malabar Rose by Martin Davies (2005, mass market paperback) deals in large part with Phillimore, so I will include it in this section rather than under the one for Mrs. Hudson. It is also better written than Davies's previous Hudson novel.

The Malabar Rose is a fabulous ruby that has just been brought to England for display, and just as quickly stolen. But before that storyline has a chance to get started, Holmes receives another client. Mrs. Smithers is worried sick because her son-in-law James Phillimore has disappeared, having last been seen stepping back into his house to get his umbrella. Since Holmes is too busy chasing rubies, Mrs. Hudson takes on the case, which at first glance appears totally unrelated. She begins investigating Phillimore's background, with the help of her tweeny Flotsam. The man had a habit of disappearing mysteriously for weeks at a time, and has a connection with the exotic dancer Lola Del Fuego, nee Polly Perkins. Del Fuego dreams of a new life in Canada with her fiance: "*He owns much land of Canada. And I do not mind the snow to be with him.*"

Further investigation reveals Phillimore to have had an unusual life on the theatre stage as a child contortionist, and a sister who still performs on the trapeze. When the Malabar Rose disappears from its locked room, Holmes and the police are chasing after one of the usual suspects. Mrs. Hudson, however, narrows down her search to Phillimore, and more and more connections arise linking him to the jewel theft. His actual presence is missing in the first part of this novel, but as the denouement approaches, the man or his presence is everywhere. This book could be just as fairly titled "James Phillimore And The Malabar Rose".

Throwaway Characters: Wilson, The Notorious Canary Trainer.

One wonders how a canary trainer could be notorious, which, of course, is the humour in Watson's remark.. "The Adventure Of The Deptford Horror" by Adrian Conan Doyle and John Dickson Carr (Exploits) seeks to explain this. Wilson doesn't train just any sort of canary. His birds are trained to sing at night to help insomniacs. Wilson is part of an extended family that is rapidly dwindling away from heart attacks and the like, with considerable assistance from him to help them on to the next world. Only his niece now stands between him and the inheritance of the manor and family fortune. Wilson uses his birds as part of the plot, which Holmes foils with a golf club.

Pastiches: Crossover Fiction.

Some authors cannot resist dragging in other characters from the real world or other fiction into a Holmes story. Crossover fiction seldom works well except among uncritical media fans.

An example is "The Adventure Of The Celestial Snows" by George Alec Effinger (MSH). Reginald Musgrave, he of the ritual and an old school friend of Holmes, accompanies him to solve a theft for Dr. Fu Manchu.

The fiend is, well, quite fiendish, in a plot to either support or overthrow the Dowager Empress, depending on which way the wind is blowing. This story also explains that it is in China that Holmes picks up his cocaine/opium addiction.

A sequel to an existing Holmes story is “The Second Treaty” by Daniel Stashower (NASH), which brings in a character from the original canon, Mrs. Percy Phelps (nee Annie Harrison) of “The Naval Treaty”. Another treaty has been stolen, this time involving the Malta government, but the whole misadventure turns out to be a blind for the theft of a rare statue known as the Maltese Falcon. Although the statue is not mentioned until the denouement, and is tastefully done with no blatant parody, it still ends the story on a jarring note.

In “The Case Of The Vampire’s Mask” by Bill Crider (Murder), the young son of a Surrey manor is suffering from what is alleged to be vampire bites. Holmes determines these are leech bites, and are part of an elaborate plot by the boy’s tutor, who is in love with the lady of the manor. The chap who hired Holmes is Bram Stoker, who, much impressed by Holmes’s successful solution, decides that he will write a novel about vampires. Quite.

“God Of The Naked Unicorn” by Richard Lupoff (Hidden) generally misses the mark. Holmes is still dead at the Falls, and Irene Adler, *the* Woman, asks Dr. Watson for help in recovering

a stolen statue. The theft has not yet been announced -8- because the news would shake the political foundations of Europe, etcetera. Along the way, Watson meets up with Doc Savage, the Shadow, John Carter, and company. A ho-hum story.

Lupoff also did another crossover story, “The Incident Of The Impecunious Chevalier” (MSH), in which Holmes visits the Parisian detective C. Auguste Dupin. Holmes is searching for what is never named but described well enough that we know it was the Maltese Falcon. Dupin taught Holmes his methods and was angry in later life to see Holmes getting all the glory.

H.G. Wells is dragged in for the story of “The Richmond Enigma” by John DeChancie (Orbit). Holmes is asked by a solicitor to determine if a client is dead. The man hasn’t been seen for six months. He left a peculiar will which required the solicitor, as executor, to maintain the house as is, locked up and unchanging. As Holmes gets going on the case, the client suddenly returns from nowhere, babbling of strange people called the Eloi and the Morlocks. He doesn’t stay long, and disappears forever in his time machine.

Barrie Roberts story “The Honour Of A Sportsman” (New Strand Mag, 2007 February) brings Holmes and Watson to investigate the theft of jewels from a manor house while the celebrated cricketer A.J. Raffles was a guest. The Amateur Cracksman, as Raffles is

known to Scotland Yard, happens to be innocent in this case, so the search is on for the real culprit who framed raffles. Much riding of trains back and forth.

Crossover Characters: Sir Arthur Conan Doyle.

Sherlockians like to maintain the supposition that Holmes and Watson were actual people, and that Doyle was merely Watson's literary agent. As a result, some pastiches weave Doyle into his own stories, one popular useage being to have Watson grumping about the Literary Agent getting all the glory.

The well-known fact that Doyle killed off Holmes because he detested the way those stories took over his literary career is used as actual fact in Michael Mallory's story "The Murderer At The Falls" (New Strand Mag, 2000 April). In the famous struggle at the falls, Moriarty does indeed fall to his death but Holmes stays safely on the cliff-top path. Only to be pushed into the abyss by Doyle himself, who then saunters off congratulating himself on a job well done, unaware of what the future will hold for him. The implication at the end of the story, for the reader if not Doyle, is that Holmes will survive, and will re-appear in the future.

A less successful crossover is "The Adventure Of The Field Theorems" by Vonda McIntyre (Orbit), in which Sir Arthur comes calling on Holmes to ask him to solve a case. Crop circles are

appearing on his estate's fields, and Doyle is convinced that the UFOs are visiting from Mars. Holmes demolishes the crop circles for the frauds that they are, but Doyle still wants to believe. The crossover of Doyle was bad enough, but dragging a modern news event back into the Edwardian era was too much.

Crossover Characters: Charles Dodgson.

For some reason Lewis Carroll is a popular choice for a crossover character in Holmes pastiches. "The Christmas Client" by Edward Hoch (Holidays) has Holmes and Watson relaxing on Christmas Day when a client suddenly appears. He is an Oxford man named Charles Dodgson, known to posterity as the author of ALICE IN WONDERLAND. He also had a dangerous hobby which would get him arrested and vilified today; he liked to photograph nude pre-pubescent girls. Moriarty has a photograph of Dodgson fiddling about with a young girl's swim costume on the beach, and is blackmailing him for L100. This baffles Holmes because such a penny-ante amount isn't worth the attention of Moriarty. There is a rendezvous on the London Bridge at which no one shows up to claim the money from Dodgson, but a time bomb does, detonating and bringing half the police force to the scene. Only afterward does Holmes recognize the whole affair as a diversion, while Moriarty goes after a different female, the Old Lady of Threadneedle Street, aka the Bank of England.

“Call Me Wiggins” by Norman Schreiber (MSH) follows up the later life of the leader of the Baker Street Irregulars, the street urchins whom Holmes used to gather information. Wiggins is now an Oxford undergraduate, and has arranged a meeting between Holmes and Prof. Dodgson, who had his diaries stolen. The diaries are indiscreet, to say the least. They are retrieved, but Holmes does not do the work himself, instead teaching Wiggins how to proceed.

“The Case Of The Unmarked Graves” by Colin Bruce (Conned) has Watson going off by himself to visit an amateur archaeologist friend named Prendergast, who is convinced he has found King Arthur’s grave. Watson meets Dodgson on the train going down, and it turns out that both men were invited for the grave digging. Prendergast is hampered by the lord of the manor who has authority over the land and doesn’t want pothunters cratering the landscape digging up every grave in sight. The laird has issued orders severely restricting the number of digs that Prendergast can excavate. Dodgson therefore uses his knowledge of probability to narrow down the options, assisted later by Holmes, who shows up with Inspector Lestrade on an unrelated case.

“The Case Of The Detective’s Smile” by Mark Bourne (Orbit) is not a case per se, but rather a vignette of a matron calling upon Holmes to deliver a small bequest from the estate of Dodgson.

The woman was Alice, now long since grown, and who may have been the real Irene Adler. The gift is a souvenir of Wonderland.

“Alimentary, My Dear Watson” by Lawrence Schimel (Orbit) has Holmes and Watson investigating the disappearance of Dodgson. The major clues are a dead white rabbit, a top hat with tea stains, and a crack in the looking glass. Alice appears with a strange cat from Cheshire with an unusual smile. The story is not so over-the-top as might seem, because elements of the Wonderland stories are made plausible and are used to commit a murder by methods not possible in our world.

Marginalia Fiction: Fan Fiction.

The Case Of The Baker Street Irregulars by Anthony Boucher was first published in 1940 and has been in print continuously since then. Boucher was a big-name editor in the mystery and SF fields. This novel is fan fiction, not a Holmes pastiche. The plot, set in 1939 just before the war begins, concerns a Hollywood producer who is making a film version of “The Speckled Band”. He is having trouble with the screenwriter, Stephen Worth, who has a no-cut contract, and decides to harass Worth into voluntarily leaving by bringing in the Baker Street Irregulars as script advisors. Everyone is lodged at the producer’s house, but Worth is apparently shot. Apparently, because the body disappears

before the police can begin their investigation. What follows is a series of subplots, one per chapter, as each BSI advisor is drawn into some weird circumstance that parallels a Sherlock Holmes story. The police detective is assisted by a Sergeant Watson, who is part of the wallpaper until the closing scene, when he correctly identifies the murderer after the others have failed.

Worth was one of those characters about whom one wonders how he managed to live as long as he did. In the usual tradition of murder mysteries, each character has something to hide and comes under suspicion. Matters are made more complicated when Worth's body is found several days later in a hotel, freshly murdered and still warm. How and why does a man die twice? There are Nazi spies skulking about, impersonators playing games with the cast of characters, and entirely too much detail about who was where at 23h30 on the night of the 5th when Col. Mustard was in the library with the candlestick. You can safely skim the infodumps where the characters discuss everyone else's timetables and decrypt secret messages, as it turns out that none of that has anything to do with the real murder.

This novel has a humourous tinge and will appeal to the Holmes fan. It reads well, but if it was an ordinary murder novel whose characters had nothing to do with Holmes, then it would have been out of print for sixty years and deservedly so.

The prolific Edward Hoch churned out **An Irregular Christmas** (New Strand Mag, 2006 October) about a Manhattan woman named Jennifer Ring who is applying for membership in the BSI. She is invited to a small gathering of Irregulars at an East 68th Street mansion, where she will be quizzed about her knowledge of the canon and vetted for membership. After all but one of the guests, including Ring, have departed, the remaining and unknown guest shuffles the host off this mortal coil while the latter was laying out tarot cards. (It reminds me of the Steven Wright joke about the time he was playing poker with tarot cards, got a full house, and three people died.) The solution is unlikely, as no one could have reasonably guessed it. This reads like a first-draft pulp story, which is not too surprising considering that Hoch is one of the few remaining pulp writers..

Marginalia Fiction: Historical Fiction.

Mr. Doyle And Dr. Bell by Howard Engel (1997) makes use of the historical fact that Arthur Conan Doyle was a medical student in Edinburgh who used his professor Dr. Joseph Bell as the inspiration for Sherlock Holmes. Dr. Bell was famous for his deductive abilities, and is the acknowledged model for Holmes. Engel's novel is the story of how Doyle and Bell overturn a miscarriage of justice in Edinburgh and save an innocent man from the gallows.

This involves a run-in with the ruling oligarchy of Scotland, who did not like to admit they had been in too much of a rush to seize the nearest suspect instead of investigating the matter properly. I would like to think such things don't happen anymore but of course they do. (One reason why bring-back-the-noose proponents in Canada have never succeeded in restoring the death penalty is because there have been a number of recent cases where a convicted murderer was set free after 20 years imprisonment and compensated because the true murderer was subsequently found.)

The novel piles obstacle upon obstacle upon Doyle and Bell as they investigate, sometimes a bit too much. The author relies heavily on the current events of that time, dragging in Disraeli and a few other celebrities, but manages to inform the reader of life in Victorian Scotland without clogging the narrative flow with infodumps. The denouement is the stereotypical gathering of all the suspects in a room where the detective elaborates who was where with Col. Mustard on the night of the 5th, and then shouts "J'accuse!" at the least likely suspect. An average read for a mystery story.

Parodies.

I do not collect the over-the-top parodies other than a couple that came my way by zine trade or gift. Few parodies are more than

mildly amusing. The more frenetic they become, the less amusing they are. I do have a few though, as reviewed below.

Evolution by John Peel (1994) is another novel that involves Doyle, this time as he returns from an Arctic voyage as a ship's surgeon on a whaling ship (a true fact of the real Doyle's life). Unfortunately this book is a Dr. Who novel, so it often tips over into parody, not to mention all those time travel paradoxes that the Doctor scatters about like birdseed. He and his companion Sarah end up in Dartmoor, where a monstrous hound is roaming the moors by night. There is an encounter with a 15-year-old Rudyard Kipling, and someone is turning children into animals by fiendish laboratory experiments (I'll let you guess which story that one is). Arthur Conan Doyle becomes involved with the Doctor and spends half his time frantically jotting down story ideas he gets from observing the people and things about him. Story ideas that will mutate into Sherlock Holmes. The denouement is the stereotypical gathering of heroes and villains in a secret laboratory which is destroyed in a cataclysm as the heroes desperately race to safety, leaving the villains to die in the ruins.

Robert Rankin is the author of an ongoing modern fantasy series set mostly in Brentford, England. The storylines often do not make sense and rely on vaudeville humour, but the books are a pleasant way to kill time. His 1984 novel **East Of Ealing** is the

third installment of this series. The plot involves a mysterious multinational corporation that has convinced the British government to require everyone to have a bar code on their right hand or forehead. This will enable a cashless economy where money is no longer needed and economy of scale will bring greater efficiencies. And so forth. Of course, if your bank account is frozen by mistake, you will starve to death while trying to get the matter straightened out, since no one may buy or sell save those who have the mark or the name of the Beast or the number of its name.

Meanwhile, Sherlock Holmes is discovered suspended in stasis in an underground cavern beneath Brentford and is revived to help in the struggle to overthrow the Beast. His appearances throughout the plot are only intermittent, and at best he is only a peripheral figure. Someone gave him a Magnum handgun, and he spends much of his time imitating Clint Eastwood (“Is one feeling lucky, old chap?”). He is, however, constantly harassed by people challenging his identity by asking him trick questions about The Case of the 39 Steps. All in all, only mildly amusing.

From NASH is a parody by Joyce Harrington called “The Adventure Of The Gowanus Abduction”, set in modern New York. Down these mean streets must go John Conan Watson, who was sick of the constant “Elementary, my dear Watson” jokes, so he changed his name to Moriarty. Instead of Holmes, he tags

along after Diana Adler, daughter of Irene, who is in the process of busting a kidnaping ring. A nice touch was that the Irregulars were bicycle messengers. Not bad for a parody, and not too over the top.

Also from NASH is “The Curious Computer” by Peter Lovesey. It is set in modern times, when Scotland Yard is using a computer system called the Home Office Large Major Enquiry System, or HOLMES. The gang lords of England try to subvert it but are taken out en masse by an unbelievably elderly Sherlock Holmes. (Holmes was born circa 1854.) Lovesey was trying too hard here.



Figure 1: Postmark honouring a Sherlockian event.

So ends this series on Sherlockiana. I have only skimmed the surface of all the pastiches available, and I know that my readers will have many more in their libraries. The essence of Sherlock Holmes is not just in the plots and characters. It is the evocation of the Victorian world, the gaslights and hansom cabs, a place where the trains run on time and to every obscure village. It is a world that many admire from a safe chronological distance but few would want to live in. It is a world where the villagers blessed the squire and his relations, and accident of birth made a Lord or Duke a superior man by definition, not by merit. But it is also a world that Doyle unknowing preserved for us.

WORLD FANTASY CONVENTION 2008

Calgary will host the World Fantasy Convention the weekend of October 31 to November 2, 2008, at the Hyatt Regency Hotel in the downtown core. Attending membership is C\$115 or US\$100 until September 30, 2007. Cheque, money order, Visa, or Mastercard accepted (credit card charges will appear as Sentry Box on your monthly statement). The mailing address is World Fantasy 2008, c/o The Sentry Box, 1835 - 10 Avenue SW, Calgary, Alberta, T3C 0K2. The Sentry Box is Calgary's oldest SF and gaming store.

noticed by Dale Speirs

Burger, J., et al (2007) **Absence of the lactase-persistence-associated allele in early Neolithic Europeans.** PROCEEDINGS OF THE NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCES USA 104:3736-3741

"Lactase persistence (LP), the dominant Mendelian trait conferring the ability to digest the milk sugar lactose in adults, has risen to high frequency in central and northern Europeans in the last 20,000 years. This trait is likely to have conferred a selective advantage in individuals who consume appreciable amounts of unfermented milk. Some have argued for the "culture-historical hypothesis," whereby LP alleles were rare until the advent of dairying early in the Neolithic but then rose rapidly in frequency under natural selection. Others favor the "reverse cause hypothesis," whereby dairying was adopted in populations with preadaptive high LP allele frequencies. Analysis based on the conservation of lactase gene haplotypes indicates a recent origin and high selection coefficients for LP, although it has not been possible to say whether early Neolithic European populations were lactase persistent at appreciable frequencies. We developed a stepwise strategy for obtaining reliable nuclear ancient DNA from ancient skeletons, based on (i) the selection of skeletons from archaeological sites that showed excellent biomolecular

preservation, (ii) obtaining highly reproducible human mitochondrial DNA sequences, and (iii) reliable short tandem repeat (STR) genotypes from the same specimens. By applying this experimental strategy, we have obtained high-confidence LP-associated genotypes from eight Neolithic and one Mesolithic human remains, using a range of strict criteria for ancient DNA work. We did not observe the allele most commonly associated with LP in Europeans, thus providing evidence for the culture-historical hypothesis, and indicating that LP was rare in early European farmers.”

Speirs: The ability of Europeans to drink milk into adulthood is considered as one of the factors that enabled their civilization to expand worldwide and dominate other cultures.

Jones, C.B. (2000) **The evolution of exploitation in humans: ‘Surrounded by strangers I thought were my friends’.** ETHOLOGY 113:499–510

“Early humans were obligately social, living in nested kin groups or close associations of related individuals. Theoretical and empirical research has demonstrated that group life is characterized by both costs (e.g. increased likelihood of disease transmission) and benefits (e.g. enhanced predator defense). This paper addresses the evolution of exploitation in humans (e.g.

slavery, infanticide) as a response to within-group competition for limiting resources (e.g. food, mates), a potential cost of living in groups. Exploitation is defined as one individual's use of another for selfish ends, in particular, the acquisition and/or use of another's resources for the optimization of inclusive fitness. It is argued that exploitation is most likely to occur in relationships characterized by asymmetries such as dependence, intimacy, and/or differential access to resources.”

Morozova, D., et al (2007) **Survival of methanogenic archaea from Siberian permafrost under simulated Martian thermal conditions.** ORIGINS OF LIFE AND EVOLUTION OF BIOSPHERES 37:189-200

“Methanogenic archaea from Siberian permafrost complementary to the already well-studied methanogens from non-permafrost habitats were exposed to simulated Martian conditions. After 22 days of exposure to thermo-physical conditions at Martian low- and mid-latitudes up to 90% of methanogenic archaea from Siberian permafrost survived in pure cultures as well as in environmental samples. In contrast, only 0.3%–5.8% of reference organisms from non-permafrost habitats survived at these conditions. This suggests that methanogens from terrestrial permafrost seem to be remarkably resistant to Martian conditions.

Our data also suggest that in scenario of subsurface lithoautotrophic life on Mars, methanogenic archaea from Siberian permafrost could be used as appropriate candidates for the microbial life on Mars.”

Pellecchia, M. (2007) **The mystery of Etruscan origins: novel clues from *Bos taurus* mitochondrial DNA.** PROCEEDINGS OF THE ROYAL SOCIETY OF LONDON 274B:1175-1179

*“The Etruscan culture developed in Central Italy (Etruria) in the first millennium BC and for centuries dominated part of the Italian Peninsula, including Rome. The history of the Etruscans is at the roots of Mediterranean culture and civilization, but their origin is still debated: local or Eastern provenance? To shed light on this mystery, bovine and human mitochondrial DNAs (mtDNAs) have been investigated, based on the well-recognized strict legacy which links human and livestock populations. In the region corresponding to ancient Etruria (Tuscany, Central Italy), several *Bos taurus* breeds have been reared since historical times. These breeds have a strikingly high level of mtDNA variation, which is found neither in the rest of Italy nor in Europe. The Tuscan bovines are genetically closer to Near Eastern than to European gene pools and this Eastern genetic signature is paralleled in modern human populations from Tuscany, which are genetically close to Anatolian and Middle Eastern ones. The*

evidence collected corroborates the hypothesis of a common past migration: both humans and cattle reached Etruria from the Eastern Mediterranean area by sea. Hence, the Eastern origin of Etruscans, first claimed by the classic historians Herodotus and Thucydides, receives strong independent support.”

Fei, J., et al (2007) **Circa A.D. 626 volcanic eruption, climatic cooling, and the collapse of the Eastern Turkic Empire.** CLIMATIC CHANGE 81:469-475

“During the late sixth century and early seventh century, the Eastern Turkic Khanate was the most powerful country in the Northeast Asia. It collapsed suddenly in A.D. 630 ... Here we suggest that a climatic cooling event ca. A.D. 627–629 could be the direct cause. In A.D. 627–629, the Eastern Turkic Empire experienced severe disasters of snow and frost. Many of the sheep and horses died. People suffered great famine and massive deaths. The Empire fell into severe national crisis and collapsed in A.D. 630. Simultaneously, the Tang Empire also experienced three successive years of frost disasters. Climatic cooling possibly also occurred in other regions. Our investigation of the ca. A.D. 627–629 climatic cooling event also improved our understanding of another problem: was the climatic event due to the impact of a ca. A.D. 626 volcanic eruption? “