

# OPUNTIA

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Whole-numbered OPUNTIAs are sercon, x.1 issues are reviewzines, x.2 issues are indexes, x.3 issues are apazines, and x.5 issues are perzines.

### SHERLOCKIANA: PART 1

by Dale Speirs

Mystery stories can be divided into two groups: a) Sherlock Holmes, and b) all the others. I am not going to review the actual novels and stories, since millions of words have been written about them and I can add nothing new. Like most Sherlock Holmes fans, I don't have just the original stories, known collectively as the canon, but also commentaries, pastiches, parodies, and peripheral characters made central figures in novels. It is these that I will review, at least those in my small collection of them, which occupies only about two metres of bookshelf. A serious Sherlockian would have entire bookshelves of the stuff.

#### Commentaries And History.

**The Sherlock Holmes Companion** by Michael and Mollie Hardwick was originally published in 1962; I have the 1999 trade paperback edition. This is a concordance of the Holmes stories. There is a Who's Who section which lists all the characters of the stories and their biographies, and another section summarizing plots for each story. A third section roughly sorts out notable quotations from the stories. I say roughly, because it could have been indexed more finely to be of better use to people seeking a quotation relevant to a theme or topic. The Hardwicks also attempt biographies of Holmes and Watson, but the better choice

is that done by June Thomson, about which more below. Finally there is a brief biography of Arthur Conan Doyle, a man whose literary and public life outside Holmes would have made him eminently forgettable.

Peter Haining edited the 1980 anthology **A Sherlock Holmes Compendium**, which contains articles on a wide variety of topics. There are essays on A. Conan Doyle, his artist Sidney Paget, and Scotland Yard, mixed in with puzzles and lots of short parodies (too many, I would say). There are serious research papers about the real Baker Street, the places that Holmes visited, and a tour of Victorian London. American President Franklin Roosevelt was a fan and his essay claiming that Holmes was an American is reprinted here. Another reprint is an editorial from *THE TIMES*, which deeply regrets hearing the news of a researcher that Holmes never said “Elementary, my dear Watson”. The editorialist suggests that sleeping attributions should be left alone.

Elsewhere in this anthology, the trains that Holmes took when rushing off to his cases are analyzed in detail. The conclusion is that in all but one instance there was a convenient train just about to depart. Holmes was better at timetables than most of us who stand and wait on a frozen LRT platform because we just missed the train. P.G. Wodehouse, via one of his Mulliner stories, discusses Holmes’s income and asks why he would have had to

share rooms with Dr. Watson, pointing out that -2-  
30 shillings would cover the weekly rent of a two-bedroom suite plus three meals a day. Even then that was cheap, so Holmes must have been very careless of money, no doubt because he always went first-class on the trains, spent serious money on telegrams, and took on cases from governesses and porters that couldn’t possibly earn a profit. And not to mention nodding off over cocaine (which was legal in Britain until 1965).

An oddball item I found back in the 1990s in a Chapters superstore was the third volume in the history of the Baker Street Irregulars (BSI), a New York City group of Sherlock Holmes fans. I haven’t bothered to locate the other volumes, for lack of motivation, which is not to say I regret buying **Irregular Records Of The Early Forties** (edited by Jon Lellenberg, published by Fordham University Press, New York), which covers the war years of the BSI. This volume is a fascinating account of how Edgar W. Smith, a General Motors vice-president, kept the club going almost single-handedly. He arranged the annual banquet, and nagged the membership into getting things done. He also pushed the publication of various Holmes commentaries and ephemera, often at the expense of but never with the knowledge of General Motors. The zinesters who today sneak off copies of their work on the office photocopier are descendants of Smith, who had his secretary type up mimeograph masters for the BSI.

This history includes details of the banquet speeches; the annual banquet was the major activity of the club in that era. It was at the famous (or infamous) BSI banquet in 1941 that Rex Stout stirred up all Holmes fandom by purporting to prove that Watson was a woman. President Franklin Roosevelt never attended a BSI meeting but was a devoted corresponding member and staunch advocate of the idea that Holmes was an American-born founding. Other controversies of that era included two competing designs for Holmes' coat of arms and a supposedly never-published Holmes story from the Doyle archives which was subsequently found to be a fake. One member composed an orchestral piece called "The Baker Street Suite", which was not only performed but recorded on a two-disk set of 78-rpm records. The speeches and correspondence of the BSI were irregularly published (pardon the pun) in an assortment of mimeographed or typeset pamphlets and thin books, for lack of any other medium to preserve them. Eventually a periodical would be started up to take care of them.

This book is an intricate history, with 300 pages of detail and correspondence. It will be of no interest to anyone outside Holmes fandom, but an interesting read for those within. The BSI was of major importance to the fandom, and spawned many scion societies in other cities. They also published much in the way of ephemera and periodicals that are collector items today, and encouraged the fandom throughout the world.

**Holmes And Watson** by June Thomson is a 1995 scholarly study which tries to piece together the biographies of Holmes and Watson based on the canon. It is surprising how much can be deduced from a passing remark by Watson, or by correlating the chronology of the cases. As an example, when Watson mentions that he took his M.D. from the University of London in 1878, that remark enables one to deduce his life for the previous four years and the subsequent year after graduation when he says he trained up as an army surgeon. By putting together such comments, and sorting out the time frame of the cases, an almost complete biography can be built up.

There are, of course, some inconsistencies in a consolidated timeline of Holmes' life, since Watson wrote up the cases years later and mis-remembered dates or mis-read his notes. He also deliberately altered names and places in some stories because to identify them, even at that late date, might shake the political foundations of Europe. Some omissions have also caused great speculation among Sherlockians, such as the identity of Watson's second wife, who he never mentions. We only know she existed because of a throwaway remark by Holmes.

Thomson builds up quite a body of work (288 pages in the mass-market paperback edition I have), proceeding from logical principles. Much of the information can be firmly deduced by knowing

how people lived in the Victorian era of gaslight and hansom cabs. Watson suffered two wounds in the Battle of Maiwand, an actual 1880 battle in Afghanistan that was one of the worst British defeats in the colonial wars. This information provides more deductions about Watson, not only about his life while in the army, but also afterwards back in civilian life. All in all, this book provides two useful biographies to increase one's enjoyment of the Sherlock Holmes canon.

The anthology **Murder In Baker Street** (reviewed below) has, after its short stories, several factual commentaries. The first is "Sidelights On Sherlock Holmes", by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle himself. He discusses the reaction of his fans to his stories, such as those disputing an assertion by Holmes that he could tell which direction a bicycle was going by its tracks. Doyle had to carry out personal experiments with a bicycle and discovered that while you cannot tell which way a bicycle was going on level ground, it is possible to determine direction where the bicycle goes over bumps or through swales. A bicycle going downwards leaves a lighter trace than going up. Doyle was constantly plagued by fans sending him messages in ciphers used in the Holmes stories.

"100 Years Of Sherlock Holmes" by Lloyd Rose (Murder) looks at how he was portrayed by screen actors such as William Gillette (who added the meerschaum pipe to the iconography of Holmes) and Basil Rathbone (the very image of Holmes). Holmes's

misogyny comes under scrutiny, which prompted suggestions of homosexuality. Some of the earliest slash fiction was written about Holmes/Watson.

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Sherlockians have also gone to town over the years on the incompetent plotting by Doyle, which makes Star Trek continuity look good by comparison. Some of this was carelessness, and some was lack of interest after Doyle was forced to revive the Holmes stories against his will. Other items are not what they are made to be. As an example, in one story, Watson mentions that his old leg wound from Maiwand was bothering him, and in another story he says his shoulder wound is hurting. Sherlockians have fussed about this apparent inconsistency, but the simpler explanation is that Watson received two wounds and that sometimes one wound would bother him and sometimes the other one would.

"And Now, A Word From Arthur Conan Doyle" by Jon Lellenberg (Murder) discusses the etymology of Doyle's neologisms. The OXFORD ENGLISH DICTIONARY records two inventions by Doyle, or at least the earliest known: 'snick', meaning a metallic sound such as a gun safety being flipped off, and 'smoking gun', as in irrefutable proof that ties a person to the scene of the crime. Not invented by Doyle but associated with him is the phrase "a regular Sherlock Holmes" for someone playing detective.

Canada's greatest humourist was Stephen Leacock (1869-1944). Besides his short stories, he liked to write critical essays from a humorous slant. He usually started off by taking people's remarks at face value and proceeding from there, such as stamp collectors who proclaimed their hobby taught geography, by which Leacock showed that the principal nations of his time were Cochín-China, Somalia, and Johore, because they issued the most stamps.

One such analysis by Leacock was "The Great Detective", a deconstruction of Holmes and his imitators that appears in the anthology **Short Circuits** (numerous editions since 1928 and still in print). He notes that such stories must be told through the eyes of a Poor Nut, who sees nothing and observes nothing. "*However much fogged the reader may get, he has at least the comfort of knowing that the Nut is far more fogged than he is.*" The Great Detective must have a face like a hawk, although Leacock points out that the hawk is one of nature's stupider animals, and it might be better to look like an orangutang. The Great Detective, his face notwithstanding, has a supply of recondite knowledge that would get him a Ph.D. at any university. If the case involves a criminal mastermind, it must be someone neither the Poor Nut or the reader has heard of, suddenly introduced as the most dangerous man in Europe.

## Magazines.

Many of the Sherlock Holmes stories were first published in the English periodical **The Strand Magazine**. Those issues have long since become high-priced collector items, as well as the Christmas annuals and other places where the stories were published. Like almost every other general interest and fiction magazine, **Strand** did not survive past the spread of television. The title was eventually purchased by a Michigan publisher, and it now appears on the magazine racks as an 8.5 x 11, full colour quarterly. The new series of **The Strand Magazine** (New Strand Mag) is exclusively a mystery magazine, half of it with short stories, and the other half of author interviews, history about detective stories and authors, and book reviews. Each issue has a Sherlock Holmes pastiche, and often a Rumpole story, as well as a few miscellaneous short stories. I buy my copy off the magazine racks at Chapters or Indigo but if your local bookstore doesn't carry it, then visit [www.strandmag.com](http://www.strandmag.com). Well recommended. Having said that, most of the pastiches in the new series are readable but routine, so I won't be reviewing too many of them.

**The Baker Street Journal** (Baker Street Jour.), published by the BSI, was a nicely produced illustrated quarterly. I happened to find three copies from the early 1980s in a Calgary secondhand bookstore, and would have begun to

collect the other issues but for the discovery that the University of Calgary Library has a complete run. The issues I have are a nice collection of essays, pastiches, news about scion societies, and miscellany.

**Pastiches: General Remarks.**

A pastiche is a story written by someone other than the original author to fill in missing details of a character's life or story arc. Slash fiction is an extreme form of pastiche, and fan fiction is usually the worst written form. Because Sherlock Holmes is still under the copyright of the Doyle estate, the quality of pastiche fiction has been controlled somewhat, and most of it, in novel length at least, has been written by professional writers. There are, of course, countless short stories written without permission or quality.

One of the subtle humours of the original Holmes stories are Watson's offhand remarks about other cases that he never wrote up. My personal favourite is Watson's throwaway line about "Wilson, the notorious canary trainer". Many Sherlockians have seized on these never-published cases to write up their own pastiches.

I don't have all the pastiches, which would be like trying to get a complete collection of everything Isaac Asimov wrote, but do

have a fair representation of them. I find from experience that a series of pastiche novels usually starts off well, but after the fourth or fifth novel it starts to flag and so does my interest. Pastiche authors tend to fall into ruts. It seems a rule that in every short story pastiche, Holmes will ask Watson to bring along his trusty service revolver, which, in the real world, had a reputation as an unreliable gun. Also monotonous are the stories that start off with Watson worrying about Holmes' addiction to cocaine, and seizing with relief the summons to a new adventure to keep him off the needle.

Of particular annoyance is the tendency to exaggerate Watson as an idiotic boob who shrieks and gasps at every strange event or has to be led by the nose through the solution of a case. In the original stories, Doyle used Watson as a foil for Holmes to explain to the reader his deductions. Some pastiche authors, unfortunately, carry this too far; Watson was not that obtuse. Doctors are required to learn a bit about logical deduction in medical school in order to make their diagnosis. Other authors make out Watson as being easily shocked or naive about disgusting human behaviour or wounds. That doesn't go. Watson served in the British Army overseas, saw bloody combat at the Battle of Maiwand and took two wounds. He certified that hanged men were dead, and as a battlefield surgeon he certainly would not be discommoded by blood and guts.

Conversely, many pastiches give Holmes superhuman qualities. When traveling, he always speaks the local language like a native. He knows all manner of bizarre fighting techniques, and is on a first-name basis with every local power behind the throne.

Sherlockians have not only written stories and novels about Holmes and Watson, but also many about the supporting cast, whether Mrs. Hudson the housekeeper, Inspector Lestrade of Scotland Yard, Holmes' smarter brother Mycroft (who was something in the Foreign Office), or Irene Adler, the opera singer who made the King of Bohemia so nervous and who outwitted Holmes so decisively that he thereafter always referred to her as "The Woman".

### **Pastiches: Holmes And Watson Anthologies.**

There are a number of short story anthologies of Holmes and Watson pastiches. Rather than a straightforward review of stories one by one, I will sort the stories out into various groups by theme further below. I will not review every story, as many are routine mysteries competently written but with nothing outstanding in them worth commenting upon. Many of these anthologies are edited by the ubiquitous Martin H. Greenberg, who has done hundreds of science fiction and mystery anthologies. His partner in crime for many of the Holmes anthologies is Jon Lellenberg, who is the executor of the Estate of Jean Conan Doyle, the

daughter of Sir Arthur and holder of his literary rights. The source of each story will be identified by the initials or abbreviation of the anthology in brackets. All anthologies I have are trade paperbacks unless stated otherwise.

The anthologies and single-author short story collections are: **Holmes For The Holidays** (Holidays) edited by Greenberg, Lellenberg, and Carol-Lynn Waugh. (1998). This is a thematic anthology; all of the cases take place in the Christmas and New Year seasons. Poorly edited for style and consistency, as will be mentioned in the individual stories cited below..

**The Mammoth Book Of New Sherlock Holmes Adventures** (Mammoth) edited by Mike Ashley (1997).

**Murder In Baker Street** (Murder) edited by Greenberg and Lellenberg, plus Daniel Stashover (2002)

**The New Adventures Of Sherlock Holmes** (NASH) edited by Greenberg, Lellenberg, and Carol-Lynn Waugh. This anthology was originally published in 1987 on the occasion of the centennial of the first Holmes story. I have the 1999 edition, which includes some extra stories and a new foreword.

**Sherlock Holmes In Orbit** (Orbit) (mass market paperback, 1995) edited by Mike Resnick and Greenberg. The pastiches are sorted out into chapters about Holmes in his own era, in our present, in the future, and after his death. It is a mistake to move Holmes out of the Victorian era since the milieu is an essential

part of him. Stories that put him in other eras lose the essence of the background that made Holmes what he was.

June Thomson has a number of short story collections of her pastiches in mass-market paperback. **The Secret Documents Of Sherlock Holmes** (SDSH) (1997) and **The Secret Journals Of Sherlock Holmes** (SJSJ) (1999) are stories based on Watson's throwaway remarks about cases he never wrote up for the original canon. These include the hitherto undocumented cases of Vittoria the circus belle, the Boulevard Assassin, and the Abernethy tragedy (solved because the parsley had sunk into the butter), and many others.

Another short story collection is **The Exploits Of Sherlock Holmes** by Adrian Conan Doyle (youngest son of Sir Arthur) and John Dickson Carr (*Exploits*) (1976, mass market paperback). As with the Thomson collections, these stories are based on Watson's throwaway remarks.

#### **Pastiches: The Anthology Stories.**

The lead story in NASH is "The Infernal Machine" by John Lutz. The new century is dawning in Britain, an arms race is underway with Germany, and a salesman is trying to sell the British Army on a newfangled weapon called a Gatling gun. The deal is about to go through when the British arms dealer is murdered and the

Gatling salesman is arrested. At the same time, another chap was trying to convince the British calvary to replace their mounts with horseless carriages. Dr. Watson is not the only one to laugh at the idea of cavalymen charging into battle waving a sword in one hand and hanging on to the tiller with the other. The gaslight era is fading away, much to the dismay of Watson and old cavalry stagers. The Germans, however, are not laughing, and have sent an agent to investigate. He had nothing to do with the murder but the horseless carriage inventor has neither clean hands or conscience. Holmes makes a connection between the sound of the Gatling gun and a horseless carriage whose muffler fell off.

"The Final Toast" by Stuart Kaminsky (NASH) has Holmes responding to a newspaper classified ad looking for someone to impersonate a "well-known consultant". He goes as an actor impersonating Holmes, and gets the job, which is to visit a man on Death Row in Dartmoor Prison. The intent is to destroy Holmes' reputation because the man was sent there by him and is intending to cheat the hangman by committing suicide and making it look like Holmes assisted. The story is enlivened by a reverse double-cross by Holmes.

"The Phantom Chamber" by Gary Ruse (NASH) involves an apparently haunted manor house, the impersonation of an elderly widow, and a scheme to get her money. It was relatively easy to



guess where this plot was going even before Holmes got there. The denouement involved a *deus ex machina* explanation that came out of nowhere.

“The Return Of The Speckled Band” by Edward Hoch (NASH) is a sequel involving a band of gypsies who were spear carriers in the original story. There is a second swamp adder, and a wife who wants her husband out of the way by using it. I tripped over one Americanism used by Hoch in this story that an Englishman would not use, but otherwise it is a smoothly flowing tale.

A story involving a secret underground is “The Adventure Of The Amateur Mendicant Society” by John Betancourt (Mammoth). This is based on the historical fact that Emperor Constantine of the Byzantine Empire observed that beggars were usually ignored and could wander about freely without people paying any attention to them. It occurred to Constantine that these mendicants could be organized into a spy ring to let him know what the common people were thinking. He established the Secret Mendicant Society, which apparently went out of business after Constantine’s demise. In Victorian England, a would-be criminal mastermind learns about this episode, and creates an Amateur Mendicant Society to supply information for theft, blackmail, smuggling, and other free-enterprise pursuits. Holmes is drawn into a case where he discovers the existence of the AMS. The AMS is running into difficulty, as it turns out the SMS not only never disbanded but

has spread across Europe into England, where it now works for the Foreign Service. The SMS strongly resents the competition, and Holmes has to agree, so he helps drive the AMS out of existence.

“The Case Of The Sporting Squire” by Guy Smith (Mammoth) has the daughter of the lord of the manor coming to Holmes in the belief that the locked room death of her mother was a murder. The squire is a loud boisterous man who brooks no opposition from anyone. Her father wishes to be free of her mother so that he can marry a wealthy widow. At the denouement, when Holmes accuses the man, he has a sudden breakdown and does away with himself with his shotgun. This wasn’t too believable. Men of his type fight it out to the last gasp, not suddenly showing remorse and ending it all because of the shame.

“The Adventure Of The Anonymous Author” by Edward Hoch (Murder) is set in 1902. It is about an author who hides her identity from her publisher, who in turn hires Holmes to locate her. He does. She claims to be 25, an orphan who is raising her teenage sister. Holmes, however, deduces that she is 35 and raising her daughter, and doesn’t want to be found out. Edward may have been on the throne but the Victorian era was still extant. Society of that time could accept two sisters struggling together but not a single mother. A good view of the English morality of those days.

“The Adventure Of The Silver Buckle” by Denis Smith (Mammoth) fills out a passing mention by Watson about the Grice Patterson case on the Scottish island of Uffa. A valuable antique is stolen, the Grice Pattersons are accused, and the local constabulary asks Holmes to assist. Some of the clues are fair hints to the reader, but when the actual thieves are arrested, it is a bit of a cheat because Holmes reveals knowledge that the reader should have had access to. This brings up a basic rule of mystery stories, often violated, in that the reader has to be given the same information the detective has. Suddenly springing a surprise bit of knowledge does not play fair with the reader.

#### **Pastiches: Holmes Novels.**

**The Case Of The Reluctant Agent** by Tracy Cooper-Posey (2001) is placed in the final years of World War One. To set the stage for the novel, the book begins with a reprint of Doyle’s final Holmes story, “His Last Bow”. The novel begins in 1917 with Mycroft Holmes having been shot and now near death by an unknown assailant. Holmes is asked to pursue the case to the Ottoman Empire, also near death. He is reluctant because a love of his life, Elizabeth Sigerson, was kidnapped by Col. Moran and taken into captivity there. Another pause for a rant about authors who like to get cute with character names; the name Sigerson for a major female character is distracting and serves no useful purpose. This was the name Holmes used on occasion when

undercover, but bears no necessary connection to this novel.

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Holmes begins by searching for an Arab guerilla leader known as the Divine Wind, whom no one has ever seen in person, and who is seeking to liberate his land from the Germans. He works his way into the Anatolian desert and discovers that the Divine Wind is his beloved Elizabeth. Who, as we later learn, is also masquerading in Constantinople as the wife of a German officer turned double agent. Who in the Arab world pays attention to a woman, who thus ignored can overhear useful things? And the German officers likewise pay little attention to a hausfrau. The reader, however, does pay attention, as it is difficult to believe that Elizabeth could alternate between Constantinople and the desert for weeks at a time without someone at either end wondering where she went to. As is usual in pastiches, Holmes is made too much a superhuman in learning languages. In one incident, he determines that a Turk is actually a Persian because he speaks Arabic with a very slight Persian accent. I suppose it might be possible for me to uncover a Hungarian speaking with a Ukrainian accent, but it is no more plausible.

Notwithstanding all that, the novel reads well and is a steady page turner. There are several double crosses along the way to keep the reader interested with twists and turns in the plot. The ending was dragged out with several epilogues after the main crisis was

passed. One anti-climax in a story to tie up loose ends is enough; three are not needed.

**The Italian Secretary** by Caleb Carr (2005) has Mycroft summoning Holmes and Watson to Scotland, where two murders have occurred in the royal palace of Holyrood. Fortunately the Queen was not in residence at the time. Mycroft suspects German agents at work, but Holmes soon uncovers a more mundane fraud that culminated in a mattress stuffed full of gold coins. The house staff are worried that they will be dismissed en bloc. The con men, having killed twice, are not likely to stop at further murders in order to retrieve their gold. There is also a bit of class warfare involved, not to mention ancient Scottish grievances against the German queen occupying the Scottish throne.

Laurie R. King has/is writing a series involving Holmes as a retired beekeeper on the Sussex Downs. **The Beekeeper's Apprentice** (1994) is the introductory volume, in which a 15-year-old orphan named Mary Russell living on a farm near Holmes comes to know him and Mrs. Hudson (who came to the Downs with Holmes and still serves as his housekeeper). Russell is every bit as clever as Holmes, and he takes her on as a semi-apprentice. Semi, because she goes off to Oxford during the Great War to study chemistry and theology, and only comes back to the Downs during summer break. The first part of the book sets up the relationship between Holmes and Russell. The next part is a

series of short cases where she learns his methods, and helps solve a case of treason (the butler did it), petty theft from the village inn (four hams and the cash box), and a kidnaping in Wales (the child was recovered but the mastermind remained unknown). The final part segues from the Welsh case, as the unknown mastermind begins a series of attacks against Russell and Holmes. It turns out that Moriarty had a daughter, who wants revenge.

There are several more volumes in this series, set during and after the Great War, but I wasn't enthused enough to buy them. In a later volume, Russell marries Holmes despite their 45 year age difference. May-December marriages are nothing new, but this one sticks in my craw as a bit too unbelievable. This first volume was reasonably well written, although every so often I skipped a page of obvious padding, but nothing in it encouraged me to continue with the series.

### **Pastiches: Magazine Stories.**

David Ellis has a story with a twist called "The Adventure Of The Shakespeare Cipher" (New Strand Mag, 2001 August) in which Sherlock Holmes declines to take a case from an American named Silas Claypole. The man wants Holmes to use his deductive powers to prove that Shakespeare's plays were written by Francis Bacon, which in those days was a favourite of Victorian conspiracy theorists.

(And still is, even in the face of competition from the grassy knoll bunch and Twin Tower implosion experts.) Rebuffed, the American hires someone else, who, however, ends up proving that Shakespeare wrote Shakespeare's plays. Claypole kills him in a rage, which brings Holmes into the police investigation, and also his brother Mycroft, because the deceased was a codebreaker for the Foreign Office.

Brian Freemantle's short story "The Case Of The Faberge Egg" (New Strand Mag, 2005 June) gifts Sherlock Holmes with a love child named Sebastian, the boy being partially raised by Mycroft before Sherlock reconciled with his son. The story involves Queen Mary's apparent kleptomania, specifically stealing a Faberge egg from the Romanovs while a house guest. Sebastian plays his part in solving the mystery. Given that the name Sebastian has a conspicuous place elsewhere in the Holmes canon in the character Col. Sebastian Moran, the second most dangerous man in Europe, it is annoying that Freemantle decided to get cute instead of picking a less jarring name.

### **Pastiches: Philatelic.**

One of my hobbies is stamp collecting, so I have been accumulating philatelic fiction references, some of which are Holmes related.

Herman Herst Jr, who was to philatelic writing what Isaac Asimov was to science fact writing, did one pastiche "Dirty Pool" (Baker Street Jour., 1966). Holmes' client is an English bookie, legal in Britain, who is suspicious of a large win in the football pools and hires Holmes. Bets in the pools are mailed in, so Holmes analyses the envelope and discovers that the stamp was issued by the British Post Office the day after the date of the postmark. Further investigation reveals the bettor was a postie who back-dated his betting form after reading the results in the newspaper the next morning.

Robert L. Fish had a modern-era Sherlock Holmes farce in "The Adventure Of The Common Code" (Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine, 1979 September). Holmes is investigating envelopes with mysterious letter and number combinations added to the addresses, not realizing that they are postal codes.

Martin Edwards' story "The Case Of The Sentimental Tobacconist" (New Strand Mag, 2003 October) has an old man coming to Holmes about a burglar who broke into the man's shop but only stole some old letters. The letters were from a son in Western Australia, dated in the 1850s, at the same time the Western Australia Post Office accidentally released some stamps with the central image of a black swan upside-down. The thief, it transpired, was looking for inverted stamps on the envelopes, having learned of the letters elsewhere.

## Pastiches: Holmes In The Celebrity Pages.

If Watson was chronicling the early cases of Sherlock Holmes while he was still detecting in his later years, it stands to reason that he would become a celebrity. People then were the same as people now; in fact one of the first messages across the trans-Atlantic telegraph cable was a news story about the doings of a British princess. As the century turns, a new thing called the cinema is taking hold in Britain, and Holmes is pestered by would-be movie magnates who want him on film. Jon Breen considers this point in his NASH story "The Adventure Of The Unique Holmes", in which the great detective is plagued by visitors with fake cases for him. The cases are designed to get him out into strange places where a camera crew can capture him on film for posterity and profit. Holmes' hope to retire into obscurity as a beekeeper in the Sussex Downs is sidetracked into the movie business. This story is an interesting look at how the real world would react to Holmes.

Another such look points out the dark side of Watson publishing the Holmes chronicles. In "The Italian Sherlock Holmes" by Reginald Hill (Holidays), the stories have inspired a young Italian count to take up the life of a consulting detective in Rome. He has sent one man to the guillotine for murder. But did he get the correct culprit?

## Pastiches: Death Takes The Holidays.

"The Sleuth Of Christmas Past" by Barbara Paul (Holidays) is possibly the worst pastiche ever published professionally. (Amateur fiction, of course, knows no limit in crud.) Holmes' behaviour throughout the story is untypical of the canon, and she has him shouting such things as "*Unhand her, you blackguards.*" There is a sentence which I thought appeared only in jokes and parodies: " ... *but with a bound, Holmes was upon him* ... "

"The Adventures Of The Three Ghosts" by Loren Estleman (Holidays) is a sequel to Charles Dickens' "A Christmas Carol". Timothy Cratchit is now a prosperous banker, who just happens to own Scrooge's old house and sleeps in the same bedroom. Cratchit has been bothered by the three ghosts of Christmas and seeks the assistance of Holmes in dealing with their reappearance. It turns out that there is a logical explanation for the ghosts, both for Cratchit and for Scrooge, and in finding that explanation (hidden magic lanterns projecting ghostly images and doped tea to make the victim suggestive), Holmes uncovers a murder plot. In the same anthology is a very similar story "The Adventure Of The Christmas Ghosts" by Bill Crider, which switches the cast about a bit, with Franklin Scrooge, grandnephew of Ebenezer, being doped by an elderly Cratchit. This was sloppy editing to put two very similar stories in the same anthology. The Crider story contains one very jarring piece of text.

At the beginning, an unnamed man visits Holmes for a consultation and the reader is kept in the dark about his identity. Then, without explanation, we read “*You are right, said Scrooge*”, followed a few sentences later by Holmes asking the man his name. Since the name was already given away inadvertently due to poor editing, there is no frisson of shock that might have otherwise existed.

“The Adventure Of The Christmas Tree” by William DeAndrea (Holidays) uses the fact that Christmas trees were a relatively new custom in Victorian times in Britain, having been introduced by the Prince Consort Albert. Holmes is asked to investigate a mysterious theft of a Christmas tree that disappeared en route to a duke’s house, then reappeared as if by magic. Holmes discovers that the tree was hollowed out and filled with explosives. Anarchists want to assassinate not only His Grace but his friends from the diplomatic corp visiting for the holidays, and thus trigger an international incident.

“The Adventure Of The Angel’s Trumpet” by Carolyn Wheat (Holidays) takes a look at a different angle of Holmes’ cases, after the solution. Stories traditionally end with the ruffian being hauled away to his just desserts in Court of Queen’s Bench. This one starts off with a more realistic view. Holmes testifies as a witness for the prosecution in his dispassionate manner, but a flamboyant Irish lawyer ties him up in verbal knots and gains an

acquittal. Now Holmes is asked by that lawyer to provide advice in the defense of a woman charged with murder. The victim was her grandfather, who had just announced a few days before Christmas that he had changed his will in her favour, then suddenly keeled over from poisoning. The murder turns out to be an inadvertent suicide. The victim was celebrating not Christmas but winter solstice, not as a Christian but as a Rosicrucian. He ingested some seeds of *Datura sacra* (angel’s trumpet), a poisonous weed whose seeds are used by some pagans as an hallucinogen but which must be properly diluted. Which the victim didn’t do.

#### **Pastiches: Watson Solves The Case.**

The original stories used Watson as a poor nut who had to have everything explained to him, and thus to the reader. A few pastiches have made Watson the central figure in solving the case, although surprisingly few make use of his medical knowledge. As an army surgeon who was used to rough-and-ready conditions, it seems he would be a good man for dealing with wounds in the field, be it Afghanistan or Croydon, Surrey.

One such story is “Hostage To Fortune” by Anne Perry (NASH), which has a fake kidnaping in order to draw out Holmes and kidnap him. Holmes falls into the trap and it is up to Watson to free him. Watson manages to locate Holmes’ whereabouts and

then shows a bit of ruthlessness in double-crossing the kidnapper by taking the villain's daughter as a hostage for exchange.

In "The Two Footmen" by Michael Gilbert (NASH), Holmes sends Watson off to investigate a manor house murder by himself. Holmes is tied up in The City, as London's financial district is known, investigating what promises to be a bank failure. But the two investigations come together, and it turns out that the lord of the manor did it in both cases. What makes this story stand out is its close look at the class system among servants in a manor house. It explains why the initial suspect couldn't be the guilty one because a downstairs footman would never be allowed upstairs.

"The Doctor's Case" by Stephen King (NASH) is about a miserly lord of the manor who gets a knife in the back while disinheriting his family in a new will. Watson solves the case, not Holmes. In another knifing of "The Yuletide Affair" by John Stoessel (Holidays), Inspector Lestrade is apparently stabbed by a known thief who was in the wrong place at the wrong time, but who vigorously denies it. Lestrade is unconscious and cannot identify his assailant. Watson examines the wound and puts his surgical knowledge to use, revealing the wound had a different cause.

## **Pastiches: Explaining The Background.**

Many pastiches I have read take it upon themselves to explain passing remarks or minor incidents related in the original canon, or elaborate the origins of certain things well established in the original stories. For example, "The Adventure Of The Persistent Marksman" by Lillian de la Torre (NASH) has Holmes called out to a country manor. Someone is persistently taking pot shots at the lord of the manor. An interesting sidelight in this story is why Holmes fired bullets into the walls of 221B Baker Street to create the famous VR pattern. He was collecting bullets to invent the science of ballistics. Another explanation of Holmes's interior redecorating with bullets is in the story "The Adventure Of The Sealed Room" by Adrian Conan Doyle and John Dickson Carr (Exploits). Here Holmes fires the shots to determine if cigar smoke could be smelt over gunsmoke. This was a point of interest that would hang the murderer in a sealed room mystery.

Holmes went on to attend Oxford but never finished his studies. "The Bothersome Business Of The Dutch Nativity" (Mammoth) by Derek Wilson sets up an incident at college as Holmes' first case. He is asked to investigate the theft of a painting at one of the colleges, originally put down as a student prank. Holmes solves the case, but because the perpetrator is a nobleman's son at Oxford, the college dons prefer to sweep the whole matter under the carpet.


Holmes does not care for this snobbery, and makes his protest against the class system by resigning as a student. Things like that don't happen these days. Do they?

[to be continued]

At right is an advertisement for a Sherlock Holmes game, from HARPERS WEEKLY, 1904-10-08, page 1555. I have no idea how it was played, but the price refers to 50 cents a pack, so it must have been some sort of card game.

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