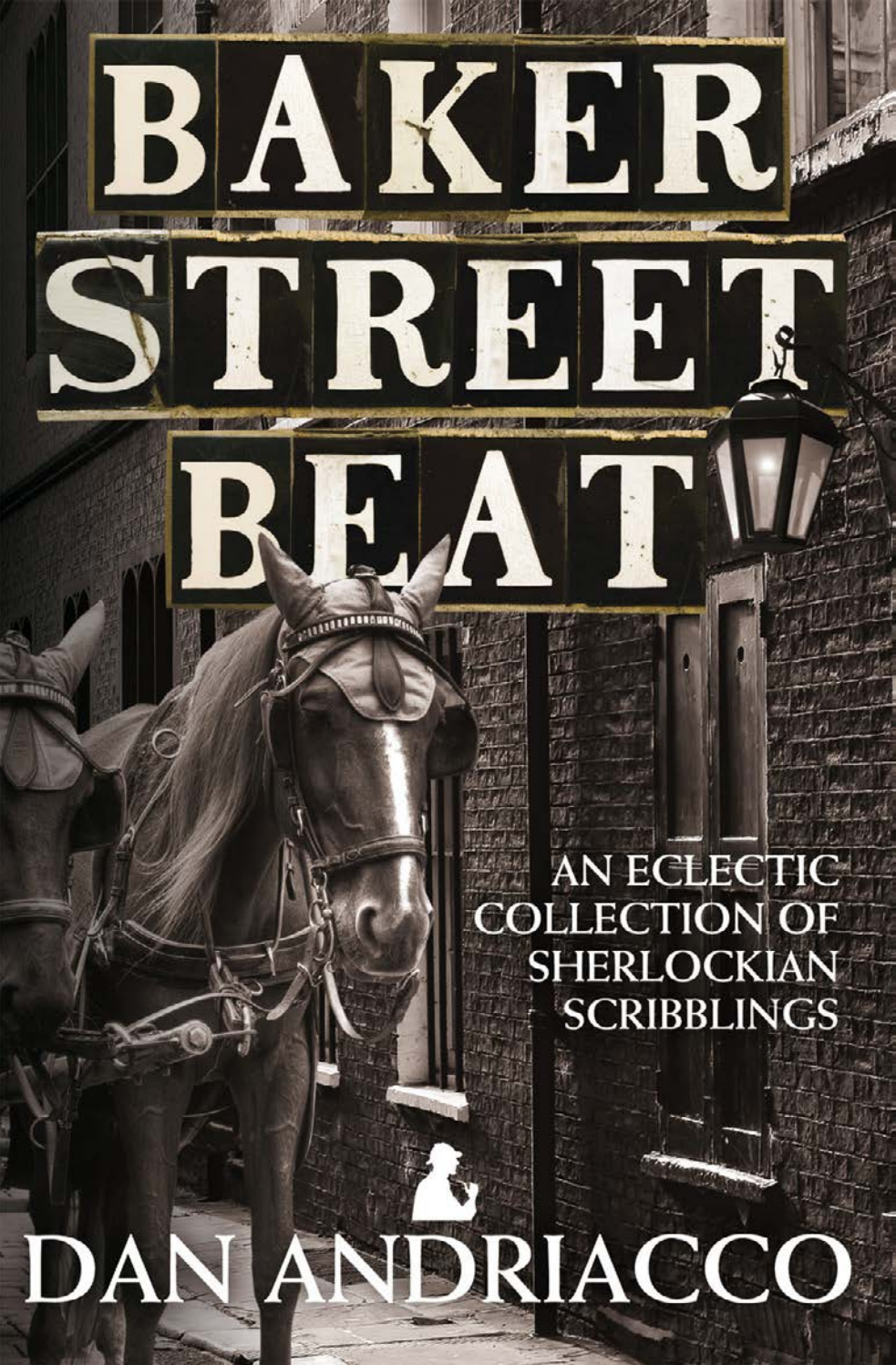
BAKER
STREET
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AN ECLECTIC
COLLECTION OF
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DAN ANDRIACCO

Contents

BAKER STREET BEAT

An Eclectic Collection Of Sherlockian Scribblings

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for my old friend

Stephen F. Winter

"the one fixed point"

Essays

Holmes, Sweet Holmes

An Introduction in the form of a memoir

It's always rude to impose oneself on another without an introduction. Hence, this collection of Sherlockian scribblings begins with an introduction – of me and of the book. In it, I present the thoughts of a middle-aged man reflecting with pleasure on a life well read. A small portion of this essay is adapted from "The Enduring Mr. Sherlock Holmes," which appeared in the Classic Specialties catalog, Volume 4, No. 1, in 1991.

For me, it didn't start with Basil Rathbone.

I don't even remember when I first saw one of his Sherlock Holmes movies on late night television sometime in the 1960s. But I do remember the sense of disappointment. This Holmes didn't look at all like the Sidney Paget illustrations! And who was that buffoon going by the name of Watson? He wasn't at all the solid doctor of the Conan Doyle tales.

Sure, I watched the movies. I even kept a running list of the titles, awed by how many there were and wondering if I could ever see them all. But I had met Sherlock Holmes first in the world of books, and for me no cinematic version has ever quite measured up.

A boyhood friend named Ralph Eppensteiner performed the introduction. He lived in a house with bookcases on either side

of the fireplace. And in those bookcases were 1920's era A.L. Burt Co. reprint editions of the *Adventures* and other Holmes books, including a collection called *Tales of Sherlock Holmes*. I picked up the *Adventures* and read: "To Sherlock Holmes, she is always *the* woman."

I had heard of Sherlock Holmes, of course – everybody had – but it was from Ralph that I learned the disturbing news that this Great Detective was a drug user. This shocked my mother, but it didn't stop me from playing Holmes and Watson with Ralph. I was the younger kid, about nine, and I didn't at all mind always being Watson. It was my job to bring along my wholly-imaginary revolver as we set off for our adventures in the woods behind Ralph's house. When I actually began to read the stories, I recognized many of the plots from having acted them out.

Like a generation or two of boys before me, the first volume in which I actually read Sherlock Holmes stories was *The Boys' Sherlock Holmes*, edited and introduced by Howard Haycraft. (Did girls ever read that book?) But the first Holmes book I owned was the inexpensive Whitman Classics edition of *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* with an illustration of "The Red-Headed League" on the cover – still my favorite Holmes short story. The collection was abridged in the sense that it didn't include all of the stories. But the stories were as God intended, none of this nonsense of adapting them for children.

Somewhere along life's journey, I lost my original copy of the Whitman book. It was like reclaiming a piece of my childhood when I replaced it years later for my modest Sherlockian library. I felt the same way when I found a *Boy's Sherlock Holmes* and many of the other books I had borrowed in my pre-teen and early teen years from the excellent Public Library of Cincinnati and Hamilton County – Vincent Starrett's *The Private Life of Sherlock Holmes* and *221B: Studies in Sherlock Holmes,* William S. Baring-Gould's *Sherlock Holmes of Baker Street,* Edgar W. Smith's *Profile by Gaslight*, and others.

Long before I dreamed of being able to do that, though, I reached the point of affluence that allowed me to pay my parents $5.50 to order the one-volume Doubleday edition of *The Complete Sherlock Holmes*. I came home one day from the seventh grade to find a suspicious mound under a white tea-towel. Is it only in my memory that my mother removed the towel with a flourish reminiscent of Holmes in "The Naval Treaty"? The book had arrived! And it had more than just the stories. The Book (as my friend Steve Winter has always called it) also came with an introduction by a man named Christopher Morley that was magical; I read it and re-read it.

I still own that edition of the *Complete*, along with one that looks almost like it. The second is my wife's, bought while we were in high school or college. You can tell mine by the stain on the "A Note to the Reader" page – a faded chocolate-candy smudge that made me cry when it first happened. The dust jacket is tattered with wear and missing a chunk ripped off by one of our children in her infancy. (She knows who she is.) But I love it. I am of one mind with the respected member of the Catholic Church hierarchy who told me that his copy of the *Complete*, bought in 1950 when he was a seminarian, is one of his most treasured possessions.

With the *Complete* I discovered some of the later tales for the first time. (How I cried over "The Adventure of the Dying Detective," checking again and again to assure myself that it wasn't the true final problem!) Some of these stories came to be among my favorites, despite the lesser reputation of the post-*Return* Holmes. As soon as I read "His Last Bow" for the first time, I copied down the final exchange between Holmes and Watson and would read it with a dramatic flourish to other kids at school. Most of them were not impressed. But for me those words never lose their thrill, words I know by heart:

"There's an east wind coming, Watson."

"I think not Holmes. It is very warm."

> "Good old Watson! You are the one fixed point in a changing age. There's an east wind coming all the same, such a wind as never blew on England yet. It will be cold and bitter, Watson, and a good many of us may wither before its blast. But it's God's own wind nonetheless . . . "

Good old Watson, indeed! Somebody once said you could have Archie Goodwin stories without Nero Wolfe, but not Nero Wolfe stories without Archie. There are two Holmes stories without Watson, and he is certainly conspicuous by his absence.

For me, in fact, the most memorable passages in the Canon involve interchanges between Holmes and Watson, whether the context is a spectacular exhibit of ratiocination or a touching moment of revelation. I have always savored the last page of "Charles Augustus Milverton" ("Why, it might be a description of Watson!") for its delicious irony. And surely I am not the only one who cannot read this moving passage from "The Three Garridebs" without a lump in the throat:

> "You're not hurt, Watson? For God's sake, say that you are not hurt!"
>
> It was worth a wound – it was worth many wounds – to know the depth of loyalty and love which lay behind that cold mask. The clear, hard eyes were dimmed for a moment, and the firm lips were shaking. For the one and only time I caught a glimpse of a great heart as well as a great brain. All my years of humble but single-minded service culminated in that moment of revelation.
>
> "It's nothing, Holmes. It's a mere scratch."

As Holmes sheds his British reserve in near-panic, Watson retains his in order to reassure his friend.

The friendship between Holmes and Watson that resonated with me as a boy means even more to me now. Friendships formed in my own life have faded away, been interrupted by death – or, happily, mellowed with age into something even more precious than my first copy of the *Complete*.

It's no coincidence, I think, that many of my friends are friends of Mr. Sherlock Holmes as well. When we were students at the University of Cincinnati, my grade school friend Steve Winter and I teamed up with college friend Peggy Kreimer to have Sherlock Holmes parties. Since this took place in the 1970s, perhaps I should stipulate that the only drugs involved were those in the stories. Our merrymaking consisted of reading the stories aloud in all their glory, and on at least one occasion the Morley introduction as well. We appropriately called ourselves The Three Students, although sometimes others were invited.

I graduated from college into the world of journalism. As a reporter at the now-defunct *Cincinnati Post*, I wrote a column reviewing mysteries and mystery-related books from 1977 to 1982. Those were heady days for Sherlockiana, the immediately post-*Seven-Per-Cent Solution* era, when it almost seemed that one was liable to get hit by a falling pastiche at any corner. Some were readable and some were really bad, but none of them were the Real Thing. I kept them all, though. They became the basis of my library of a few hundred Holmes-related books, to which the current slim volume will be added.

Almost inevitably, I tried my hand at writing mysteries. I tried very hard, in fact, writing eleven unpublished mystery novels and several short stories. My greatest successes, in terms of publication or production, were articles, scripts or stories related to Sherlock Holmes. In this book are those that I liked best from those years – two essays, two short stories, and two radio dramas, all from the 1980s and 1990s, as well as this introduction and a new essay. Almost certainly none of them would ever have happened if I hadn't had the encouragement of Sherlockian friends.

Through a non-credit mystery fiction course which the late Rev. Lee J. Bennish, S.J., taught at Xavier University in the 1980s, I met Paul D. Herbert, BSI, founder and Official Secretary of The Tankerville Club. In short order I joined this Cincinnati scion of the Baker Street Irregulars, attending my first meeting in January 1981. I later pulled in Steve and Barb Winter as well. (I recall the shocked expression on Paul's face when I informed him that Steve had deliberately avoided reading some of the later Canonical tales so as to delay the pleasure. "Egad!" Paul exclaimed. "The man could die tonight!" The tragedy of dying without having consumed the entire Canon was not to be contemplated.)

Membership in the Tankerville Club – named for a club mentioned twice in the Canon – has waxed and waned, along with my own interest, over nearly three decades. Intriguing personalities have come and gone. For a variety of reasons there have been entire calendar years when I wasn't able to make a single one of the roughly quarterly meetings. But through it all, the Tankerville Club has been the one fixed point of my continuing connection to Sherlock Holmes. I'm also a founding member, with Dr. R.J. Senter, of The Scheming Minds of Sherlock Holmes for chess-playing Sherlockians. But the Tankerville Club actually has meetings.

What is it that impels grown men and women to put 221B on their license plates, collect obscure editions of books about an era long past, vacation at the Reichenbach Falls, wear deer stalker caps, argue about dates of events that (cynics say) never happened, and engage in other equally irrational behavior with like-minded lunatics in dozens of Holmes societies around the world?

In other words, how does one account for the enduring appeal of Mr. Sherlock Holmes, stretching from the nineteenth century now into the twenty-first?

In his own age – the late Victorian – the Great Detective must have resonated as a man of logic and reason at a time when science seemed to have all the answers, not just more questions. He battled speckled bands and hounds from hell with only the faithful Watson at his side and nearly always won.

Today, however, the world faces far more frightening monsters – the man-made creations of laboratories and bomb factories. What accounts for the continued popularity of Sherlock Holmes in these jaded and dangerous times?

Surely nostalgia for a time we never knew is part of it. The sleuth of Baker Street "provides the best picture ever set down of the focal point of the world at one of the high points of human history," Vincent Starrett wrote. Sherlock Holmes is "the spirit of a town and a time," in the apt words of William Bolitho, and we love him for that. But that is not the complete answer.

John McAleer, the late biographer of Nero Wolfe creator Rex Stout, pointed out that Holmes so far has enjoyed three pinnacles of popularity – each coinciding with a national or international crisis. The first was at his initial appearance, while Jack the Ripper still stalked the streets of London. The second was in the 1930s, a time of great lawlessness in England and an approaching world war. The third – a particularly American renaissance – was in the late 1970s, on the heels of the Watergate scandal and a loss of faith in public institutions.

"In times of stress," McAleer wrote, "when [people] feel their property, their values and even their lives menaced or are disillusioned with those in whom they have put their trust, they find reassurance in rallying around a figure who is the embodiment of integrity and competency – someone who believes in law and order and can bring it to pass."

Could it be, then, that Holmes is hero and father figure in periods that sorely need both? He has his faults, but we know what they are. There's no chance that tomorrow's newspaper will contain some shocking revelation of a personal peccadillo – a fate to which flesh and blood heroes can fall prey even after their deaths. Although Holmes sometimes fails, he is always a reassuring presence. When he is around we feel that everything is all right. And, of course, Holmes always *is* around whenever we need him – never farther away than a wire to summon him and a train to get him here.

That is why for millions of us around the world, the game is still afoot. The game, in fact, never ends.