

Holmes, Doyle, and Friends Conference, March 11-12, 2022

A Report by Dean Richardson

March 11 is nine days away from spring, but you couldn't tell that as Bill Mason drove and I road through snow showers as we approached the Clayton Airport Inn in Englewood outside Dayton, Ohio. The last gasp of winter threatened to impair the latest conference of Holmes, Doyle, and Friends, sponsored by the Agra Treasurers of Dayton, but Sherlockians are hardy souls (especially those living in northern climes), and attendance was not much affected by the weather.

The pandemic prevented them (as it did most things) from holding a conference the last two years, but they more than compensated for that this time with a strong program of speakers and events. That Friday evening (the 11th) a welcome reception packed a room with cold but warmly friendly (and hungry) people who enjoyed being together again and talking over things Sherlockian and mundane for a couple of hours, by which time the snow had ceased without affecting much beyond the rooftops and grass. Streets were clear and remained so throughout the weekend.

Saturday morning, after a welcome from Lorraine Reibert, Chief Constable, and Ann Siefker, Chancellor of the Exchequer, the program began with a rousing presentation by our own Bill Mason (BSI) on the topic, "Conan Doyle on Trial: The Murder of Sherlock Holmes" (retitled for the con, "Regina vs. Arthur Conan Doyle, M.D., upon a Charge of the Willful Murder of Sherlock Holmes"). The ground rules were that the time frame was prior to "The Empty House," and as far as the court and public were concerned, Sherlock Holmes was definitely dead. With much humor and several digressions, Bill laid out the ways in which ACD could be charged (guilty; guilty but insane; not guilty) and all of his possible motives and justifications. Then Bill allowed the conference attendees to vote on a verdict and a motive. He tabulated and reported the results. While the presentation was somewhat interactive, I think it would make an excellent article with slight modifications, and I'd love to have that more permanent form.

The next speaker, Rich Krisciunas, is a retired trial lawyer, and he addressed a similar issue: "Could the Crown Convict Sherlock Holmes?" He made a lively examination of the events in "Charles Augustus Milverton," concluding that while Sherlock did bend the law (inadvertently enabling the killing of CAM and then destroying blackmail letters), there probably was not enough hard evidence to justify a jury trial.

Regina Stinson (BSI) related the origins and history of the use of the deerstalker in images of the Great Detective (such that it was a major element in evoking him), despite the fact that it is never mentioned by Watson in any of the stories. (One story does refer to a cap with ear flaps.) Many classic (and some awful) illustrations accompanied her presentation.

After a break for lunch, Mike McSwiggin (BSI) opened the section of "Friends" with a discussion of "Solar Pons: A Bridge of Light." The creation of young August Derleth in the late 1920s, with ACD's permission, Pons is a sort of Sherlock clone, and the pastiches use many of the elements of the canon (Dr. Lyndon Parker as his companion and chronicler, Mrs. Johnson as his landlady, etc.), but moved forward in time to the 1920s and '30s. While Derleth was an American who never ventured far from his Wisconsin home, he managed to capture much of the

spirit and fun of his source material. What happened to his stories after his death is equally interesting.

Ira Matetsky (BSI) spoke on “Rex Stout and Sherlock Holmes.” Stout, author of the Nero Wolfe mysteries, was strongly influenced by the canon, but he had a rather rocky relationship with the Baker Street Irregulars. Matetsky, who bears a striking resemblance to descriptions of Wolfe, regaled us with stories of Stout’s unorthodox teasing of the Irregulars with presentations such as “Was Watson a Woman?” (he “proved” the affirmative response). Matetsky is president of the Wolfe Pack, the society devoted to the study of Rex Stout’s work.

Maureen Mascha, an academic statistician, analyzed the types and treatment of “Women in the Canon.” She demonstrated with charts the relative numbers of positive and negative portrayals, and she discussed the attitudes of Victorians in general and Conan Doyle in particular toward women. She considered how his life experiences, especially his wife’s illness, affected his views on women’s rights and on divorce. Overall, he comes across as relatively progressive, at least in his earlier years.

The final speaker, Lise Sherwood-Fabre, gave a lively talk on “The Truth about Opium Dens.” After describing several literary representations (“The Man with the Twisted Lip,” Dickens’s *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, and Oscar Wilde’s *Portrait of Dorian Grey*), she showed contrasting reports of journalistic and government documents of the time. She concluded that while the public image of opium dens was that they were widespread, dirty, decadent places that were the product of Asian immigrants and frequented by the lower classes, in fact there were few, they were relatively clean, and they were considered minor indiscretions when indulged by members of the upper class. Further, they were perpetuated by the British government because they were profitable. (The opium wars were actually an attempt by China to keep the British Empire from exporting opium into China, rather than the other way around.)

After another break, the conference concluded with dinner at Company 7 BBQ. There were toasts to the usual suspects (Holmes, Watson, Mrs. Hudson, Conan Doyle) followed by food and fellowship. It was a fitting finish to a wonderful conference characterized by top-notch presentations and dealers’ tables with way too many tempting goodies. My only complaint is that my facial muscles were weary from smiling so much. I hope to recover in time for next year’s conference.