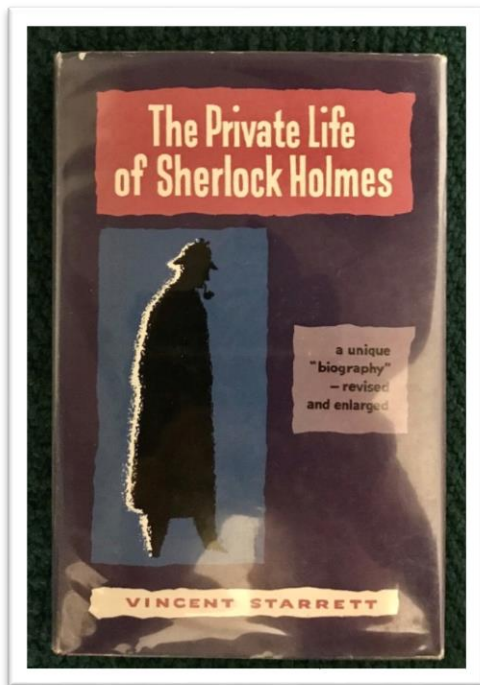


My Most Valued Book
The Private Life of Sherlock Holmes by Vincent Starrett
Jim Hawkins, BSI

One of the benefits of working as a flight attendant for Southwest Airlines for 16 years was having the opportunity to visit some of the finest used and rare bookstores across the United States. One special place was Salt Lake City, the home of **Sam Weller's Books**. Upon finishing up the day's flights in Salt Lake, I immediately made a bee line to Weller's to look for treasures. The Weller's were a prominent Mormon family in Salt Lake, operating their bookstore in the downtown area since the 1930's. Gustav and Margaret Weller emigrated from Germany in 1925 and opened Zion Bookstore, catering mainly to the religious community. Gustav turned the bookstore business over to his sons in 1943 when he opted to become a farmer in Marion, UT. As Sam matured into the business and became one of the leading booksellers in the Valley, the store came to be known locally as **Sam's Books**.

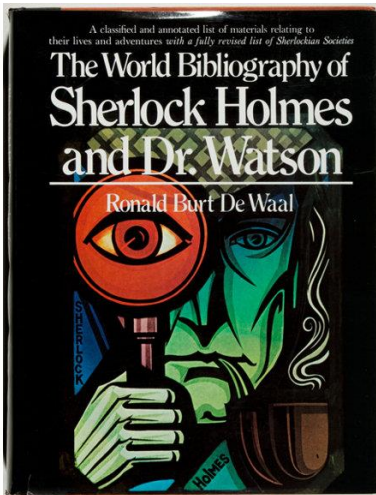


(Enter the Sherlockian connection)

Ronald Burt De Waal, born in Salt Lake City in 1932 to another prominent Mormon family, grew up buying books from Sam Weller's. He earned his Bachelor of Science degree from the University of Utah in 1955 and his Master of Arts from the University of Denver, Colorado a few years later. De Waal became a specialist in bibliography, first at Westminster College in Salt Lake and then at Colorado State University in Fort Collins, Colorado. He was an avid fan of the Sherlock Holmes canon; his other passion was ballroom dancing. Subsequently he became known as "The Holmes and Dance Man," receiving his BSI investiture as "Lomax, the Sub-Librarian" in 1969, and the Two-Shilling Award in 1984. Through his involvement with the Baker Street Irregulars, de Waal became acquainted with John Bennett Shaw.

John Bennett Shaw was given his BSI investiture of "The Hans Sloan of My Age" in 1965 for good reason. In 1753 the Irishman Hans Sloane gave his collection of 71,000 volumes to Britain as the core of the British Library. In the 1960s John Bennett Shaw had one of the largest collections of Sherlockian books and ephemera anywhere. After he moved to Santa Fe in 1970, he began to absorb everything Sherlockian within reach of the postal service and the telephone company. He literally had the largest private Sherlockian/Doylean collection in the world, so it was natural for de Waal to begin his "world bibliography on Sherlock Holmes" with Shaw's enormous collection.

In 1966 de Waal and John Bennett Shaw began a most important collaboration on **The Universal Sherlock Holmes**, a bibliography and catalog of practically every Sherlock Holmes book in print, many of which were in Shaw's library. According to Shaw in his foreword to **The Universal Sherlock Holmes (1993)**.



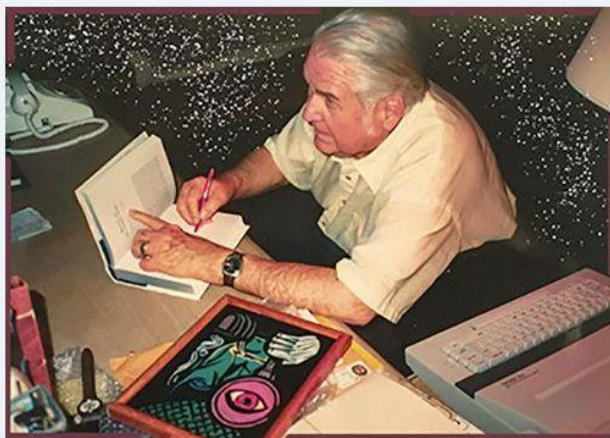
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“Twenty-seven years ago at a Baker Street Irregulars' dinner on West 23rd Street in New York City I met a young man who said, ‘I am Ron De Waal and I plan to compile a world bibliography on Sherlock Holmes.’ I thought, ‘He is mildly insane,’ and then, ‘Good heavens, I hope he does it.’ The outcome of this chance meeting led De Waal to spending ninety-seven days (and by ‘day’ I mean a full twelve hours) in my library working on his bibliographical project.

He visited several times when I lived in Tulsa, Oklahoma, and then many times in Santa Fe, New Mexico. Further, there have been countless letters and phone calls. It seems we are a good pair: I am a blotter-type collector, and he is obsessed with listing and describing it all.

Ronald De Waal and his prodigious and ambitious literary project are a success — for him a triumph; for me a justification for being a one-subject collector. It is De Waal who made my efforts worthwhile.”¹

FRIENDS OF JOHN BENNETT SHAW



Sadly, John Shaw lived only one more year after writing this foreword to the book he and de Waal worked on at John and Dorothy's home in Santa Fe. In several photos of Shaw in his library at 1917 Fort Union Drive in Santa Fe **The Universal Sherlock Holmes** can be seen.

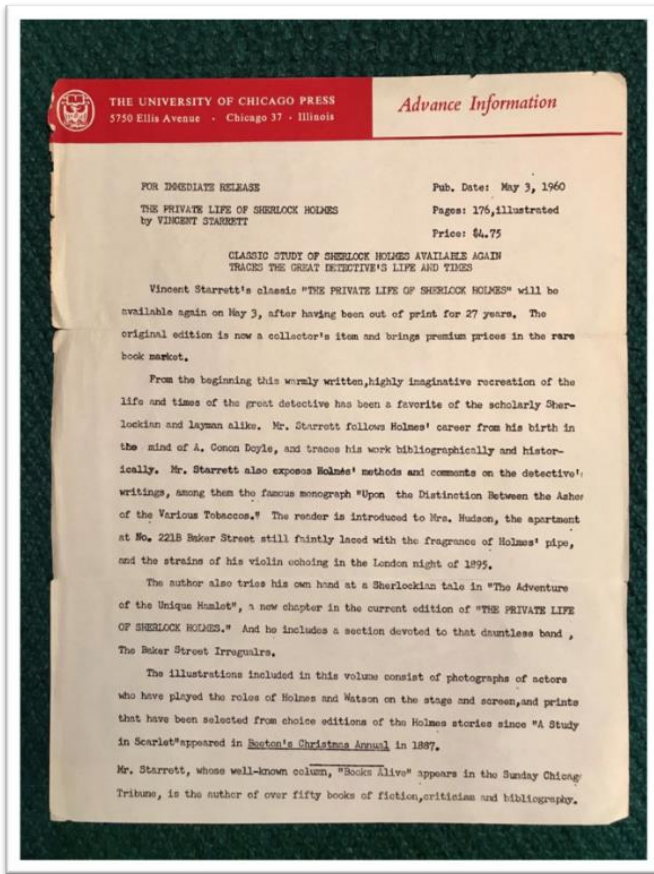
(Now to my collection and the wrap up of this story.)

I retired from Southwest Airlines in June of 2017. Ronald de Waal died one year later in 2018, the year I made my last sojourn to

Sam Weller's Books. Having been ill for several months, De Waal had given most of his

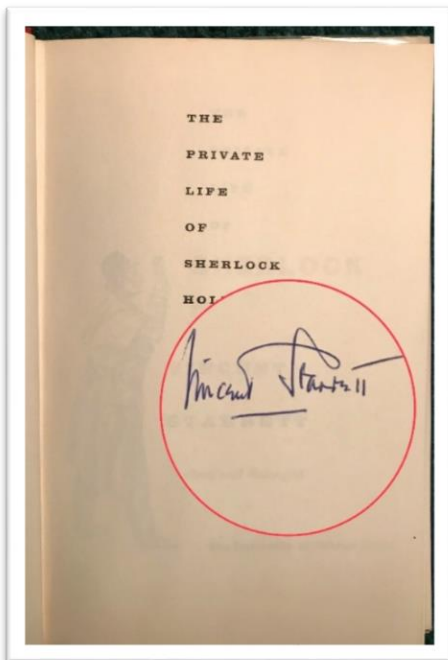
¹ De Waal, Ronald B., *The Universal Sherlock Holmes*, Toronto: Metropolitan Toronto Library, 1994. Foreword by John Bennett Shaw. Illustrated by Betty and George Wells. George Vanderburgh, editor.

Sherlockian books to the Weller's to sell for him.

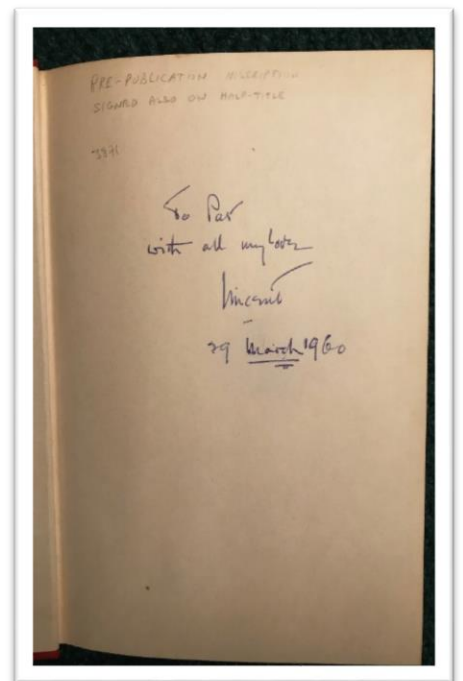


On my final visit to the bookstore, I came across a book I had long desired, **The Private Life of Sherlock Holmes** by Vincent Starrett, not the original from 1933 (now, practically impossible to find or purchase), but the 1960 edition published by the University of Chicago Press, with inclusions that make it especially valuable to me. Inside this book was the *Advance Information* letter sent out by the University of Chicago on May 3, 1960.

Vincent Starrett had autographed this book two times! Once for **Pat, with all my love. Vincent 29 March 60** as a prepublication gift and again on the half-title page, simply **Vincent Starrett**.



(The double-autographed Starrett book, 1960 edition.)



After my retirement I fulfilled a promise I had made almost 20 years before--that of building a website to honor and remember John Bennett Shaw. Knowing that De Waal spent so many hours in the Shaw homes, both in Tulsa and in Santa Fe, coupled with the knowledge that this book was owned and read and handled by De Waal himself made this book even more valuable and meaningful to me.

And, oh! I did finally acquire that 1933 first edition of **The Private Life of Sherlock Holmes**, when Barbara Herbert offered her husband Paul Herbert's books for sale after his death in 2018.

Jim Hawkins, BSI "The Hans Sloane of My Age" (January, 2022)
Nashville, TN (revised from the 24 FEB 2020 original article)