

FOOD FOR THOUGHT IN “WISTERIA LODGE”

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“Wisteria Lodge,” the first story in the collection *His Last Bow*, which Conan Doyle apparently originally intended to call *Reminiscences of Sherlock Holmes*, is a two part-tale that is very different in many ways than most of the other Sherlock Holmes short stories.

As you read “Wisteria Lodge” and prepare for the Nashville Scholars’ discussion on April 16, identify for yourself what some of these differences might be. At the same time, think about some different “problems” or issues, some obvious and some not, that present themselves:

“Wisteria Lodge” was first published in August of 1908, so the events obviously took place sometime prior to that. Is there a problem with the date Watson himself gives for the story? If so, why might he have changed the date?

Speaking of problems, what do you think about the general attitude of Sherlock Holmes in this story? He declares himself ‘bored,’ which is nothing new, but does that boredom manifest itself in an unusual way? Is something other than boredom working on Holmes?

What about the usual Holmes process, his “whole art of detection?” Is Holmes up to snuff in this story? Is he the best detective on the scene? Or is he the second best? Or might he finish even lower in the rankings this time? What does Holmes accomplish in this story, really? Would the mystery have been solved without him anyway?

The whole tale has a problem with secret keeping. Garcia was hiding something, obviously. And Don Murillo, masquerading as Henderson, was hiding even more. Miss Burnet was also masquerading, hiding her identity and her motives. But what might John Scott Eccles be hiding? There seems to be a private matter he would be unwilling to talk about. Holmes, Watson, Baynes and Gregson probably knew what that was, but they were much too tactful to mention it. Why?

This is the third story we have considered recently with black characters. How do the descriptions of, and attitudes toward, black characters in “The Yellow Face,” “The Three Gables,” and “Wisteria Lodge” compare? What do they tell you about Conan Doyle’s, indeed of Victorian society’s, perception of black people generally?

What do you think about the account of the ultimate fate of Don Murillo and his secretary in Madrid? How much credence do you give to that “printed description” that Baynes brought to Baker Street? What seems unusual about Baynes bringing it to Baker Street at all?