The Bilge Pump

Vol. 13, No. 12 December, 2025

The Irregular Publication of the Crew of the Barque Lone Star

founded November, 1970

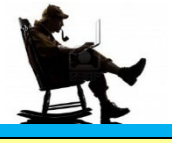
PLEASE NOTE: January 04, 2026 Meeting NOTICE

We will be conducting our next monthly meeting virtually on January 04 at 1:00 pm central. I will send out the link for the meeting the week before the meeting. The story for the month is **"The Boscombe Valley Mystery".**

Bob Katz, BSI, ASH, will lead the discussion on the story.

Our special guest speaker will be **Michael Barton.**

IN THIS ISSUE



For more information concerning our society, visit: http://www.dfw-sherlock.org/

You can follow us on Twitter at: @barquelonestar

You can friend us on Facebook at: http://www.facebook.com/BarqueLoneStar

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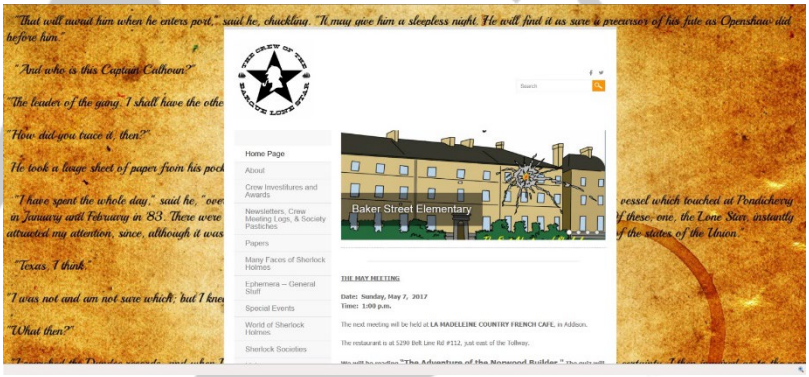


Our Facebook Page:

https://www.facebook.com/BarqueLoneStar/

DECEMBER 07 SUMMARY

There were **77** in attendance at this ZOOM meeting.

The opening toast was given by S.E. Dahlinger on Joseph Bell and Arthur Conan Doyle.

Bob Katz then led a discussion on this month's story, "A Case of Identity".

He began by asking, "What's special about this story"?. Many attendees were able to give their own opinion on this question.

In the announcements, Steve Mason showed a adventurama developed by Sarah Daniels on "The Three Students". Sarah can make others for members of the group.

Steve Mason announced that the 10th book published by the Crew of the Barque Lone Star has been published and will very soon be available for purchase.

The next book with be in conjunction with the Beacon Society, and focus on stories for younger Sherlockians.

Steve discussed Jeffrey Matthews' new book called *One Must Tell the Bees*. It is the story of Sherlock Holmes coming to America during the Civil War.

The Parallel Case of St. Louis will be meeting Saturday to discuss The Beryl Coronet. Rob Nunn also announced that the registration is available for Holmes in the Heartland conference in St. Louis next summer.

On Dec. 28, the John Watson society will meet.

Shana Carter announced that the Gillette Luncheon will once again held during the BSI weekend and the information for those who want to attend is now online. Jen Land will be handling the Ash Luncheon.

Jon Shimberg and Linda Crohn announced that the information and registration for the Starrett conference is now online and registration is open.

The Chicago Torist society will be having their yearly dinner on December 27, 2025.

Edith Pouden announced that the Bi-Metallic Question will be taking a brief break until March 2026.

Our Poet Laurette Sandy Kozinn gave us a limerick on the story, "A Case of Identity".

Rich Krisciunas led us through Sherlockian Law 101.

Jon Shimberg and Linda Crohn were the featured presenters for the month and they discussed "The Forensic Science of Sherlock Holmes and What He Taught Scotland Yard."

Brad Keefeuver gave us the Top 10 from today's story.

Shana Carter then did a reading from *The Baker Street Journal* (see page 4).

The meeting was closed with a toast to the Crew by Rich Kriscuinas.

Thanks to Cindy for taking the minutes as always.

THE WORLD THAT WAS

Shana Carter

The Baker Street Journal, (Editor: Edgar W. Smith)
Vol. 7, Num 2 – April 1957, Edited by Edgar Smith

There was a world, not so very long ago, that suffered from the lack of many of the things we have come today to know and to take for granted, but that rejoiced, too, in much that we have come to lack.

It was a leisurely world, and, by our standards, an uncomfortable one: its inhabitants did not whisk about in motor cars end airplanes, or talk across the seas, or shoot to the top of skyscrapers in high-speed cages; they jogged along patiently in their hansoms and their four-wheelers, or went afoot in the roads and streets, and toiled up steep staircases as far, sometimes, as a full six storeys.

And when they got where they were going, there was no radio or hi-fi to listen to or television set to look at -- but there were no commercials, either, and no want of good books to read or good music to play.

The fine art of conversation flourished in this world, probably for the last time on earth; and men drew challenge and inspiration from one another, face to face, instead of succumbing to the beguilements and titillations of a machine.

There was rich food to be prepared and eaten, and dishes to be washed by hand, and floors to scrub -- and the services performed in the doing of these things were personally rendered, and not dispensed, all built-in, in the form of a vacuum cleaner or an electric washing-machine or a prefabricated, pre-cooked and almost predigested meal.

The houses were of honest brick or stone, with honest roofs of nature's own materials to cover them and sturdy walls to gird them in; their furnishings and decor were fashioned on the spot by artisans enamored of their tasks, and not synthetically assembled at some distant factory.

But there was little sanitary plumbing and no central heating, and the all-pervading interior gloom was not to be relieved, over the years, until the picture window - with or without a picture outlook - came to be invented.

When disease or infection struck, there were no sera or antibiotics to perform their miracles, but death was, in the long run, no more inevitable than it is today. And when a man shaved, he had to do a lot else besides shoving a plug into an electric socket.

There were wars in those days, too, but they were waged by armies against other armies, and not by armies against whole peoples: the progress of civilization had not yet made possible, or even desirable, the mass-murders that have been perpetrated in our own time at Buchenwald and Hiroshima and Budapest.

And there was, then as now, and as there has always been, the cruelty of man to man, and the oppression and exploitation of the weak
by the strong and of the poor by the rich; but the goal of a common and disciplined equality-in-mediocrity had not yet been attained - nor was it even sought.

It is difficult to say which world of these two can be acclaimed the better or the worse; which one it was that produced the rounder man, more nearly perfect and more nearly whole.

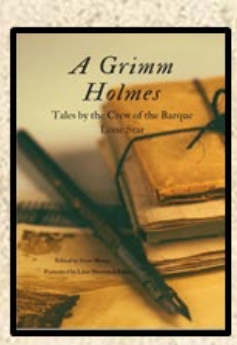
To look back upon that world of the 1880's and the 1890's, however, is to realize, from our own perspective today, that it must have been a world with much to commend it - for it was this world, after all, that gave us Sherlock Holmes.

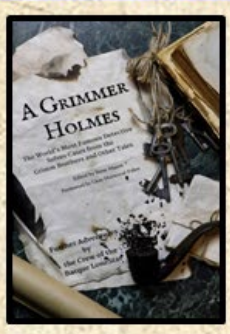
The Crew of the Barque Lone Star Society has published 10 wonderful books. Each book is chocked full of wonderful essays and pastiches by our own Society members. You may download a free copy of the books (as .pdf files) on our website…

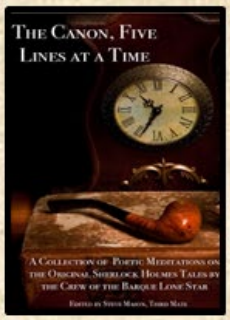
https://www.dfw-sherlock.org/society--crew-member-anthologies-pastiches.html

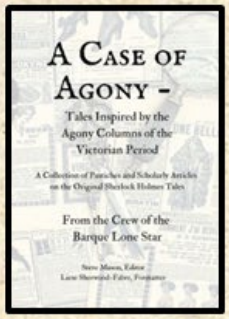
Or you may purchase a soft-back version of any of our books (at cost) at…

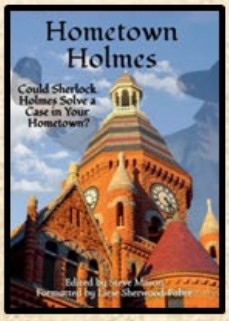
https://www.barnesandnoble.com/s/the%20crew%20of%20the%20barque%20lone%20star

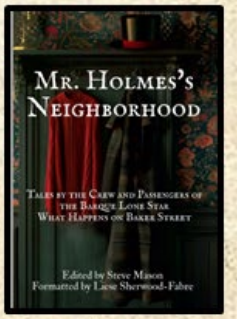












IN PRAISE OF THE PASTICHE

David Marcum

The Surrogate Assassin
by Christopher Leppek

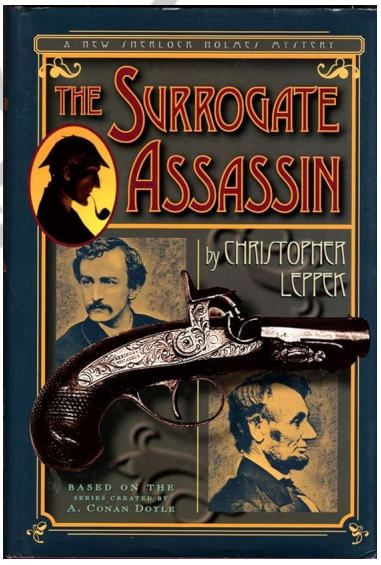
In last month's review of L.B. Greenwood's "The Last Battle" (included in *The Mammoth Book of New Sherlock Holmes Stories*), I touched on an aspect of post-Canonical adventures that is essential when considering the lives of Holmes and Watson – interaction with historical figures and historical events – but some people prefer that Holmes to be small and insignificant, and for such historical contacts to be rare or non-existent.

I say that this is "essential" because playing *The Game* requires that Holmes and Watson be treated as real historical figures. In the Canon, there are mentions of current events – the Second Afghan War and the Second Boer War – and there are occasional interactions with historic figures whose identities have been obfuscated by Watson: The King of Bohemia and Lord Bellinger. Lord Holdhurst and the Illustrious Client. And once the Queen made an off-stage appearance. But in many of the cases that Watson chose to publish, Holmes is involved in smaller private matters: A man pretending to be a scarred beggar. Another who is puzzled by his wife's actions related to a yellow-masked face. Someone attempting to cheat on a scholarship test.

Some would have their Holmes perpetually limited to the pitifully few original-sixty Canonical adventures, and in them for the most part he would typically be involved with private little crimes, displaying occasional short bursts of frenetic energy while mostly moping about the sitting room for vast chunks of time between cases in a drug-dulled brown study, and only able to function at all because of Watson's constant pestering.

No. To recognize that Sherlock Holmes is the greatest detective, one must see and observe *all* of the historical context, and all of the cases – the Canonical sixty and – by some counts – over 140 Untold Cases, and also the thousands of post-Canonical adventures that fill in all the gaps. All of these together, *The Great Holmes Tapestry*, are how we demonstrate and *know* that Holmes is truly the greatest detective . . . and in these cases, it is inevitable that Holmes, a noted historical figure, sometimes has contact with famed personages.

Here is another one of those historical adventures.



In 1998, author Christopher Leppek, who has written a few other non-Holmes books, published *The Surrogate Assassin*, his sole Sherlockian effort. It was a solid hardcover from Write Way Publishing in Aurora, Colorado, and to my knowledge, it has never appeared in paperback. Although published over one-quarter century ago, it's still easily available on Amazon and other online sites. According to what little available information I could discover, Leppek, a writer and professional journalist, was living with his family in Denver as recently as 2019. The Denver Scion should track him down (if he's still there) for what could be a mutually beneficial relationship.

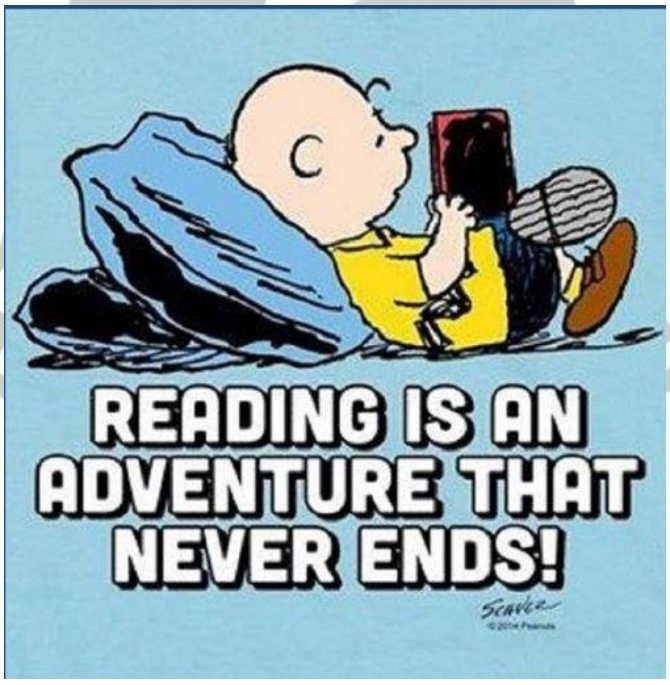
The Surrogate Assassin is set in the summer of 1881. As the story opens, Watson has known about Holmes's profession for a few months and has assisted him on several investigations. Into this new friendship arrives famed American actor, Edwin Booth, presuming on a connection with Holmes and seeking help regarding several attempts on his life. The action proceeds naturally, and soon Holmes and Watson are traveling with Booth to the United States – where they are involved in an adventure

that cements their friendship as "*brothers, not in blood, but in bond*" – a phrase taken from a later Holmes film and not this book, but always most accurate whenever it can be worked in.

It isn't a spoiler – since Leppek approved it – to point out that the cover of *The Surrogate Assassin* shows both Abraham Lincoln and John Wilkes Booth, Edwin's infamous brother. When I was twelve years old (in 1977), a film called *The Lincoln Conspiracy* proposed an alternate explanation to the accepted facts related to the Lincoln Assassination. *The Surrogate Assassin*, published from one of Watson's rediscovered manuscripts, does the same thing for the Lincoln tragedy that the book and film of *Murder by Decree* (1979) revealed the Holmesian aspects of Stephen Knight's *Jack the Ripper: The Final Solution* (1976).

To see how the truth behind the attempts on Edwin's life is revealed, and how this relates to one of history's most heinous crimes, is truly unforgettable, and – having first read this excellent book when published twenty-seven years ago – these true facts, as uncovered by Sherlock Holmes, still cross my mind on a regular basis.

You should read it, so the same thing will happen to you . . . .



ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE EXPLORED MEN'S MENTAL HEALTH THROUGH HIS SHERLOCK HOLMES STORIES

Emma Lindford

The Conversation, November 25, 2025

Arthur Conan Doyle was not just one of the world's best crime fiction writers. He was a progressive wordsmith who brought light to controversial and taboo subjects. One of those taboo subjects was male vulnerability and mental health problems – a topic of personal significance to the author.

Doyle was a vulnerable child. His father, Charles, was an alcoholic, which led to financial troubles in the family. Charles was admitted to an asylum in 1881 and spent the next 12 years in various mental care establishments. So began Doyle's interest in male vulnerability and mental health.

The character of Sherlock Holmes is a true expression of male vulnerability that does not equate it with weakness. Doyle does not represent Holmes as infallible, but as a man others can relate to – he battles with drug addiction, loneliness and depression. His genius thrives in part because of these vulnerabilities, not despite them.
Many of Doyle's Sherlock Holmes stories examine male characters facing emotional catastrophe, betrayal or moral dilemmas. In works such as "The Man with the Twisted Lip" (1891), "The Adventure of the Engineer's Thumb" (1892) and "The Stockbroker's Clerk" (1894), Holmes's male clients approach him with problems layered with emotional turmoil, fear and failure.

In "The Man with the Twisted Lip", for example, a man named Neville St Clair hides his double life. He tells his family that he is a respectable entrepreneur going to London on business. In reality he is begging on the city streets. He lives this double life due to fear and shame over the inability to pay off his debts.

"It was a long fight between my pride and the money," he explains, "but the dollars won at last."

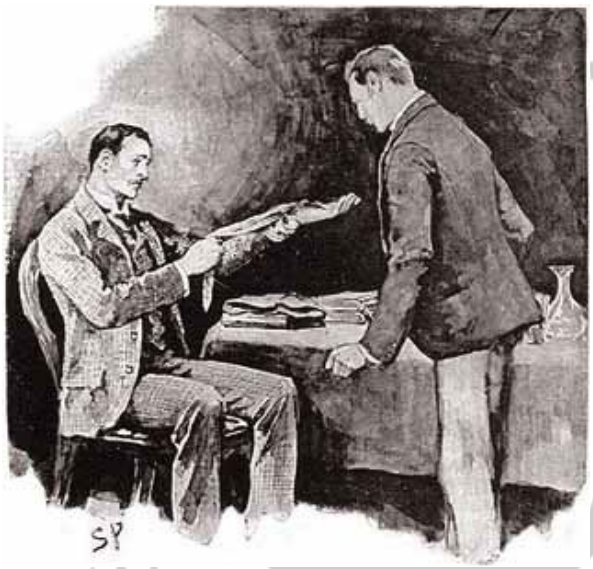
"I would have endured imprisonment, ay, even execution, rather than have left my miserable secret as a family blot to my children," St Clair says. In having his character consider execution to protect his and his family's reputation, Doyle explored the societal expectations of Victorian masculinity and how men struggled with such pressures.

"The Stockbroker's Clerk" also examines male suicide, as well as economic and professional anxieties. When Holmes reveals the crimes of Harry Pinner, the man attempts suicide rather than face prison.

In "The Engineer's Thumb", hydraulic engineer Victor is treated physically by Watson and mentally by Holmes.

As Doyle writes: "Round one of his hands he had a handkerchief wrapped, which was mottled all over with bloodstains. He was young, not more than five-

and-twenty, I should say, with a strong masculine face; but he was exceedingly pale and gave me the impression of a man who was suffering from some strong agitation, which it took all his strength of mind to control."



The physical injury marks Victor as a victim of physical violence. Watson suggests that Victor is using all his mental capabilities to keep calm about his severe pain.

Holmes treats Victor's mind as he listens to his story: "Pray lie down there and make yourself absolutely at home. Tell us what you can, but stop when you are tired, and keep up your strength with a little stimulant."
Holmes is a protector, a confidante and a comforter in this scene. He provides Victor with breakfast, induces him to lie down and offers him a stimulant (more than likely brandy).

The extremity of violence that Victor has endured has escalated to mental trauma. In having Holmes treat Victor's mental trauma while Watson treats his physical pain, Doyle showed the importance psychological support for men of the age.
Holmes was a highly popular character.

To contemporary readers, his drug use and dysfunctional clients were seen as markers of his genius rather than a reflection of the significant social issues that men faced during this period.

But today, they offer a window into the mental struggles of Victorian men, and a point of connection between readers of the past and present.

A MORE COMPREHENSIVE LOOK AT "THE BOSCOMBE VALLEY MYSTERY"

1. Summary (ACD Encyclopedia)

Holmes and Watson go to Boscombe to help Lestrade on the murder of the old McCarthy. All testimonials criminalize the son, James McCarthy, but his fiancée, Miss Turner is convinced of his innocence. By carefully observing the crime scene, Holmes finds different footprints and a stone he claims to be the murder weapon and he gives a very accurate description of the murderer.

He also visited the young McCarthy in prison to hear his version. With all these elements Holmes concludes that the murderer is the old Turner, the father of Miss Turner. He sent him a convocation note. Turner tells his story. In Australia, it was known as Black Jack of Ballarat and he was attacking convoys.

One day he attacked the convoy of McCarthy but let him alive. Back in England, rich and decided to pull over and do good, he married and gave birth to a daughter. But he met McCarthy who recognized him and began blackmail.

Gradually, he had to give all his fortune, but when McCarthy insisted that his son marries his daughter, it was too much and he killed him. Having Turner's confession written, Holmes decides not to report it because the old man is dying.

The young James McCarthy was acquitted thanks to Sherlock Holmes objections and the confession wasn't needed. The old Turner died seven months later and the two young ignored all of the past of their parents..

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2. Story Info Sheet (McMurdo's Camp)

- First published in:
  The Strand Magazine, October 1891

- Time frame of story (known/surmised):
  Began with a murder on June 3rd, stated. Most likely in 1889.

- Holmes & Watson living arrangements:
  Watson married and in practice, living with his wife.

- Opening scene:
  At breakfast, Watson received a telegram from Holmes requesting his assistance, asking Watson to meet him at Paddington. After getting permission from his wife, Watson complied. Holmes outlined the case on the 4-hour train ride to the pretty little country-town of Ross, in Herefordshire in the West of England.

- Client:
  Lestrade, who being rather puzzled, referred the case to Holmes. Lestrade, in turn, had been retained by Alice Turner, the daughter of Turner. Turner's daughter believed in the innocence of James McCarthy, son of the murder victim. James was not a very quick-witted youth, but was comely to look at and sound at heart. Alice had apparently urged Lestrade to call in Holmes.

- Crime or concern:
  Murder of Charles McCarthy, a neighbor of John Turner, an old acquaintance from Australia. Turner was the richer of the two.

- Villain:
  Old Turner killed McCarthy by bashing his head with a stone.

- Motive:
  McCarthy had been blackmailing Turner for support, over long-ago criminality in Australia. When the blackmail extended to McCarthy wanting his son to marry Turner's daughter, it had gone too far. Turner had a disease at the time and knew he was dying anyway, so he was something of a free agent, legally if not morally.

- Logic / clues used to solve:

  Two crucial points upon which the case depended were that McCarthy had an appointment at the murder scene with someone who could not have been his son, and the murdered man was heard to cry "Cooee!" before he knew that his son had returned (a singularly Australian signal).

  Holmes carefully examined the crime scene, the grassy area by the Boscombe pool, and then announced "It has been a case of considerable interest,." implying he had solved it. Dying man's reported reference to a rat was actually Ballarat, an Australian city in the area Turner and McCarthy came from. Holmes checked this on a map..

- Policemen:

  Lestrade of Scotland Yard, who apparently had been hired as an independent consultant by Alice.

- Holmes' fees:

  No mention.

- Transport:

  When summoned by Holmes, Watson was soon in a cab with his valise, rattling away to Paddington Station from which they travelled to Ross. On the train, Holmes read Petrarch (a 14th-century Renaissance humanist).

  Holmes & Watson drove with Lestrade to the Hereford Arms in Ross.

  After a night in the hotel, Holmes & Watson with Lestrade set off by carriage for Hatherley Farm and the Boscombe Pool, which was the scene of the crime.

  Holmes and Lestrade took train to Hereford from Ross to interview the accused (Young James McCarthy) in gaol.

  After visiting the crime scene, Holmes & Watson and Lestrade took a cab back to Ross..

- Food:

  On the ride to Herefordshire, Holmes & Watson stopped at Swindon for lunch. After dropping Lestrade off, Holmes & Watson had lunch in their hotel in Ross.

- Drink:

  No mention.

- Vices:

  Holmes felt no urgency to visit the scene of the crime. "I have a caseful of cigarettes here which need smoking, and the sofa is very much superior to the usual country hotel abomination."

  After lunch in Ross, Holmes instructed Watson to sit down and light a cigar while Holmes expounded..

- Other cases mentioned:

  A Study in Scarlet.

- Notable Quotables:

  "Singularity is almost invariably a clue. The more featureless and commonplace a crime is, the more difficult it is to bring it home." – Holmes

  "It is really very good of you to come, Watson," said he. "It makes a considerable difference to me, having someone with me on whom I can thoroughly rely. Local aid is always either worthless or else biased." – Holmes to Watson.

  "I cudgelled my brains" – Watson. Note: Watson also cudgelled his brains in The Naval Treaty.

  "You know my method. It is founded upon the observation of trifles." – Holmes

- Other interestings:

  When on the job in Ross, Lestrade wore a light brown dustcoat and leather-leggings in deference to his rustic surroundings.

  Tracks near the crime scene were obscured like a herd of buffalo had wallowed all over it, possibly the same herd that caused similar difficulties in A Study in Scarlet.

  In this case, Holmes and Lestrade take quite a few verbal jabs at each other. Holmes prevails.

- When all was said and done:

Turner had been a highwayman and murderer in Australia; McCarthy had been one of his victims. Turner was a successful criminal, became wealthy, and moved back to England. McCarthy found him and threatened exposure. Holmes had a talk with Turner at the end and agreed not to expose him as long as McCarthy's son was not punished for the murder. The son's lawyer got him acquitted with Holmes' help. Old Turner died shortly after as expected. The son and daughter were getting together and never knew of their parents' secrets of sin and shame.

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3. Selected Chronologies

a.	The Original Story by Arthur Conan Doyle	June 3, 1889
b.	William Baring-Gould	Thursday, June 6, 1889
c.	H.W. Bell	June, 1889
d.	Roger Butters	Monday, June 3, 1889
e.	Jay Finley Christ	Friday, June 7, 1889
f.	Jean-Pierre Crauser	Friday, June 7, 1889
g.	D. Martin Dakin	Saturday, June 8, 1889
h.	Bill Dorn	Monday, June 3, 1889
i.	Henry Folsom	Thursday, June 6, 1889
j.	John Hall	Thursday, June 6, 1889
k.	Craig Janasek	Sunday, June 8, 1890
l.	Brad Keefauver	Saturday, June 8, 1889
m.	Toshio Suzuki	Saturday, June 8, 1889
n.	June Thomson	June 1890
o.	Ernest Bloomfield Zeisler	Friday, June 27, 1896

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4. Canonical Queeries (Ralph Edwards, BSI)

- Did the half-hour mean it was 10:45?
- Did Holmes really need Watson's help?
- Why a cloak instead of a coat?
- Is a person in their thirties young or middle-aged?
- Why did James start back for his house?
- What are platform tickets?
- Why did Watson's wife want him to leave?
- Was Holmes wearing a deerstalker?
- Did Holmes want company or assistance? Who paid Watson's expenses?
- Is "the" in "the two corner seats" meaningful?
- Was it a carriage or only a compartment?
- Why the reference to London papers when local papers were at hand?
- Would Holmes and Watson normally be digesting their breakfast after 11:15?

- Was England's murder rate high?
- Were Turner and McCarthy Australian or English?
- How old really was James McCarthy?
- Did Patience Moran see Turner?
- Where is the right-hand side of one's bedroom?
- Did Watson have the moustache of The Red Circle days?
- Did Holmes err as to the case of the "self-reproach and contrition"?
- Having requested Watson's assistance, why did Holmes abandon him the first night?
- Who were the serving-man and groom?
- Why Petrarch rather than conversation?
- Could you carry a gun if you wouldn't hurt a fly?
- Why was there "the quick blush"?
- Was the hideous outcry consistent with the head wound?
- Would you want James to marry your daughter?
- Was the cape waterproof?
- Was Turner vigorous for one so ill?
- Was the stone bloodied?
- Did Holmes apply his blood test (from STUD)?
- Was Turner's secret really safe?
- Could McCarthy have made a convincing accusation against Turner?
- What are the odds of Alice Turner and James McCarthy living happily ever after??

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5. 17 Steps (Brad Keefauver, BSI)

1. Did This Man Ever Recover From Afghanistan?

"You have been looking a little pale lately," the good Mrs. Watson tells her husband at the beginning of BOSC. "I think that the change would do you good."

Holmes's own telegram to Watson recommends the air and scenery of Boscombe Valley, as one would suggest it to a sick friend. While Watson writes of Holmes working himself to the point of illness on several occasions, it would seem the good doctor downplays his own moments of weakness. Was this indeed the case? Was Watson chronically ill?

"My experience of camp life in Afghanistan had at least had the effect of making me a prompt and ready traveller," Watson writes, and the words "at least" sound very sad indeed. Was his physical condition a reminder that would never let him forget that horrible war?

2. The Origin Of The Deerstalker?

Watson tells of Holmes's "tall, gaunt figure made even gaunter and taller by his long gray travelling-cloak and close-fitting cloth cap" as Sherlock Holmes heads out to the country for the first time in the Canon. Is this the same "ear-flapped travelling-cap" from "Silver Blaze"? What does "close-fitting" imply about the cap's style, if anything? Was "caps in the country, hats in the city" the fashion etiquette of the day?

3. Newspaper Basketball Anyone?

Holmes brings quite a few papers on the train with him. "All the recent papers" is the way Holmes describes them. An "immense litter of papers" is how Watson describes it. But in the end, Holmes rolls the lot up into a gigantic ball which he arcs up into the rack for two points.

How many newspapers does it take to make a gigantic ball? How many newspapers where coming out every day in London at that time? Just how many days worth of papers do the Hounds think Holmes dragged on to that train?

4. The Unusual Case Of How Holmes Got The Case

"There are several people in the neighbourhood, however, and among them Miss Turner, the daughter of the neighbouring land-owner, who believe in his innocence, and who have retained Lestrade, whom you may recollect in connection with 'A Study in Scarlet', to work out the case in his interest. Lestrade, being rather puzzled, has referred the case to me."

James McCarthy's friends have taken up a collection and hired Inspector Lestrade of Scotland Yard to prove McCarthy's innocence. Lestrade, being used to declaring guilt, finds innocence an angle he needs some help on. Is Holmes now on the payroll of the friends of J.M., or is Lestrade just cutting Holmes in for a piece of his action? And why is Holmes telling Watson "this is the guy from 'A Study in Scarlet'" and referring to the case by Watson's very own title?

5. This Wasn't The Denny's Across The Street

"We drove to our hotel, where we found lunch upon the table," Watson tells us. He and Holmes are staying at the Hereford Arms, where they even have a nice sofa in their room, so surely they don't mean some common boarding-house table, do they? Would they have arranged for lunch to be served to their room at a specific time in this country hotel? And why wasn't Lestrade staying at the same place, if he was the one who arranged for them to come up, and their hotel room had been already procured for them? Did Lestrade feel he had to get Holmes better lodgings than he himself had?

6. That's One Thin Plot!

"I lay upon the sofa and tried to interest myself in a yellow-backed novel. The puny plot of the story was so thin, however, when compared to the deep mystery through which we were groping . . ."

While Watson's married state would seem to indicate that this case occurs after he's spent many years with Holmes, his excitement over this case seems rather over-played . . . or is it just me? Do the rest of the Hounds find this simple murder as engrossing as Watson seems to? Is this, combined with Holmes's explanation of who Lestrade is, an indication that this tale really occurred earlier in the partnership than most Sherlockians suspect?

7. That Dirty "Rat"

Perhaps the most mysterious part of this mystery is the dying man's reference to "a rat." In the end, we are expected to agree that this was the last two syllables of a six syllable identification of the murderer. Would a dying man silently mumble the first two-thirds of his statement, then force up the last third in his dying breath? And if the poor fellow had enough wits about him to identify his murderer to his son, wouldn't he have used a name his son would have more easily recognized, such as the man's current nomenclature?

If this were an Ellery Queen mystery would we consider this playing fair with the reader? Or would "a rat" be a rather bogus device on the part of the mystery's constructor?

8. Where Was He Headed Otherwise?

"I never hear of such a case as this that I do not think of Baxter's words, and say, 'There, but for the grace of God, goes Sherlock Holmes.'"

While it's nice that Holmes is sympathetic toward a dying old man at this story's conclusion, I've never quite understood just *why* he was particularly sympathetic toward Turner's situation. Did Holmes have a criminal past that he feared might rise up to ruin those he loved? A daughter wanting to marry the son of an enemy? Or was it something involving a former college friend whose father was blackmailed to death?

"Well, it is not for me to judge you," Holmes says. "I pray that we may never be exposed to such a temptation." Again, Holmes seems far too sympathetic with this murderer. Was there a payoff involved on the part of this wealthy landowner? Or can the Hounds find a more noble reason for Holmes's sympathies?

And while we're on that earlier quote: Jack Tracy claims Holmes was confusing Nonconformist Richard Baxter with Protestant John Bradford in his attribution of the paraphrase. Is this a hint toward the detective's theological upbringing?

9. Judge Sherly Makes His First Ruling

Here we are a mere six tales into the sixty, and Sherlock Holmes is already letting a murderer go free. While turning in the killer would probably punish two innocents more than it would the villain himself, Holmes still shows as much disrespect for the criminal justice system here as he does in later cases, where he lets such men as Leon Sterndale and Captain Crocker walk away from their crimes, doesn't he? Or does the future of the two innocents involved excuse him this time?

10. This Sure Isn't Hazzard County

Watson calls for the weekly county paper, which contains "a surgeon's deposition" stating "that the posterior third of the left parietal bone and the left half of the occipital bone had been shattered by a heavy blow from a blunt weapon." This seems like a lot of information for not only a weekly rural paper, but an inquest into a clubbing murder in the late 1800's as well. Why would a surgeon have been called in to look at a man who plainly had his head smashed in? Another local paper prints transcripts of the coroner's hearings -- was that ever done by any newspaper the Hounds have had experience with, be it 1880s vintage or otherwise?

11. Shaving By Sunlight

In this tale, Holmes makes an amazing deduction that Watson's bedroom window is on the right-hand side. He does so with the following explanation:

"You shave every morning, and in this season you shave by the sunlight; but since your shaving is less and less complete as we get farther back on the left side, until it becomes positively slovenly as we get round the angle of the jaw, it is surely very clear that that side is less illuminated than the other. I could not imagine a man of your habits looking at himself in an equal light and being satisfied with such a result."

As with many things in the Canon, it sounds good at first, but starts to weaken when one really considers it. As shaving tends to be done by methodically dragging a sharpened blade across the expanse of one's face on a daily basis, patterns develop. And do any male Hounds shave by looking at the whiskers themselves? And would a man of "military neatness" judge the finished product without running a hand across it? The concept of a shaving job so slovenly that one can actually judge degrees of how bad it is on different parts of the face seems totally incongruous with anyone the least bit neat about it. Personally, I'm thinking Holmes found out about that bedroom window through other means (which may be a clue as to what happened to Watson's marriage).

12. Such Language, Mr. McCarthy!

"I found my father expiring upon the ground, with his head terribly injured. I dropped my gun and held him in my arms, but he almost instantly expired."

Does this seem a bit cold-blooded to anyone? "Expired" is a word for newspaper obituaries, not sons whose fathers have died in their arms. Did the Herefordshire paper clean up McCarthy's true language here for their reading public, or would a young man of that day actually use so dispassionate a term for his father's final moments?

13. And Now For Poetry Time, Like It Or Not

After devouring all the facts of the McCarthy matter from that giant ball of newspapers and relaying them to Watson, Holmes refuses to speak to Watson for the last twenty minutes of the train trip. After spending the first part of the trip silently reading and taking notes, might Holmes and Watson have enjoyed some non-murder-related chat during that time? They were not living together at the time, and surely had a lot to talk about.

Would there have been any urgency in Holmes silently reading the poetry of Petrarch in that twenty minutes? Had he been eagerly awaiting the chance to dive into that book, or was he perturbed with Watson for some reason?

14. The Ballarat Connection

We learned in The Sign of the Four that Dr. Watson had once been to Ballarat, and he is very quiet about that fact when he finally comes into the company of someone from that area. Five other men came to England with Black Jack, all rich from their gold heist -- five other men we never hear anything else of. Is Watson's silence suggestive of a brother or father that was one of Black Jack's cohorts? Might that have been the reason that Holmes invited Watson along for a fairly straight forward murder case, then didn't speak to him on the trip down, leaving the doctor to his own thoughts? Might not the true paraphrase have been "There, but for the grace of God, goes John H. Watson?"

15. Is There A Real Doctor In The House?

"Dr. Willows says that he is a wreck and that his nervous system is shattered," Miss Turner tells Holmes of her father. Lestrade says old Turner is "About sixty; but his constitution has been shattered by his life abroad, and he has been in failing health for some time." Finally, Turner himself claims to have had diabetes for years, and his doctor says he might not live a month. Turner's fellow Australian, Dr. Watson, tells us that Turner died seven months later.

So many different diagnoses: Nerves. Health ruined by life in Australia. Diabetes. Were any of these close to the truth, or just a part of some larger scam which involved Turner eventually dying of everyday old age?

16. Holding A Place

"If you will keep the two corner seats I shall get the tickets," Holmes tells Watson when they reach the train. Apparently Watson did a good job, as the pair had a carriage to themselves. But what did Holmes mean by "corner seats," and why were those so desirable? Was it for the same reasons one might choose the back row in a movie theater? And how odd was it that they had an entire carriage to themselves on an 11:15 train from Paddington Station? (Extra points for anyone who can work that cute little bear into the discussion and stay on topic.)

17. Legal Help Needed!

"He was on Wednesday brought before the magistrates at Ross, who have referred the case to the next assizes. Those are the main facts of the case as they came out before the coroner and the police-court."

Coroner. Police-court. Magistrates. Assizes. Okay, I'm confused. "The Boscombe Valley Mystery" gives us about as much legalese as any other tale in the Canon. Can anyone give a clear, *concise* explanation of this process for we moderns ignorant of the British legal system? Were coroner's jurymen allowed to question suspects?

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6. View Halloas (Rosemary Michaud)

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7. Delicate Questions (Chris Redmond, BSI)

Is there any more corny incident in the Canon than the scene in which Holmes proclaims, “The culprit is —” and a hotel waiter announces the name of a visitor?

Is its use in this case sufficiently effective to be justified?

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8. Additional Thoughts (Steve Clarkson)

A young man stands in the dock before a coroner’s jury, accused of patricide. He claims he’s innocent, but circumstantial evidence and his own words when he was arrested are damning evidence against him. This is complicated by his stubborn refusal to reveal what he and his father were arguing about just before the murder occurred. But there are two rays of hope: Inspector Lestrade, who has been hired by a young lady friend of the accused, states confidently that the young fellow is guilty beyond a doubt; and Sherlock Holmes has entered the case on behalf of the lad.

The Boscombe Valley Mystery contains a classic demonstration of Holmes’ axiom that circumstantial evidence cuts two ways, in that it can be seen as an alibi as well as proof of guilt.

John Turner said that he had “led the life of a martyr” to atone for his misdeeds in Victoria Province, Australia. I see this as a blatant claim for the sympathies of Holmes and Watson, without any justification therefor. Turner killed, or participated in the killing of, six men from ambush, took his share of the ill-gotten gains back to the Old Country, bought parcels of valuable land, and made other investments which put him on Easy Street for the rest of his life. Was the alleged blackmailing by Charles McCarthy sufficient to justify his claim to “martyrdom?”

Holmes, with incorrect attribution, paraphrases a saying as “There, but for the grace of God, goes Sherlock Holmes.” The words were spoken originally by a cleric who was in fear of his own life (due to heresy) every time he saw a criminal pass by in chains. Did Holmes himself have some guilty secret which caused him to fear retribution from the law?

Was James McCarthy the fine young man he is made out to be by Watson? Was he really that head-over-heels in love with Alice Turner when he went to Bristol and married a barmaid? One for the barristers: was either young McCarthy or the barmaid, or both, at risk of prosecution for an illegal marriage? And why would the barmaid marry McCarthy? There is at least one explanation for why he married her — youthful er…ardor — but what benefit did she expect to derive from the illicit and illegal union?

In young McCarthy’s testimony before the coroner’s jury, he stated that he heard a “horrible outcry” which took him running back to the spot where he had argued with his father. Evidence showed that the elder McCarthy had suffered crushed parietal and occipital bones from a sneak attack by John Turner. By the nature of the injuries, would a person so struck be capable of making a “horrible outcry,” or would he have been rendered unconscious before he could make much noise?

Some odds and ends: Was it customary for barometers to be available in the private sitting-rooms of hotels in those days? Could a shotgun butt, which is flat rather than concave like a rifle’s, make the type of injuries described in the newspaper account? Was young McCarthy also left-handed and, if not, could not the discrepancy between the location of the fatal wound and his right-handedness be one of the objections drawn up by Holmes? What other objections might Holmes have concocted?

And what were the chances that James McCarthy and Alice Turner would eventually marry, even if they never saw Watson’s account of the solution to the mystery?

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9. Questions & Comments (Sonia Fetherston, BSI)

In this week's story, The Boscombe Valley Mystery, Australia is the location of the first crime. The wild, remote reaches of the empire helped contribute to the mood of this story.

If the location is a variable, how would the story change? Would it still work? Could we still arrive at the same outcome if the original crime took place in another part of the empire? India? Ireland? South Africa? Hong Kong? Even Central London?!

I'd like to get this week's discussion going by changing the background variable of BOSC to my own favorite corner of the empire, Scotland. The story would appear to hold up pretty weel, er, well, with that change of location. Scotland was a "verra" wild place, a suitably inspiring origin for McCarthy's later years of blackmail and Turner's slow burn. No gold convoys there to stick up, but Turner's robbery could have involved payroll or a cash shipment from one of the big three local industries — the woolen trade, fishing, or distilling. Charles MacCarthy (making him a Mac instead of a Mc) could not have called "cooee," but would need to use a call that identified the Scots background. Lots of colorful words and phrases to choose from! The plaid dropped by Turner is consistent with having once lived in Scotland; a plaid is a length of tartan usually belted and drawn across the shoulder. By Victorian times the plaid and other items of Scots attire enjoyed a certain vogue in Britain, anyway. Many tartans incorporate predominately gray hues like James saw.

The rest of the story could unfold pretty much as Watson laid out, with the same conclusion. Scotland was just rugged enough and remote enough to lend a solid background to the later events in BOSC.

A whole other area of discussion is how would James McCarthy and/or Turner fare had Boscombe Valley been located in Scotland itself. Scotland's criminal laws were somewhat different from British criminal laws, and either man might well have gotten off Scot free!

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10. 56 Stories in 56 Days (Charlotte Anne Walters)

I'm sitting on a train travelling back home from London to the Midlands, writes Charlotte Anne Walters. My meeting ended early and I arrived back at Euston station in time to walk towards Baker Street, following the route which Red – the protagonist in my novel – would have taken during a key scene.

I had strange Goosebumps at the thought of actually being there, in situ, and imagining how she would have felt running through the streets to reach 221b one stormy early evening.

Anyway, back to the matter in hand. The train journey did give me the perfect opportunity to read the Boscombe Valley Mystery and have a think about what further insights it gives into both Holmes and his partnership with Watson.

Partnership seems to be the appropriate word because in this story it is clear how much Holmes needs Watson. He even sends a telegram to Watson's house requesting his company for a few days in the West of England while he investigates this new case.

The telegram arrives as the Watsons are eating breakfast and Mrs Watson urges her husband to go adding – 'you are always so interested in Mr Sherlock Holmes' cases'. Watson replies, 'I should be ungrateful if I were not, seeing what I gained through one of them.'

This confirms that the first Mrs Watson was Mary Morstan from the Sigh of Four and I can't believe how blatantly Guy Ritchie ignored this in his film – more to the point I can't believe how little this seemed to have mattered to Holmes fans as I have seen very little criticism of this error.

In the first Sherlock Holmes movie, Watson is engaged to a woman who is clearly not Mary as he has to go and visit her parents (Mary's parents were both dead) and she meets Holmes for the first time in a restaurant not through bringing him the mystery of the Sign of Four.

This really mattered to me and coming so early on in the film it did rather spoil my enjoyment (not that Ritchie will mind of course – ""Oh I would happily give back all the millions I made if Charlotte Anne Walters would just enjoy my film.")

Further evidence of how much Holmes has come to rely on Watson comes later on in the story when he asks him to be a sounding board to help him think through his ideas – 'Look here Watson, just sit down in this chair and let me preach to you for a little. I don't quite know what to do, and I should value your advice. Light a cigar, and let me expound." What a lovely thing to say, acknowledging not only how much he needs Watson but also that he is at ease enough with him to admit not knowing what to do and to ask his advice.

The case against young James McCarthy looks so solid that as a reader it is almost impossible to see how Holmes will save the day and all the more satisfying when he does – especially the part where he refers to Lestrade as an 'imbecile'!

The story does follow a familiar Doyle theme of someone coming to England with ill-gotten gains from the colonies and their past finally catching up with them. I suppose this was just the topic of the age – imperial advances and people becoming more geographically mobile. Am I the only one who sometimes gets the stories muddled up because of this commonality?

Score for the Boscombe Valley Mystery = 7/10

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11. Observance of Trifles (Brian Keith Snell)

The Adventure of C.S.I. England!

Ah, the nineteenth century British Empire--where a chap can go to Australia, become a highway robber, hijack a gold shipment, murder most of the guards, come back to England, and buy an entire valley! Who said there was no class mobility in those times? Aww, but he might be bedeviled by A pesky blackmailers!! Well, frankly, the blackguard deserves to die for threatening a fine gentleman--so kill 'im!! Don't you feel *sorry* for this guy?

Such is **The Boscombe Valley Mystery**.

But while that opening paragraph tells you my opinion of this story's resolution, I'd rather focus the first part of this essay on the most significant aspect of the story: **Doyle's** clearest laying out of the difference between **Holmes'** methods and the police's. And how, although fictional and perhaps at times a bit fanciful, Sherlock Holmes forecast the growing impact of forensics science on criminal investigations.

BLACK-JACK, DE BALLARAT.

It can be easy, from our vantage point of 1,000 reruns per week of **CSI** and **Law & Order**, to forget how little of what we consider the basics of crime-solving were available at the time these stories were being published. Of course, there was no DNA. But there was also no blood-typing; in fact, there wasn't even a test that could conclusively prove that a given blood sample came from a human, as opposed to some other mammal. Fingerprints had been theorized about, but there was no systematic use of them in most places until the 1900s (**Scotland Yard** had turned down a doctor's offer to help them develop a fingerprint system in 1886...he should have gone straight to Holmes). Ballistic fingerprinting, matching a bullet to a specific gun, wasn't used in any court until 1902.

Just imagine **Lenny Briscoe** trying to solve a case without any of that information! So perhaps we should be more charitable to the poor British police of the era than Holmes was.

In the real world of the time, most murders weren't too complicated--the causes were generally drunken quarrels, revenge, greed or love/lust.

And the inspectors of the day were fairly adept at finding out who had such motives, arresting them, and getting either a confession--or finding enough evidence (and hopefully an eyewitness or two) to succeed at trial. Who needed science?

Ah, but when there *wasn't* conclusive evidence? Well, the police still had a job to do. But without an eyewitness or confession, they had to try and fit the crime before them into one of their preset scenarios, and would go on to "*round up the usual suspects*." It is noteworthy that, in the three murder cases we have dealt with so far, Scotland Yard inspectors immediately latched onto "incorrect" theories of the case, and pursued the wrong suspects, no matter what Holmes told them. As **Lestrade** himself noted, '"I find it hard enough to tackle facts, Holmes, without flying away after theories and fancies."

[Lest you think this was only a flaw of *fictional* policeman, I suggest you look into contemporary accounts of the investigation into the **Jack The Ripper** murders. Without forensic techniques or any real evidence, the prevailing theories amongst police involved trying to fit the killings into their limited psychological understandings of other crimes: "he must

be a foreigner, because no Englishman could commit such heinous butchery" and "the killer must be homosexual, because the crimes evince a hatred of women." Little wonder he was never caught...]

But despite all of the polices' criticism of Holmes' "*theorizing*," our amateur detective was the one gathering ***actual*** evidence. You may think it cruel when Holmes says he employs methods that Lestrade "*is quite incapable of employing, or even of understanding*." But it is true. Whereas Lestrade is willing to rely on the narrative presented by the local constabulary, Holmes actually looks at evidence. He identifies tobacco ash, and has written monographs on it. He analyzes footprints at the crime scene. Indeed, he did both of these things in **A Study In Scarlet**, which led to the successful apprehension of the murderer; yet Lestrade continues to ignore and mock these techniques in this case. Sherlock gets on his hands and knees and finds the actual murder weapon, something the police hadn't managed. Heck, in this story **Watson** gets in on the fun, analyzing the coroner's evidence to prove the blow was struck from behind, not in a face-to-face quarrel. Lestrade and Scotland Yard "*do* find it very hard to tackle the facts," as Holmes said. A paradigm shift was necessary for the development of modern police work, and Holmes was trying to provide the template.

No, in the **Canon**, and in this story in particular, Doyle has Holmes inventing forensics science right in front of our eyes. Unlike the authorities, he won't rely merely on circumstantial evidence, which "may seem to point very straight to one thing, but if you shift your own point of view a little, you may find it pointing in an equally uncompromising manner to something entirely different."

No, Holmes got out of his armchair and found actual physical evidence which could be used to solve the crime.

All of the actual "*speculation*" and "*theorizing*" was done by the police, trying to tell a story that seemed to make sense, without taking advantage of all the facts around them.

Despite his reputation as a "*theorizer*" or an armchair detective, Sherlock Holmes was more than just the "science of deduction." He helped popularize the "science of analyzing crime scene evidence," by teaching us that it was important to get off our metaphorical *** and get beyond the circumstantial evidence.

Given the immense popularity of Holmes, it's not to think that his approach began to influence the way modern police forces would conduct investigations. It may be a reach to suggest that Arthur Conan Doyle and Sherlock Holmes invented CSI, but it's not a long reach.

The other important issue in this story is, just as in **A Case Of Identity,** an *ethical* one: Holmes does not turn over the murderer, even after confession. For the second straight time, Holmes has interposed himself between the villain and the law, acting as a *de facto* judge and jury. One could argue that this is an even more egregious instance than in ACOI, as Holmes is covering for someone who has *actually* committed a crime, a murderer.

On some levels it is somewhat more defensible a cover-up, though. It seems unlikely that **John Turner** would go on to commit mores crimes, making this instance less troubling than allowing **Windibank** in ACOI to go unrevealed. Turner is dying (although Holmes seems to take his word on that far too easily). Turner has promised to come forward, and a signed confession to use, should the case against **James McCarthy** go badly. And one might be sympathetic to the concerns that releasing the truth might would harm the future happiness of the children.

Except I am slightly more *skeptical*. I am not at all receptive to the suggestion that Turner will "*soon have to answer for his deed at a higher court.*" Whether you're a believer or not, justice on Earth should not abandoned. As for shielding the children, well, Holmes' promise that the story "shall never be seen by mortal eye" is *obviously* **false**, as the fact that we're reading it means that Watson published the story!! "*There is every prospect that the son and daughter may come to live happily together in ignorance of the black cloud which rests upon their past?*" How, Doctor, when you *wrote up the black cloud and published it?* Especially since **Alice** will now of James' marriage to the Bristol barmaid! (I suppose we could surmise that Watson so altered the story as to make it unrecognizable; or perhaps the young lovers went back to Australia, leaving Boscombe Valley behind.)

But what I find *most* unsettling is Holmes' apparent sympathy to the senior Turner. In the future, we will learn that Holmes finds blackmailers more repulsive than murderers. Surely, though, this case takes it to an extreme. We get continuous references to **Charles McCarthy** being a blackguard, "the devil incarnate," "wicked," "cursed stock," etc. Well, that conveniently forgets that the whole sordid affair started when McCarthy was *a victim* of Turner's crimes! Turner is responsible for at least ***5 murders***, four of which were in the course of a robbery of a gold shipment. A set of murders that set Turner up in a life of luxury, no matter how much he claims to have led "*a life of martyrdom*." McCarthy is hardly a saint; but Turner shows no remorse over taking 5 lives, and in fact does *everything possible* to

prevent that the truth coming out and facing punishment. He was willing to let his daughter's love rot in jail (only until the last minute, he avers).

To *heck* with being judged in the afterlife--Turner was a *right* ******* deserved arrest and trial immediately.

OTHER TRIFLES AND OBSERVATIONS:

** Yet *another* quarrel born in a foreign land ends up being settled in England. That's five of the seven stories thus far. I guess that's the consequence of having a global empire--trouble washes up on your shores.

** Watson doesn't name-drop any untold cases this time...In the **Granada** adaptation Watson mentions **The Case Of The Counterfeit Spanish Dollar**.

** Alice declares that James was "*too tender-hearted to hurt a fly.*" Of course, our tale starts when he grabs his gun to go hunting rabbits. I suppose that rabbits aren't as important as flies in Alice's philosophy? Or just the exaggeration of young love?

** Look, I know I've been griping about the Granada subtitling.

But this goes beyond *egregious*:

Since the whole point of subtitles is to render the dialogue *intelligible*, this must surely be the biggest **fail** in subtitling history.

Get a copy of the script, fools.

** The **1968 BBC** version had John Turner played by **John Tate**:

Unfortunately, Tate played Turner as *so* infirm and ill, there's no way we can believe he could have made it all the way to the lake and back, let alone committed the murder unseen by his running son. He also uses *a cane* in every scene, including the flashback to the murder; so when Holmes fails to find cane marks amongst the footprints, it only serves to make the detective look clueless for not solving the mystery immediately.

** Both the BBC and Granada versions changed the character of Lestrade to a different Inspector. Why? Presumably the perils of long-running series that didn't secure the actors playing him under contract.

When a Lestrade episode rolled around, if the actor wasn't available, they faced the choice of recasting the role or changing the inspector's name for a new actor.

** Speaking of Lestrade, does Holmes *ever* tell him the truth? I suppose I can see the argument for keeping the facts from James and Alice; but after Lestrade's case gets dismissed in court thanks to Holmes, doesn't Sherlock at least owe him the full story? Or did Lestrade have to read about it when Watson published?

In the Granada version, **Inspector Sommerby** is *demoted* at the end, most likely due to his failure to capture the killer. Holmes' evasions and cover-ups do have real world consequences.

** This is our first road trip out of London. It is an imaginary locale, despite the efforts of many to pin it to a specific location. There will be more...

** Both BBC and Granada continue to ignore the fact of Watson's marriage. Even though this tale specifically starts with Watson and his wife at breakfast, BBC starts with Holmes and Watson already aboard the train; Granada has Watson on a fishing vacation (alone) in the area, and Holmes swings by to grab him.

** In an obvious attempt to annoy me/make me look stupid, Granada has both The Boscombe Valley Mystery *and* **Shoscombe Old Place** on the same disc, making me click on the *wrong one* innumerable times. Well played, Granada.

** The "*getting drunk and marrying a barmaid*" tale hardly ennobles James in our eye, even if it later turned out that the marriage was null and void. Heck, he had just spent the three days before the murder in Bristol with her! Oh, poor faithful Alice, do you know what you're getting yourself into?

** If I start a band, it's name will be Patience Moran.