



Colleen Barnett

What About Murder?

Reference Books Reviewed

by Jon L. Breen

Barnett, Colleen. *Mystery Women: An Encyclopedia of Leading Women Characters in Mystery Fiction*. Volume III (1990-2000), revised edition. Scottsdale, AZ: Poisoned Pen, 2010. xxix, 1056pp. Bibl., index. \$39.95

The author updates her exhaustive accounts of female detectives and important secondary characters introduced in the final decade of the 20th century through a cut-off date of December 31, 2008, adding about 200 pages to the previous edition, which was published in two physical volumes in 2003. Now 85, Barnett advises that she will not be adding a volume on new sleuths from the first decade of the 21st, so this is a good time to commend her on one of the most ambitious and thorough specialized reference projects in the annals of mystery fiction scholarship.

Arrangement is by character name with indexes by author and title. There is also a chronology of characters covered in all three volumes of the set and a secondary bibliography which includes not only sources on mystery fiction but also on political, economic, social, and general literary trends

over the period 1860-2009. The extensive series histories and plot summaries have their value, but frank critical judgments add considerably to the interest. Usually these are neutral or laudatory but occasionally, as in the entries on Carole Nelson Douglas' Irene Adler and Patricia Cornwell's Kay Scarpetta, they can be harsh—or sometimes funny, as in the following on the Victorian housekeeper Mrs. Jeffries (Emily Brightwell): "A reader might ask: while the servants followed lovesick young nieces, frequented seedy taverns, or set séance traps, who was feeding the horses, polishing the silver and tending to the clothes? These employees would not last a week at the Belamys of Eaton Place."

Barnett admits to the inevitable presence of errors in a project this ambitious. Kathy Lynn Emerson was the author, not the editor, of *Murder and Other Confusions*. Margaret Lawrence (who writes the Hannah Trevor series) and Martha C. Lawrence (who writes about Dr. Elizabeth Chase) are two different people, and it was Margaret Lawrence who also wrote as M.K. Lorens.

Knox, Ronald. *Ronald Knox and Sherlock Holmes: The Origin of Sherlockian Studies*. Edited with an introduction by Michael J. Crowe. Indianapolis: Gasogene, 2011. 126pp. Illus., bibl. \$32.95

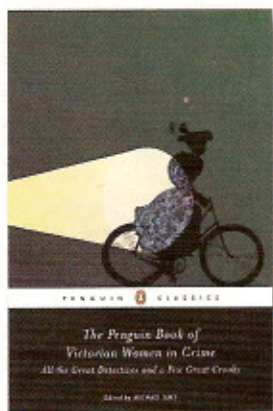
Though Monsignor Knox (1888-1957) was a more than capable Golden Age detective novelist, his two most notable contributions to the field lie in the area of criticism. Editor Crowe's 32-page introduction recounts how the witty 1912 essay "Studies in the Literature of Sherlock Holmes," intended as a satire of the Higher Criticism of the Bible and arguably foreshadowing Knox's conversion from High Church Anglican to Roman Catholic, launched a whole genre of mock scholarship. A freshly annotated reprinting of that essay is followed by Knox's introduction to *The Best Detective Stories of 1928*, which featured his other famous (to some, notorious) landmark: ten rules for writers of classical detective fiction. Rounding out the small volume are a review, focusing on the dating of Watson's marriage, of two 1932 volumes of Sherlockiana, H.W. Bell's *Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson* and Thomas Blakeney's *Sherlock Holmes: Fact or Fic-*

tion; a 1934 essay making a shocking claim about brother Mycroft; and the 1947 pastiche "The Adventure of the First Class Carriage." The dust jacket and frontispiece have excellent photographs of Knox from The National Portrait Gallery, London. A short bibliography ranges from Knox's *Spiritual Aeneid* (1918) to Steven Doyle and David Crowder's 2010 Edgar nominee *Sherlock Holmes for Dummies*. Crowe, a Notre Dame professor and historian of astronomy, has produced an excellent volume for any library of criminous history.

Sims, Michael, ed. *The Penguin Book of Victorian Women in Crime*. New York: Penguin, 2011. xxvii, 321pp. Bibl. \$16.00

Sims gathers 11 stories about female detectives in British and American fiction from W.S. Hayward's pioneering Mrs. Paschal in 1864 to Anna Katharine Green's Violet Strange in 1915. Green's humorous spinster sleuth Amelia Butterworth also appears in an excerpt from the 1897 novel *That Affair Next Door* (1897). Like some of the editor's other anthologies, this one has considerable reference value, with an enjoyable and informative 15-page introduction and substantial story notes plus three pages of secondary bibliography, including useful websites. Other authors included are Andrew Forrester, C.L. Pirkis, Mary E. Wilkins (Freeman), George R. Sims, Grant Allen, M. McDonnell Bodkin, Richard Marsh, and Hugh C. Weir.

In explaining his selections, Sims humorously says he excluded Fergus Hume's Hagar Stanley and Arthur B. Reeve's Constance Dunlap out of boredom, "an emotion that every anthologist must employ as doorkeeper." He regrets not including Lady Molly, whom he mistakenly credits to L.T. Meade and Robert Eustace rather than Baroness Orczy, "because reprint rights proved outrageously expensive." It's surprising the stories aren't in the public domain. While the editor is an admiring expert



on the works of Anna Katharine Green, having edited and introduced Penguin's edition of *The Leavenworth Case*, his description of the crime in that novel as a "locked-room murder" is inaccurate.

Jon L. Breen is a two-time winner of the Edgar Award. His most recent novel is *Probable Claus, Five Star*.