



Teller of Tales : The Life of Arthur Conan Doyle

By Daniel Stashower, Sherlock Holmes

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Winner of the 1999 Edgar Award for Best Biographical Work, this is "an excellent biography of the man who created Sherlock Holmes" (David Walton, The New York Times Book Review)

This fresh, compelling biography examines the extraordinary life and strange contrasts of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, the struggling provincial doctor who became the most popular storyteller of his age. From his youthful exploits aboard a whaling ship to his often stormy friendships with such figures as Harry Houdini and George Bernard Shaw, Conan Doyle lived a life as gripping as one of his adventures. Exhaustively researched and elegantly written, Teller of Tales sets aside many myths and misconceptions to present a vivid portrait of the man behind the legend of Baker Street, with a particular emphasis on the Psychic Crusade that dominated his final years-the work that Conan Doyle himself felt to be "the most important thing in the world."

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

Despite (or because of) the tremendous success of his Sherlock Holmes stories, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle always tended to play down their value and importance in his life. Just before his death in 1930, he drew a memorable sketch of his life's work. Conan Doyle portrayed events from his life as a series of packing cases being loaded onto a wagon and pulled by a flea-bitten workhorse. Perhaps the heaviest case of all, notes Daniel Stashower in his fascinating biography *Teller of Tales*, is the one that reads "Sherlock Holmes."

Stashower's intent is to show that Conan Doyle was *not* Sherlock Holmes, and that his life consisted of much more than the now ridiculed spiritualism to which he devoted much of his later years. He succeeds to a surprising degree, convincing us that *The White Company* and *Sir Nigel* (forgotten novels that Conan Doyle thought were his best) are indeed worth reading. As for the spiritualism, Stashower meticulously places his subject's long fascination with it into a compassionate and fully researched social context. We come away certain that Conan Doyle (along with many other worthy citizens of the period) really believed in it. --*Dick Adler*

From Kirkus Reviews

An elementary life of the writer, historian, and activist who wanted to be remembered as more than just the creator of Sherlock Holmes. Novelist Stashower (*Elephants in the Distance*, 1989, etc.), like many fans of the Great Detective, is somewhat disappointed that Holmes creator tried so hard to live him down. Still, Conan Doyle's latest biographer has immersed himself in all his works, from Professor Challenger's proto-sci-fi adventures, Brigadier Gerard's Napoleonic exploits, and assorted historical novels, to his detailed nonfiction and obsessive Spiritualist output not to mention, also, the author's phenomenally active life. The origins of Holmes are well enough known: for example, how the young Edinburgh-trained doctor, languishing in a Portsmouth practice, decided to write a detective story, basing his hero on his old medical school lecturer, Dr. Joseph Bell. Stashower offers no revelations about this or other aspects of Conan Doyle's early life, though by keeping a clear sense of context, he does scour the self-deprecation that Conan Doyle cast over them later. Indeed, if Conan Doyle had not made the serious career error of trying to start an ophthalmology practice in London, Stashower argues, he might well have remained a general practitioner with a literary sideline. Even as Sherlock Holmes took off in the Strand magazine, the author valued other projects more, such as his historical novels. And as he turned his prodigious energies to other interests for instance, skiing in the Swiss Alps, running for a seat in Parliament, enlisting as a medical officer in the Boer War, campaigning against wrongful convictions (notably the cases of George Edalji and Oscar Slater), and finally, Spiritualism Stashower can suggest only that Conan Doyle's crusading zeal served as a replacement for his early, lost Catholic faith and that his belief in the Cottingley fairy hoax could be rooted in his institutionalized father's own fancies. A doggedly thorough investigation, though missing a few psychological clues. (b&w photos, not seen) -- Copyright ©1999, Kirkus Associates, LP. All rights reserved.

Review

"A gripping sympathetic bio that proves that Doyle was anything but elementary." (Entertainment Weekly)

"An appealing and much-needed biography of the man who created one of literature's renowned eccentrics." (The Wall Street Journal)

Users Review

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Catherine Crider:

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Arnold Allison:

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