

An Update from the Collections

“I detected a mixture of mingled uneasiness and expectation beneath that mask which he was wont to assume.” (Six Napoleons)

Many things awaited me in New York—some known, others unforeseen—as I packed my bag for the annual Baker Street Irregulars Weekend. Anxious about increasing numbers of coronavirus cases and the omicron variant’s aggressive nature, I packed additional high-quality masks while tucking my vaccination record card into a secure pocket in my backpack. Both were required during the weekend. Cancellation of a long-planned railroad journey necessitated a last-minute scramble to book a flight. But all went smoothly, without any meddling from Moriarty, and before I knew it, I was in Midtown Manhattan with a stunning view of the Chrysler Building.

I am in the habit of working out an itinerary for trips like this, so it may be no surprise that a viewing of Glen and Cathy Miranker’s exhibit “Sherlock Holmes in 221 Objects” at the Grolier Club was the first event on my weekend schedule. Before leaving the Twin Cities I prepared for my Grolier visit by reading James Barron’s report on the exhibition in *The New York Times*, reading Scott Monty’s report on the exhibit’s opening, and listening to Glen’s interview with Scott Monty and Burt Wolder—each found on their “I Hear of Sherlock Everywhere” website and podcast (the report under “Blog” and the podcast as Episode 227). My preparations, while helpful, did

not wholly anticipate the stunning presentation which greeted me on passing through The Grolier’s ground floor gallery doors. A colossally projected Mr. Holmes, gowned and piped through the eyes of artist Frederic Dorr Steele, greeted me from the far wall. To my left and right exhibit cases shimmered, their contents summoning me to further investigations.

Our exhibit designer once told me that people are prone to begin their viewing in a clockwise or counterclockwise manner, but because small clusters of people lingered over cases immediately to my right and left, I headed diagonally across the gallery to a case bearing the title “Adventures & Memoirs.” I eventually lingered over each display, coming back to some a second or third time, continually astonished at the depth and breadth of Glen Miranker’s collecting. A small but useful printed exhibit guide noted: “The exhibition spans Conan Doyle’s Sherlockian writings from *A Study in Scarlet* (1887) through the publication of *The Return of Sherlock Holmes* (1903), displaying objects in nine thematic groups.”

These 221 objects—from a collection of thousands—provided ample evidence of an assemblage “rich in bibliographic rarities, manuscripts, books, correspondence, and artwork, all with intriguing stories to tell beyond their significance as literary and cultural landmarks.” However, what struck me most in viewing the exhibition, paging through the sumptuously illustrated catalog (which

I purchased on arrival), or reading other accounts and interviews was what they told me about the character of the collector and the curator.

Or, rather, co-curator. For while Glen receives most of the credit for building the collection, it was his wife, Cathy, who launched the enterprise by the gift of a single volume. “I am the collector,” Glen remarked at the opening reception for the exhibit, “but it is absolutely true that the selection, the organization, the overwhelming majority of the writing are hers. So, genuinely, a co-curator.”

During his keynote address at the opening reception, Glen also offered his view of collecting. “Authors don’t write books. They write manuscripts, they create typescripts, they build computer files, but they don’t make books. The entire world of circumstance, of individuals, of companies, of institutions that are involved in both informing and causing this creation to finally transmute into the object we hold in our hands is a world, is a process that I find endlessly fascinating. And that’s what drives my collection, is exploring that part of the bibliosphere, in an admittedly very small arena—late Victorian, early Edwardian, and Sherlock Holmes only.”

Glen continued, his words resonating with my own sense as curator of the Holmes Collections: “The second thing that I would like to say about collecting is that...sharing...is absolutely critical. Let’s not forget, what’s the point of collecting if all you

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do is sit at home and enjoy the things that you've accumulated. If you're not sharing the experience, the knowledge, access to the items themselves so that people can see and touch and know what they are, you're both diminishing your own experience and not fulfilling your responsibilities." His comments mirrored an observation shared during the "I Hear of Sherlock Everywhere" interview: "Collectors have an obligation, a delightful obligation, a pleasurable obligation to make their stuff, their holdings available to interested people, interested parties. Hiding it a room or a warehouse away from eyes is certainly for me not part of what collecting is all about."

In a final comment during the opening reception, Glen shared another thought which I also share: "Last, but not least, I would like to say that for me—very important—is the folks, the people that I have met on this journey. I can't imagine a more convivial, more passionate, more knowledgeable collection of folks. And I count many, many, many of them as wonderful acquaintances and an unfair number of them as friends. And this would not have happened had I not been a book collector."

In both the exhibit guide and catalog Glen acknowledged many of these friends and acquaintances. "As a collector, I stand on the shoulders of giants." He also shared a wonderful connection with Sir Arthur through this exhibition. Reading a Doyle manuscript, in this case a remarkable speech seen for the first time in this show, "is akin to hearing Conan Doyle himself. It is personal, good-humored, appreciative of his literary heroes, full of anecdotes about his early, struggling years as a writer and his bemusement at the annoyances of celebrity, and offers kindly advice to fellow writers.... There are few better ways to fall under Conan Doyle's spell than by reading this speech."

"Sherlock Holmes in 221 Objects" is a beautiful joint effort by Glen and Cathy Miranker which brims with excitement, joy, curiosity, and generosity. I am so happy that this was my first stop on what turned out to be a very celebrative weekend. If you are in New York before the middle of April, I trust you will find time to visit the Grolier Club. The Miranker exhibition set the tone for the next few days and was a constant reminder of those remarkable and treasured friendships that make up the world of Sherlockiana. It was a delight to see many of you during this visit to New York. I hope to see many more of you as we journey together through 2022. ♥

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