

preoccupied with her aristocratic Welsh ancestry, to Woodcourt's embarrassment' (p. 64). It is in fact her preoccupation with his supposedly aristocratic heritage and her related insistence – in front of Esther – that no one like Esther would be a suitable match for him that accounts for Woodcourt's embarrassment rather than rejection of his own Welshness (and I am not sure that Welsh heritage could be counted a defining characteristic of Englishness – at least, one wouldn't want to say so in an Aberystwyth pub). Again, these moments are far more frequent in the first three chapters than in the last two, and it seems sometimes as if Pamboukian is overwhelmed by the amount of criticism extant on the more canonical novels, her prose becoming entangled in an attempt to account for what has already been said. Her work is strongest in the latter part of the century and more specific topics such as arsenic and Collins, and it is for that reason that readers of *Medical History* may find it useful.

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**James O'Brien**, *The Scientific Sherlock Holmes: Cracking the Case with Science & Forensics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. xx + 175, \$29.95, hardback, ISBN: 978-0-19979496-6.

This book is an account of the various appearances of science in Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes stories. O'Brien suggests that Holmes's scientific activities, which feature in many of the stories, are central to his character and the stories' appeal. He analyses Holmes's use of scientific techniques to solve cases, and charts the character's other scientific interests, in particular chemistry, his own professional field. Moving methodically through each disciplinary area, including fingerprinting, cryptography, botany and meteorology, among others, the author explains some of the real-life science behind some of the stories, discusses Holmes's aptitude and the plausibility of his deductions, as well as looking at some of the historical background to the techniques. He also explores the origins of the stories, including the influences of Edgar Allan Poe and Conan Doyle's medical school lecturers.

Much of the book is concerned with identifying and elaborating upon references to science in the stories. This involves speculating about what some of the more oblique allusions to scientific issues in the stories actually meant. For example, O'Brien suggests that a reference to Holmes having carried out work on 'coal-tar derivatives' may represent work on chemical dyes, which were the subject of some competition between British and German industry in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In one of the book's more successful passages, he uses this as a lead-in to discuss some interesting aspects of the dyestuff industry. In another section, O'Brien discusses the test for bloodstains which Holmes is developing when he first meets Watson. Holmes describes his invention as 'the most practical medico-legal discovery for years'. O'Brien states that, as late as 1911, a quite antiquated blood test was still being used in Britain, 'so it seems that his [Holmes's?] test was not enough of an improvement to be put into general use' (p. 111). While O'Brien's conclusion to this discussion of the blood test may be in jest, it is symptomatic of a wider problem with the book, namely a failure to engage with the stories on their own

terms, as a series of works of short fiction, rather than as windows into a universe existing beyond the stories.

*The Scientific Sherlock Holmes* is unlikely to be of great interest to readers of this journal. It does not engage with current scholarly debates about Sherlock Holmes, science and wider Victorian culture. It is based almost entirely on works of secondary literature, many of which are not scholarly. While it does not claim to be a history book, it does contain some passages of historical exposition. However, a number of these appear to be based on quite perfunctory research. For example, in a passage discussing the rate of uptake of fingerprinting by police, O'Brien cites the failure to analyse a bloody handprint found at the scene of the murder of Marion Gilchrist in 1909 (which led to the notorious conviction of Oscar Slater) as evidence that 'as late as 1909, Scotland Yard was not totally using fingerprinting' (p. 52). However, because the Gilchrist murder took place in Glasgow, it was not investigated by Scotland Yard (a colloquial term for the London Metropolitan police). The case cannot therefore be used justifiably as evidence for their use (or not) of fingerprinting. The book also contains some errors in its scholarly apparatus. At least two citations from the main body of the text do not appear in the bibliography.

Excessive concentration on happenings or references that are not fully explained in the stories means that there is less space which can be devoted to addressing the interesting questions arising in the reader's mind, which is a shame. I would have liked to learn more about what it was about Victorian and Edwardian culture which so valued a detective with scientific and deductive credentials, rather than be subjected to a two-page demonstration of Holmes's aptitude in mental arithmetic. Why did so few of the stories feature the detailed examination of the corpse, despite Conan Doyle's medical background? Did the changing portrayal of the police in the stories reflect wider cultural shifts? There is plenty of scope for a thoughtful, engaging work on science and Sherlock Holmes. Unfortunately, *The Scientific Sherlock Holmes* disappoints in this regard.

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**Howard Padwa**, *Social Poison: The Culture and Politics of Opiate Control in Britain and France, 1821–1926* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012), pp. 248, \$55.00, hardcover, ISBN: 9781421404202.

These days, the smart money – actually, pretty much all the money – is on addiction being a chronic, relapsing brain disease whose cure will involve repairing or mitigating organic lesions. But many of the most important aspects of addiction are forged not neurochemically but socially and culturally: the line between addiction and other forms of chronic behaviour; how much addicts should be held responsible for their actions; the impact of 'structural' factors (eg., racial segregation) on the epidemiology of addiction; and, not least, how authorities should understand and respond to the social problems associated with addiction. Such judgements have profoundly marked experiences with unproblematically biomedical illnesses such as tuberculosis, cancer and the flu, and the same remains true for addiction, too, no matter how the science plays out. This is why we need books like Howard Padwa's *Social Poison: The Culture and Politics of Opiate Control in Britain and France, 1821–1926*, which analyses the cultural processes