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http://leepers.us/mtvoid/back_issues.htm.

THE HOUND OF THE BASKERVILLES (Part 2) (film comments by Evelyn C. Leeper):

Here is part 2 of my comments on various film and television versions of THE HOUND OF THE BASKERVILLES:

In the 1968 BBC two-part television version of THE HOUND OF THE BASKERVILLES, Cushing reprises his role as Holmes, with Nigel Stock as Watson. Holmes is less abrupt with Watson here, but Watson is a bit blander than in the Hammer version. In both, however, Watson has shed the buffoonery of Nigel Bruce's portrayal, and a good thing it is too.

The story itself sticks reasonably close to the original, as do most BBC adaptations (at least those I have seen). Perhaps this is because the BBC was not concerned with luring people into theaters the way Hammer Films was.

THE HOUND OF THE BASKERVILLES (1982) has Tom Baker as Holmes. His facial structure seems wrong for Holmes, and his long stint as The Doctor in "Doctor Who" makes it difficult to see him as anyone else. (This was Basil Rathbone's problem in reverse.) I also thought Nicholas Woodeson was miscast as Sir Henry Baskerville--not that his performance was bad, but I had envisioned Baskerville as being a tall man, and Woodeson, at 5'4" is considerably shorter than Holmes and even than Watson. Maybe I have been spoiled by Christopher Lee as Baskerville.

The back story of the hound is told with short nighttime scenes, with no sound other than Mortimer telling the story. This certainly helped the production save money.

THE HOUND OF THE BASKERVILLES (1988) has Jeremy Brett as Holmes, and is part of the Granada Television series of 41 episodes encompassing 43 stories (two of the episodes merged two stories in each of them). The first twenty episodes of the series are considered some of the definitive portrayals of Holmes on screen. But Brett's health problems had him start taking lithium pills, which caused both fluid retention and lethargy. The unfortunate result is that in the remaining episodes (this one was number 26), his face is puffy, and his performance a bit less energetic. He also had heart troubles and difficulty breathing. He insisted on continuing, saying, "The show must go on," but it must be acknowledged that the later performances are not up to the earlier ones.

This version is fairly faithful to the original, given the necessary condensation to fit a 100-minute slot. Mortimer gets bit more time than in the book, there is a bit of justification in saying Selden is no longer a danger, and so on. The problem is that the whole production is not very exciting.

THE HOUND OF THE BASKERVILLES (2001) has Matt Frewer as a truly annoying Holmes--even more annoying then Doyle made him. The credits claim it is based on the "novella" by Doyle--when did it become a novella rather than a novel? And something not revealed in the novel until a ways in (the circumstances of Sir Charles's death) is shown even before the credits. Also, the discussion about Selden occurs almost immediately after the discovery of Barrymore's signaling, and the film also makes Selden (apparently) innocent but tricked into a false confession. To top it off, the ending is totally changed.

Label this Hallmark Channel version a revisionist version, and feel free to skip it.

THE HOUND OF THE BASKERVILLES (2002) was shown on PBS's "Masterpiece Theatre" and its introduction credited Bertram Fletcher Robinson as a major contributor to the story, something other films did not. (In fact, Robinson received a third of the royalties from the Strand publication of the novel.) Richard Roxburgh stars as Holmes, Ian Hart as Watson, and Richard E. Grant as Stapleton. Unfortunately, for me Grant tends to exude a sly, menacing aspect, possibly due to my knowing him in his role in THE MOUNTAINS OF THE MOON, and that somewhat gives away one of the surprises in the story. (Then again, it was made for the hundredth anniversary of the book, so it may be assumed most viewers knew the story anyway.) And Roxburgh does not look like Holmes at all.

There are a lot of changes to the story: a seance and a Christmas ball are added, as well as a different backstory for Selden and an encounter between him and Sir Henry. (It seems everyone wants to tweak the Selden plotline.) A lot of the explanation of final sequence is changed or left out entirely as well.

I am not including SHERLOCK: THE HOUNDS OF BASKERVILLE (2011) in this article because while it is inspired by the novel THE HOUND OF THE BASKERVILLES, it is not an adaptation of it. [-ec]

THE HOUND OF THE BASKERVILLES (letter of comment by Scott Dorsey):

In response to [Evelyn's comments on film adaptations of THE HOUND OF THE BASKERVILLES](#) in the 07/12/24 issue of the MT VOID, Scott Dorsey writes:

What about musical adaptations such as my personal favorite below?

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ac-0NzF1SyA>

[-sd]

This Week's Reading (book comments by Evelyn C. Leeper):

Okay, two weeks ago I misspelled the names of two Roman emperors. Last week it was the editor of KEN BURNS'S THE CIVIL WAR: HISTORIANS RESPOND, who is Robert Brent *Toplin*, not Robert Brent *Topin*.

Two weeks ago I wrote that Elagabalus was "a colorful dumpster fire of an emperor", so I was pleased to find THE MAD EMPEROR: HELIOGABALUS AND THE DECADENCE OF ROME by Harry Sidebottom (Oneworld, ISBN 978-0-86154-253-6) available through inter-library loan. While it is not really fair to call the book "a colorful dumpster fire of a biography," it is colorful, and it is a dumpster fire in the sense that it cannot decide whether it is an academic work or a work aimed at the non-academic reader, one which repeats all the scandalous part only often to say "but this is probably not true."

The academic aspect of the book is seen in its interminable introductions of names along with their official positions (in both Latin and English, and occasionally in Greek), as well as references to the three major historians writing about the time: Cassius Dio, Herodian, and the "Historia Augusta". The first two are fairly straightforward and respectable; the "Historia Augusta" seems to be an ancient version of HOLLYWOOD BABYLON, a book by Kenneth Anger, full of many stories about Hollywood, highly salacious and entirely unsupported by any hard evidence.

(I personally found it off-putting that Sidebottom chooses to refer to Julia Domna and Julia Maesa as just "Domna" and "Maesa", since every other source I am familiar call them by the fuller names.)

The "Historia Augusta" purported to be the works of six authors; modern scholars pretty much agree that there was only a single author. And that author seemed to want to collect the most outrageous stories about all their subjects (all the emperors from 117 to 284 (Hadrian to Carinus and Numerian). (However, there are gaps presumably due to lost manuscripts.)

All this means that for just about every event Sidebottom reports, he gives the three different accounts, and goes into detail about which version is the most likely. This, combined with the huge cast of characters introduced by Sidebottom, make this aimed more at an academic audience.

This is counter-balanced by Sidebottom's rather informal language. On occasion he relapses into the first person singular, fairly uncommon in academic history books. And when describing Heliogabalus's sexual activities, he often uses two slang four-letter words for "penis" (as well as the "F-word"). The contrast is startling (well, to me anyway).

As for the actual content--I bet you thought I would never get to it... Well, that is the same feeling I had about the book. As with author Paul N. Pearson and his biography of Maximus Thrax that I commented on in the 12/05/24 issue of the MT VOID, Sidebottom spends a lot of time on the lead-up to Heliogabalus's reign (or even to his early life)--Heliogabalus is mentioned only six times in the first hundred pages of this three-hundred-page book.

After that, Sidebottom goes into detail of why Heliogabalus was ultimately so despised--he managed to offend everyone. He did not cultivate friendships with the military, his bisexuality (and his diverse acts within that label) offended the plebs, his dismissal of the Senate (beginning with claiming powers traditionally granted by the Senate) made them hostile, and his insistence of putting the Eastern God Elagabal above even Jupiter and then engaging in weird rites before Elagabal made everyone nervous that they would lose the protection of their traditional gods.

Oh, and if you're looking for a speculative fiction connection, Neil Gaiman has done a comic strip "Being an Account of the Life and Death of the Emperor Heliogabolous" [sic]. [-ec]

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Quote of the Week:

If you can tell the difference between good advice
and bad advice, you don't need advice.
--Anonymous

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