

Dark Deeds in the Canon - From 31 May 2019 to Tuesday 4 June 2019 in Hasliberg Reuti and Splügen

A few introductory remarks from the organizers

Switzerland is blessed with an impressive number of Sherlockian sites.¹ Already in the very early years of the 20th century already, visitors to Meiringen were reminded not to miss the Reichenbach Falls where Sherlock Holmes freed the world of one of its most hideous scourges, Professor James Moriarty. What somehow gets brushed aside is the fact that Holmes spent relatively little time in Meiringen.

Moriarty, however, remained in Switzerland. “(D)eep down in that dreadful cauldron of swirling water and seething foam” of the Reichenbach Falls “(lies) for all time the most dangerous criminal”. Because Switzerland has become the burial site of the “the organizer of half that is evil and of nearly all that is undetected” The Reichenbach Irregulars of Switzerland decided to dedicate their 2019 conference exclusively to the sinister characters in the Canon.

The conference also offered the unique possibility to combine two venues in Swiss alpine heights, relatively unknown to many Sherlockians: Hasliberg, high above Meiringen, where, from the Panorama Hotel where the first part of the conference took place, one enjoys unrivalled views of the Reichenbach Falls and Splügen, where the group stayed in the historic Hotel Bodenhaus, dating back to the late 18th century. The Splügen mountain pass is located along the Swiss Italian border, and it is there where Baron Adelbert Gruner murdered his wife. It was this the very first Sherlockian outing ever to the truly evil Splügen Pass.

The organizers, Marcus Geisser and Michael Meer, would like to thank Richard Olken for his faithful account of what was a truly memorable weekend in alpine heights.

A Tale of Two Villages

By Richard Olken, BSI² and with some pictures by Hiroko Nakashima³

On the sunny Friday afternoon of 31 May, 46 Sherlockians from Japan, USA, Canada, the UK, France, Germany, Italy, France, Denmark and Switzerland came together at Hasliberg Reuti to begin a weekend examining the sinister aspects of the Canon at two locations across the Swiss alpine heights. We were welcomed to the conference by the organizers, Reichenbach Irregulars Marcus Geisser, BSI (“Rosenlauri”) and Michael Meer, BSI (“The Englisher Hof”).

¹ *The Adventures of two British gentlemen in Switzerland* by the Deutsche Sherlock Holmes Gesellschaft, published in 2016, fills almost 500 pages (in English and German) about sights in Switzerland in connection with Sherlock Holmes and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle: www.dshc.de.

² The organizers would like to thank Richard Olken, BSI, a life-long Sherlockian and bicycle enthusiast from Boston and Poker for the Speckled Band of Boston, USA, for many years, for his faithful account of The Reichenbach Irregulars’ Dark Deeds in the Canon 2019 conference. We also thank him for the excellent photographs which accompany is article.

³ The two group pictures on pages 7 and 11 were taken by Hiroko Nakashima from Japan. The other pictures were taken by the author.



Marcus Geisser began our investigations with his presentation “From British gas men to rats, spiders, snakes, and tigers: hovering over the great cesspool of villains in the Canon,” in which we were given a holistic view of sinister characters in the Canon, including the many instances of animal metaphors following La Fontaine’s fables metaphors used to dramatically illustrate villainous personalities and traits including the avaricious, the vengeful, the despots, the berserkers, les femmes fatales, the psychopaths, the spies, and the minor crooks.

Peggy Perdue, BSI (“Violet Westbury”) spoke on “The Sum of Our Fears” enlightening us on how the Literary Agent created his Canonical villains by evoking widely held phobias. Peggy began with Winston Churchill’s quote, “Why, you may take the most gallant sailor, the most intrepid airman or the most audacious soldier, put them at a table together – what do you get? The **sum of their fears.**” Peggy showed that Moriarty evoked a number of common phobias which she showed in “Moriarty’s psychological rap sheet: Fear of death; Xenophobia, fear of The Stranger; Herpetophobia, fear of snakes; Arachnophobia, fear of spiders; and Fear of the machine and the ruthless efficiency of organized crime. Peggy went on to add the fear of mathematics and, to bring us to Reichenbach, Acrophobia, fear of heights.



Julia McKuras, ASH, BSI (“The first day’s presentations with her Victim, Accomplice, of Villain?” stories in which a woman helps of four attributes to each of the – anything from “he done her Accomplice – aiding or abetting a as the criminal. Julie showed us heroine or a victim and a villain.



Duchess of Devonshire”) rounded off the paper, “A Singular Set of Women: Heroine, in which she examined the 43 Canonical drive the narrative and ascribes at least one women: Heroine – “I saved the day”; Victim wrong” to endangering a woman’s life; crime or misdeed; and Villain – the woman that a woman could be both a victim and a

After this wonderful afternoon of scholarship, we were officially welcomed to Hasliberg Reuti by our host at the Panorama Hotel, Panos Perreten, on the hotel terrace offering unrivalled views of the Reichenbach Falls before enjoying a sociable dinner of Potato Soup “Hasliberg” and Sliced pork “Zurich.”

Panos Perreten, owner of the Panorama Hotel in Hasliberg Reuti, addressing Sherlockians in the splendid surroundings of the Hasliberg overlooking the Reichenbach Falls.



Brigitte Latella, BSI (“Holmes’s Alpenstock”) gave us a wonderful surprise, a beautiful and delicious cake in celebration of her birthday that happened to be on the very day our conference started. Everyone got a big piece of cake and Brigitte received a piece that was a cake/birthday card.



On Saturday the first of June we explored places of Sherlockian interest in and around the town of Meiringen. Our first stop by postal coach from Hasliberg was a visit to the Sherlock Holmes Museum in Meiringen where we were welcomed by officials of the Museum and of the town of Meiringen. We were delighted to find that the permanent exhibition at the Museum has been expanded through the fine efforts of Michael Meer.





And then the game was indeed a foot:



Following our visit in Meiringen we reboarded our magic bus for a short ride to the Reichenbach Falls where we boarded the funicular for the ascent to the spot where Mr. Sherlock Holmes and Professor James Moriarty has their fatal encounter.



“It is, indeed, a fearful place. The torrent, swollen by the melting snow, plunges into a tremendous abyss, from which the spray rolls up like the smoke from a burning house. The shaft into which the river hurls itself is an immense chasm, lined by glistening coal-black rock, and narrowing into a creaming, boiling pit of incalculable depth, which brims over and shoots the stream onward over its jagged lip. The long sweep of green water roaring forever down, and the thick flickering curtain of spray hissing forever upward, turn a man giddy with their constant whirl and clamour.”

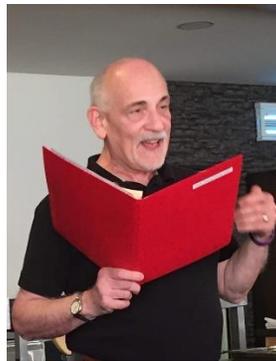
For once, Sherlockians were explicitly requested not to follow Holmes’ advice to see and to observe but – to listen. Fellow Reichenbach Irregular Daniel Laubacher from Berne, Switzerland, presented a carefully chosen compilation of sequences of radio adaptations of the struggle of *The Final Problem*, including an iconic recording from the early 1950s with Orson Welles as *The Napoleon of Crime*. Listening to these radio adaptations as the water was pondering down from the Reichenbach Falls was an unforgettable experience – or, as the organizers put it, genuinely irregular.

Some of our number continued to hike upwards to the source of the falls and to the Restaurant Zwirgli where we met with the rest of the group who had descended to the valley floor on the funicular and then on the coach to Zwirgli. Reunited, we enjoyed lunch on the mountain top. Faithful to the conference's aim to remember the sinister characters in the Canon, Michael Meer addressed us and the viewers of an upcoming documentary on Swiss Sherlockians with a carefully crafted tribute to the late Professor Moriarty - based in fact on tributes made on the occasion of the death of the other Napoleon, the very Napoleon Bonaparte!



After lunch we enjoyed a leisurely afternoon, some returning to the hotel, some visiting the center of Meiringen and revisiting the Sherlock Holmes Museum.

In the evening we enjoyed a dinner of Valais Plate, a typical Swiss Raclette à discretion, and Fruit Salad. Between courses Richard Olken, BSI ("Bob Carruthers") presented his surprising findings in "Irene and Sherlock: The True Story."



After dinner Marcus Geisser informed us of the history of the Reichenbach Irregulars of Switzerland on their 30th anniversary of the very first Swiss Sherlock Holmes society. We heard of many wonderful achievements and events including Reichenplaque, an amazing joint venture between The Bimetallic Question of Montréal and The Reichenbach Irregulars of Switzerland dating back to 1992, the 2014 conference Arthur Conan Doyle's Alpine Adventures in Switzerland, and the 2017 Reichenbach and Beyond.

Several of the woman in attendance looked marvelous in Victorian and Sherlockian clothing.



After breakfast on Sunday we enjoyed four splendid case studies into singular aspects into the the dark deeds into the the Canon before starting on our coach ride to Splügen.

Jon Lellenberg, BSI (“Rodger Prescott”) began the morning’s feste pro mente with “The Double-Agency Stands Flatfooted Upon Swiss Ground,” a masterful explanation of Switzerland’s importance in the development of modern espionage networks and of Sherlock Holmes’ clandestine intelligence activities.



Marsha Pollak, ASH, BSI (“A Small But Select Library”) gave us “Looking at Moriarty on Screen Throughout the Years,” from Ernest Maupain to Andrew Scott, including Gustave Von Seyffertitz, Percy Standing, Norman McKinnel, Lyn Harding, George Zucco, Lionel Atwill, Henry Daniel, Eric Porter, and Jared Harris.

We took a short break to play with charming Odin, a regular attendee of Reichenbach Irregulars conferences:





Our education continued with Michael *Meer's A. Loosli and Sherlock Holmes - on the Origins of the Swiss Detective Novel*. We learned about Loosli's *Die Schattmattbauern* and about the Swiss Railways ban on Sherlock Holmes stories due to the decision "that the evils of poisonous "literature" have resulted in so many crimes of recent years among the Swiss youth."

Bryan Stone gave the morning's final presentation, "The Splügen Pass - a Dreadful Place for Good or Ill." Bryan's paper was a fine preparation for our Postal Coach passage to Splügen with insight into the ancient history of the area, its geography and an excellent look at the history of the dangerous Splügen Pass including its place in commerce and its military importance including Napoleon's fatal troop movement resulting in thousands of death in his ranks.



Before boarding the coach to Splügen, we enjoyed the beautiful day with lunch on the terrace, enjoying for a last time the spectacular views of the Reichenbach Falls.





Members of The Adventuresses of Sherlock Holmes got together for a group photo:



Following lunch we boarded our wonderfully comfortable coach for the passage to Splügen, and after our alpine crossing over the Brünig Pass, along the Lake Lucerne and Lake Walensee and we reached our destination, Hotel Bodenhaus where we were treated to a tour of the hotel wine cellar and wine tasting in the historic hotel dating back to the early 18th century. We were greeted by hotelier and owner of the historic Hotel Bodenhaus Willibald Löschl, who told us about the hotel's history. Thanks to careful renovations over the last few years, the Bodenhaus has recovered its original character and offers pleasure and active relaxation in an historical atmosphere.



Willibald Löschl, owner of the historic Hotel Bodenhaus, which served originally as storage room for transit goods, housing the post station, is greeting Reichenbach Irregulars in his impressive wine cellar.



After dinner Michael Meer showed us a compilation of film adaptations of Splügen’s special story, *The Illustrious Client*.

Monday morning began earlier than we expected thanks to a very special cow bell alarm clock. Once again blazing sunshine and a clear sky welcomed us to the third day of our conference.



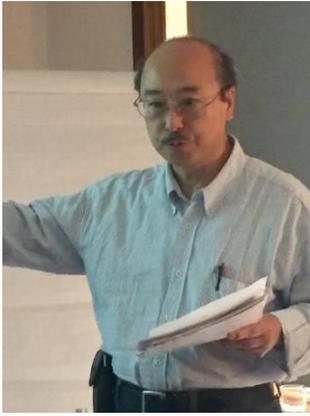
After breakfast our speakers presented a variety of angles on Baron Gruner and aspects of *The Illustrious Client*.



Guy Marriott, BSI (“The Grand Hôtel du Louvre”) presented “What Happened at Prague,” a wide-ranging review of the political and legal basis for his conclusion that a trial of Baron Gruner at Prague must have been a civil trial concerning his claim to the estate of the late Baroness. We learned that Baron’s “love or lust diaries” would have brought to mind the “Black Diaries” that helped bring about the conviction and execution of Irish nationalist Roger Casement.

Marina Stajic, ASH, BSI (“Curare”) used her expertise in toxicology to enlighten us on Kitty Winters’ method of revenge with “Upon Vitriol and Vitriolage Generally, with Some Observations upon the Segregation of the Vitrioleuse.” She educated us about the history and science of vitriol, sulfuric acid, and of its use, primarily by women, as a weapon that was inexpensive and readily available. Marina gave us a number of examples of cases of vitriolage, complete with ghastly photographs of actual vitriol victims.





Mitch Higurashi, BSI (“Baron Adelbert Gruner”) displayed his knowledge of Japanese and Chinese pottery with “Why Shoso-in? Watson’s (and Holmes’) Failures and Gruner’s Knowledge in ILLU.” We discovered that Watson could not have educated himself about ancient pottery by reading only one book. Mitch pointed out that Watson had failed to read Gruner’s book on the subject and that Gruner’s questioning of Watson were well chosen to expose him as an imposter. We learned also of the popularization of Asian pottery in the West through expositions and trade missions. In conclusion Mitch surprised us with the anagram:

Adelbert Gruner → Burglar Entered

Catherine Cooke, ASH, BSI (“The Book of Life”) delivered the final presentation of the conference, “Is There Any Truth in the Allegation?,” in which she examined the life and wives of actor Dion Bourcicault as a possible prototype for the wife murderer Gruner.



After Catherine’s paper we boarded a specially constructed alpine coach from the 1970s for the very precarious ascent to the Splügen Pass, leaving the pretty town of Splügen for the very first Sherlockian excursion to the infamous Pass where Baron Gruner murdered his wife.



We crossed the Pass into Italy and stopped to appreciate our achievement and to celebrate our fellowship with Sherlock Holmes and John H. Watson ...



... and wrote history by conquering for the first time ever in more than 100 years of the studies in the literature of Sherlock Holmes - the top of the Splügen Pass!

We returned by way of the lovely village of Monte Spluga where we enjoyed a *picnic alpin sur la montagne* in perfect weather.



On the return journey to Splügen we stopped to reenact the horrible deed at the spot where Baron Gruner murdered his wife. Fortunately no Sherlockians were harmed at the fearsome scene.



“Who could possibly have read what happened at Prague and have any doubts as to the man's guilt! It was a purely technical legal point and the suspicious death of a witness that saved him! I am as sure that he killed his wife when the so-called 'accident' happened in the Splügen Pass as if I had seen him do it.”

On our return to Splügen we walked up to the history museum Heimatmuseum Rheinwald for a guided tour of local history, then returned to the wonderful Hotel Bodenhaus for our final dinner together with our friends old and new.

On Tuesday morning, 4th June, we rose early to meet our private postal coach for the journey to Chur railway station. There were many fond farewells and a brief meeting of four of the founding members of The Elusive Bicyclists, the scion society for Sherlockian cyclists.



Many thanks to Marcus and Michael for all their work in making Dark Deeds in the Canon a success, to all the speakers for their wonderful presentations, and to all the attendees who made the event into lifelong memories of friendship, scholarship, and fun.



Attendees: Yaeko Amano, Yumiko Shigaki, Yoko Akane Kobayashi, Peggy Perdue, Richard & Victoria Olken, Marsha & David Pollak, Cindy & David Richards, Eve Igglund, Ritsuko Furuta, Catherine Cooke, Mitch Higurashi, Jon & Susan Lellenberg, Hiroko Nakashima, Guy & Liz Marriott, Julie & Mike McKuras, Marina Stajic, Brian Stone & Joanna Rieke, Michael Meer, Marcus Geisser, Gerit Stenitzer, Mia Stampe, Paula Anthony & Katharina Anthony Kittelson, & Odin, Gary & Andrea Thaden, Sonja Yazmadjian, Daniel Laubacher, Michele Lopez, Jan Kipping, Sharon McClaskey, Jean-Christophe Remont, Takahiko Endo & Mayuko Endo, Robert Stek & Paula Riezenman, Manuele Ferrari & Brigitte Latella.

Richard Olken, Boston, USA, June, 2019
