

A Sherlock Holmes Inspired Trilogy

Derham Groves and Andrew Saniga, "Murderous Melbourne: A Celebration of Australian Crime Fiction and Place", Melbourne, Australia: University of Melbourne, 2008; Derham Groves "There's No Place Like Holmes", Carlton North, Australia: Black Jack Press, 2008; Derham Groves, "Victim and Villains: Barbie and Ken Meet Sherlock Holmes", Vancleave, MS: Ramble House, 2009.

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Derham Groves, Senior Lecturer in Architecture at Melbourne University, was the first Australian member of the Baker Street Irregulars, the oldest society for the appreciation of Sherlock Holmes. Groves claims that his interest in Holmes was stimulated by his seventh grade teacher and he has returned the favor by attempting to impart some of his enthusiasm to his students, who are among many people inspired by Doyle's literary creation. His approach is a bit indirect since he asks students to design buildings or transform dolls into characters described by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, the creator of Holmes. Students take their clues from the stories telling of the fictional detective's crime solving escapades. The results of some projects are presented in the books under review: "Murderous Melbourne: A Celebration of Australian Crime Fiction and Place" (henceforth "Murderous Melbourne"); "There's No Place Like Holmes" (referred to as "No Place"); and "Victim and Villains: Barbie and Ken Meet Sherlock Holmes" ("Victims and Villains").

Of course, with a subject as popular as Sherlock Holmes, the illustrations in these books are not limited to student projects. Included among the images are Groves' own interpretations of some of Doyle's victims and perpetrators, a few images of Holmes collectibles and a sweater and Sherlock Holmes doll knitted by Groves' mother. Just in case any readers would like a knitted Holmes doll of their own, "No Place" has Mrs. Groves' instructions for creating one.

Given Groves' engagement with Holmes and keeping in mind none of the Holmes stories are set in Melbourne, the celebrated detective makes only a cursory appearance in "Murderous Melbourne". The book is basically a lavishly illustrated exhibition catalogue of student projects based on Sherlock Holmes stories and crime fiction novels by Australian writers, such as June Wright and S.H. Courtier. Two Courtier novels set in Australia

served as the basis for student projects under the direction of Andrew Saniga and Danius Kesminas. For "Murderous Melbourne" Saniga contributed an engaging description of their excursions to an abandoned Cold War military site at Woomera, Adelaide, and Stony Creek, a lost town in western Victoria. The field trips were intended to help students understand the backgrounds and locations of "See Who's Dying" and "Murder's Burning" by using "history as a strategy for generating design ideas" ([12]). Drawing upon what they learned, students were asked to design an outdoor entertainment space for the University of Melbourne campus, in essence translating various influences into a clearly defined place.

Place-making, which Groves defines as creating buildings (and spaces) that create a sense of place, figures prominently in "No Place Like Holmes". He explains: "given that architecture and crime fiction share an interest in 'character' and 'place' I believe that architects can learn a lot from crime fiction writers like Doyle." (72-3) He also provides examples of how different fans of the Holmes stories have translated the houses and rooms Doyle made of words not bricks into feasible, if mostly unrealized, designs in "Holmes' Sweet Home", Chapter Two. Groves has even consulted Feng Shui experts about the best furniture arrangement to optimize the good luck on 221B Baker Street, where Holmes lived in London. For example, since Holmes was 'born' in 1854, to optimize his good luck his bed should face the southwest because that is the luckiest direction for him. But, no matter what direction the bed faced, the empty house across the street from 221B Baker meant Holmes "lived a lonely life, never marrying or having children." (60) It seems that his relationship with his companion, Dr. John H. Watson - and there is plenty of speculation about just what type of relationship it was although not in these texts - was not as fulfilling as it could have been. In any event, drawing upon clues in the stories, architecturally-minded fans have tried to create a place where the two men could have comfortably lived.

Of course, the Holmes stories and other crime fiction adventures have inspired the need to create places where actual people might be comfortable. One of these, the Sherlock Holmes Centre, was designed by Groves during his student years. It was meant as a repository of Sherlockiana and research center. Another is a hotel for the Baker Street Irregulars, designed by students, to provide the group with income and a setting for their annual meeting.

Detailed descriptions reveal the diversity of the projects, but, the

paragraph style in which they are primarily presented is a bit lengthy. The list of items in Groves' interpretation of the 221B Baker Street sitting room intended for the unrealized Centre runs almost two pages. It might have been better to use bulleted lists or eliminate some of the information. The thoroughness of the descriptions is probably appreciated by Holmes aficionados although more casual readers might find them tedious.

On the other hand, Groves briefly outlines his journey of discovering and designing for Sherlock Holmes. He also provides an abbreviated biography of Doyle. He suggests that Doyle's interest in writing buildings may have come from his father, Charles Altamont Doyle, an undistinguished architect. His father illustrated the younger Doyle's first novel and lent his middle name to an Irish-American spy in "His Last Bow". Holmes tells a cab driver he and Watson are architects to curtail gossip in "The Adventure of the Speckled Band." In an interesting twist, Groves, the architect, is inspired by Doyle, the writer.

And, following suit, Groves, the teacher, uses Doyle's writings to inspire his students. The results of one of these projects, Barbie and Ken dolls manipulated to resemble characters in Sherlock Holmes stories, are the subject of "Victims and Villains". Pictures of the dolls make up over two-thirds of the book. Unfortunately, the illustrations are in black and white, robbing the reader of some of the fine detail. Tiny color reproductions of them are in "Murderous Melbourne" and on the front cover of "Victims and Villains". Using the numerous ways Doyle dispensed with victims in his stories, the students altered Barbie and Ken, often beyond recognition.

These three books, even though repetitious at times, demonstrate that a great teacher can motivate students to create successful projects from almost any source. Of course, the Sherlock Holmes stories are not simple crime fiction, they present complex problems solved through clever analysis. Students are probably better served by careful, not simply clever, analysis of a problem which is demonstrated in these projects.