

Afterword – The Casebook of Solar Pons

August Derleth

More than a third of a century has gone by since Solar Pons and the first pastiche came into being. Certainly, at that time, no great body of work in this limited domain was ever contemplated. Having learned, from Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, that no further stories of Sherlock Holmes were to be written, I determined with the buoyant enthusiasm of nineteen that I would myself set down perhaps half a dozen tales imitating the characters and the manner of the stories in the Canon as closely as possible – even as to a large extent, Sir Arthur had been influenced by Poe's C. Auguste Dupin. And thus, one day in my room at 823 West Johnson Street, in Madison Wisconsin, where I had not long before matriculated at the University of Wisconsin, Solar Pons came into being in *The Adventure of the Black Narcissus*. The time was autumn, 1928.

Writing the pastiche is, of course, an elaborate game, not an art, and it is one that only someone who has time and energy at his disposal – to say nothing of a certain amount of brash self-confidence – can undertake. It was never my intention to do any considerable number of pastiches, but there are, as everyone will admit, forces beyond one's control, and when Harold Hersey, who, with his string of magazines in the late 1920's, was forever in search of material, promptly bought the initial pastiche and called for more, I was powerfully motivated – since I lived meagerly in those years at \$8.00 a week, out of which rent took \$3.25, and whatever supplementary income I could manage from the efforts of my pen, and I could not afford to reject any invitation. In one day, I recall, by dint of cutting classes, I turned out three pastiches. They came rapidly – *The Adventure of the Missing Tenants*, *The Adventure of the Broken Chessman*, *The Adventure of the Late Mr. Faversham*, *The Adventure of the Sotheby Salesman*, *The Adventure of the Limping Man*, *The Adventure of the Black Cardinal*, and others – and then came to a sudden halt, for that year was 1929, and the economic collapse of the autumn swept away Hersey's magazines and my market, and the burgeoning adventures of Solar Pons of Praed Street came to an abrupt end.

And at that point Solar Pons would have been suspended but for a further circumstance over a decade later, when the bibliographer of the detective story, Frederic Dannay, announced *The Misadventures of Sherlock Holmes*, and I was impelled to revise an unsold tale, *The Adventure of the Norcross Riddle*, and submit it to him. His enthusiastic acceptance of the story, and his eagerness to know whether there were any others – perhaps enough for a book of them – an interest that was seconded and furthered by Vincent Starrett – aroused a dormant affection for Solar Pons and set in motion a curious desire to see a book of the pastiches come into being, a particularly since Vincent Starrett had offered to write the introduction for such a book. Moreover, the revision of *The Adventures of the Norcross Riddle* had put new life into Pons, and at the same time had whetted my ambition to write other pastiches.

There was not enough for a book of them – not enough acceptable tales, that is – there were, in fact, only five of the early tales I thought even possible for such a book. How many more need there be? – but an even dozen, of course, the same number Sir Arthur

had had in *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*. So I wrote seven more, Vincent Starrett wrote the introduction to the book, which I titled, “*In Re: Sherlock Holmes*” – *The Adventures of Solar Pons*, because I had indicated on my desk calendar in Madison the date on which I would begin my first pastiche by writing, “*In Re: Sherlock Holmes*” on a date chosen at random ahead of time, and I submitted the book to but one publisher before I determined to publish it myself in a small edition – not under my Arkham House imprint – but, of course, under the imprint of Mycroft & Moran, with the deerstalker as colophon, and Baskerville typeface – all were inevitable and part, so to speak, of the game. The year was 1945.

The book was so well accepted by readers and reviewers, winning even a recommendation in the Book-of-the-Month Club News, that I found it easy to continue writing adventures of Solar Pons, and when, six years later, there were enough tales for another book, it seemed only natural that the book ought to be titled *The Memoirs of Solar Pons* and contain, as did the canonical *Memoirs*, I suspect, the idea of pastiching the entire sequence of the Sherlock Holmes tales was born, and now, at this writing, with this book, that grandiose design in this elaborate game has come to pass. Indeed, it has been slightly exceeded, for there are now fifty-six published Pontine tales, and one uncollected, separately published novella, which have appeared in this order:

The Adventure of the Frightened Baronet
The Adventure of the Late Mr. Faversham
The Adventure of the Black Narcissus
The Adventure of the Norcross Riddle
The Adventure of the Retired Novelist
The Adventure of the Three Red Dwarfs
The Adventure of the Sotheby Salesman
The Adventure of the Purloined Periapt
The Adventure of the Limping Man
The Adventure of the Seven Passengers
The Adventure of the Lost Holiday
The Adventure of the Man With the Broken Face
- in “IN RE: SHERLOCK HOLMES” THE ADVENTURES OF SOLAR
PONS (1945)

The Adventure of the Circular Room
The Adventure of the Perfect Husband
The Adventure of the Broken Chessman
The Adventure of the Dog in the Manger
The Adventure of the Proper Comma
The Adventure of Ricoletti of the Club Foot
The Adventure of the Six Silver Spiders
The Adventure of the Lost Locomotive
The Adventure of the Tottenham Werewolf
The Adventure of the Five Royal Coachmen
The Adventure of the Paralytic Mendicant

- in THE MEMOIRS OF SOLAR PONS

The Adventure of the Lost Dutchman
The Adventure of the Dorrington Inheritance
The Adventure of the "Triple Kent"
The Adventure of the Rydberg Numbers
The Adventure of the Grice-Paterson Curse
The Adventure of the Stone of Scone
The Adventure of the Remarkable Worm
The Adventure of the Penny Magenta
The Adventure of the Trained Cormorant
The Adventure of the Camberwell Beauty
The Adventure of the Little Hangman
The Adventure of the Swedenborg Signatures

- in THE RETURN OF SOLAR PONS (1958)

The Adventure of the Mazarine Blue
The Adventure of the Hats of M. Dulac
The Adventure of the Mosaic Cylinders
The Adventure of the Praed Street Irregulars
The Adventure of the Cloverdale Kennels
The Adventure of the Black Cardinal
The Adventure of the Troubled Magistrate
The Adventure of the Blind Clairaudient
- in THE REMINISCENCES OF SOLAR PONS (1961)

The Adventure of the Sussex Archers
The Adventure of the Haunted Library
The Adventure of the Fatal Glance
The Adventure of the Intarsia Box
The Adventure of the Spurious *Tamerlane*
The Adventure of the China Cottage
The Adventure of the Ascot Scandal
The Adventure of the Crouching Dog
The Adventure of the Missing Huntsman
The Adventure of the Amateur Philologist
The Adventure of the Whispering Knights
The Adventure of the Innkeeper's Clerk
- THE CASEBOOK OF SOLAR PONS (1965)

I cannot promise to write no more of them.

- August Derleth