



The Casebook of Sherlock Holmes

Adventure XLIX – The Adventure of the Mazarin Stone

This week’s story is another of those Casebook wonders; we wonder who wrote it and why! So much of it seems to be a very bad pastiche: a mishmash of other stories and the standard Canonical window-dressing, such as the presence of a page named Billy, a wax dummy to draw the fire of the dreaded airguns, the coal scuttle, the gasogene, and the violin. But all this atmosphere serves only to showcase the doubtful gramophone trick which is the center of the unsatisfying plot. And yet, the story is not without its good moments, and if nothing else, there are certainly a lot of questions to be asked. So let the gramophone play on, and come join the Hounds as we sniff out “The Mazarin Stone.”

Author! Author! Who dunnit? No, I don’t mean the theft of the yellow diamond. Who wrote this story? For an excellent summary of the question, I recommend the chapter titled “It Is Undoubtedly Queer” in Baring-Gould’s Annotated. Here are some of the theories discussed there and elsewhere:

What about Sir Arthur Conan Doyle? He wrote a play called “The Crown Diamond,” the plot of which is very similar to that of “The Mazarin Stone.” And yet it is hard to imagine how such a skilled writer of short stories could have cranked out this substandard effort.



Was Watson the author, attempting a third person narrative because he had so little active involvement in the case? Can a mere change of viewpoint from first person to third turn a good writer into a poor one?

Did one of Watson’s wives (pick any one of them) decide to write up a tale?

Some of the dialog has the ring of adolescence to it. Was young Billy the author?

And how about Mrs. Hudson, who may have listened to the whole thing through the keyhole?

Or was it Count Sylvius, writing his memoirs from his prison cell? Who else but a villain would write a line like “Holmes seldom laughed,” when anyone who knew Holmes at all would have known that he frequently laughed and chuckled.

Lord Cantlemere: Nobody likes Lord Cantlemere very much. He is, as Billy so aptly put it, “a stiff ‘un.” But is that the worst of it? I invite the Hounds to read the final scene in “The Mazarin Stone,” with the idea that Lord Cantlemere, who wanted Holmes to fail, might have had something to do with the theft of the jewel. Assuming that Holmes knew of his involvement, is that the real reason for the childish sleight of hand at the conclusion of the story? Is that what Holmes meant when he said to Cantlemere, “The case is but half finished”?

And did you ever notice a certain similarity between Holmes’s dealings with Lord Cantlemere and Doctor Grimesby Roylott? “It is a little cold for the time of the year,” Holmes said to Roylott, while to Cantlemere, he opined, “It is chilly for the time of year, but rather warm indoors.” Holmes straightened out the poker that Roylott had bent, while saying of Lord Cantlemere, “Shall we make him unbend?” Did Holmes always think of cold weather and bent things when anyone gave him rannygazoo?

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