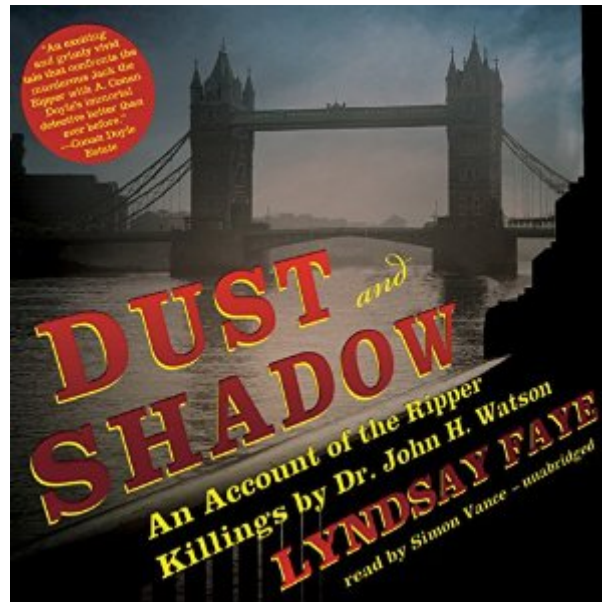


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Dust And Shadow: An Account Of The Ripper Killings By Dr. John H. Watson



Synopsis

Breathless and painstakingly researched, this is a stunning debut mystery in which Sherlock Holmes unmasks Jack the Ripper. Lyndsay Faye perfectly captures all the color and syntax of Conan Doyle's distinctive 19th-century London. In *Dust and Shadow*, Sherlock Holmes hunts down Jack the Ripper—the world's first serial killer—with impeccably accurate historical detail and without the advantage of modern forensics or profiling. Sherlock's desire to stop the killer who is terrifying the East End of London is unwavering from the start, and in an effort to do so he hires an "unfortunate" known as Mary Ann Monk, the friend of a fellow streetwalker who was one of the Ripper's earliest victims. However, when Holmes himself is wounded in Whitechapel attempting to catch the villain and a series of articles in the popular press question his role in the crimes, he must use all his resources in a desperate race to find the man known as "The Knife" before it is too late. Penned as a pastiche by the loyal and courageous Dr. Watson, this debut signals the arrival of a tremendous talent in the mystery and historical fiction genres.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Review: This is a first novel for Ms. Faye and it is subtitled "An Account of the Ripper Killings by Dr. John H. Watson." As a Sherlockian scholar, I maintain a database of Sherlockian pastiches, parodies and related fiction. Among other things, this database keeps reference to the subjects of its entries and "Jack the Ripper" is the single most popular subject for pastiche writers, other than "The Hound of the Baskervilles." There are at least seventy five different items on file about attempts to

tell the story of JACK, including Ellery Queen's excellent "A Study in Terror" and Carol Nelson Douglas' two volumes from her Irene Adler series; "Chapel Noir" and "Castle Rouge." The literature on the Ripper killings is also complex and lengthy. Numerous individuals have been nominated for the role and reasons for the abrupt end to the killings are also legion. Among the Sherlockian offerings, the number of ripper suspects approaches seventy five with almost as many explanations offered for the end to the killings. Although the Sherlockian works are often interesting, they offer little in the way of solid evidence from history for their resolutions of the questions left by the events. The true Ripper Literature tends toward the 'Police Procedural' school and is often merely gross, with little entertainment value except to sensationalists. In this book, one is taken by the Good Doctor along on an investigation by The Master into the world of monsters. This is not the world of Vampires and Ghosties; instead a sense of growing horror brings both the investigators and the reader to the awareness of the monsters that dwell amongst us, the human monsters that may be our neighbors or our contemporaries.

Having grown-up on a steady diet of Sherlock Holmes' stories as well as the macabre tale of Jack the Ripper [thanks to mom who is an ardent true crime fan], my interest was piqued by this latest pastiche of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes' stories. Though I'm no Sherlockian scholar, I thought Lyndsay Faye's debut was well-written and made for a riveting read, engrossing me in the period details as much as the intriguing plot and character development. In "Dust and Shadow", the master detective Sherlock Holmes, and his able sidekick Dr John H Watson undertake to solve a series of gruesome murders committed in the Whitechapel district of London in 1888. Those familiar with the story of Jack the Ripper know that the number of victims attributed to the Ripper totaled five in all: Mary Ann "Polly" Nichols, Annie Chapman, Elizabeth "Long Liz" Stride, "Catherine Eddowes", and "Mary Jane Kelley". In this pastiche, the author attributes another earlier murder to the Ripper, that of Martha Tabram, who was murdered on Aug 7th 1888, a victim of multiple stab wounds [39 in all]. In the process of solving the murders and uncovering the killer's identity, Holmes himself falls victim to the press of the day, and his very reputation is put on the line as he has to deal with speculations that he himself may have something to do with the murders. Thus the stage is set for a true potboiler, with rich period details and complex characterizations that had me racing through the pages. I am amazed that this is a debut novel by the author - she writes with flair and assurance, and through the authentic re-creation of Whitechapel in 1888, manages to transport readers into a world that seems altogether familiar.

I have read a great many Sherlock Holmes' take-offs, pastiches, etc. over the years. Some were pretty good, some were OK and most were awful. This latest attempt to combine Holmes and the Ripper kind of falls on the line between "good" and "OK". Lyndsay Faye does a very nice job in recreating the "Watsonian voice". Her narrative through Watson's eyes is spot-on with the canon stories. She does well also in her descriptions and dialogs. She might have over-done her attempt to create a deeper (or maybe more obvious) friendship between Holmes and Lestrade but what's the fun of playing with established characters if you can't do a bit of creative interpreting? My real complaint is that the story itself was rather bland. The idea of bringing Holmes and the Ripper together is not a new one and it has been better done. The history of Jack the Ripper is well-known and gives a pretty rigid framework to operate in. An author really only needs to be creative with the actual criminal. Who was the Ripper? Why did he commit such crimes? How would someone like Sherlock Holmes approach this case? Ms. Faye does answer those questions but the whole thing kind of flopped for me. At first the inclusion of a female hired by Holmes to serve as an inside source seemed to be a good idea. But as the story progressed it actually got rather tedious and felt unnecessary. The emotions surrounding the case lacked, too. I got no sense of terror when she described the riots in Whitechapel. There was no real feeling of panic or desperation. And there were no brilliant deductions from Holmes himself. In the end the criminal himself and the reasons behind his behavior seemed a bit stretched and rather hurried.

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