

Meeting Notes

December 17, 2022



Reported by Carla Kaessinger Coupe

More than 40 Sherlockians assembled at Alfio's La Trattoria in Chevy Chase, Maryland for a gala Red Circle in-person meeting. Many attendees wore masks and exchanged hugs, and an air of conviviality lifted all our spirits.

After a delicious lunch that finished with coffee and spumoni, everyone settled in for our presentation. Unfortunately, an issue with the electrical power the night before blew out Alfio's video projector. Fortunately, Bev Wolov and Alan Rettig saved the day by bringing their equipment, and we could hear our speaker and enjoy the audio/visual component.



Peter presented our speaker, Ashley Polasek, BSI, the Executive Director of the Ken Ludwig Company. Ashley's doctorate is in media adaptations, focusing on those of Sherlock Holmes, and she works directly with noted playwright Ken Ludwig, collaborating with him on his new plays. Ashley spoke on "*Ken Ludwig's Moriarty: Workshopping a Textbook of Friendship.*" Ken's new play, *Moriarty*, will open in Cleveland this spring, and Ashley explored Ken's writing process.

One of the important components of this process is a three-day workshop, consisting of five actors (Holmes and Watson, with the other three actors assuming forty-plus roles), a director, Ken, and Ashley. Ashley explained how the workshop allowed Ken to refine the text without being distracted by sets, costumes, lighting, etc.

Holding the workshop improved the play, encouraging Ken to not only focus on the overt relationships between Holmes, Watson, Moriarty, and Irene Adler, plus Mycroft, but also to unearth the buried relationships between Holmes and Moriarty, and Watson and Adler.



As Winnie the Pooh said: "When you are a Bear of Very Little Brain, and you Think of Things, you find sometimes that a Thing which seemed very Thingish inside you is quite different when it gets out into the open and has other people looking at it."

Ashley pointed out that the Moriarty legend is written more in adaptations than in the Canon itself, and that he's a typical shadowy villain who schemes to gain power and wealth. So why is Holmes's stake with Moriarty greater than that with other villains?

She shared the development of a specific scene where Holmes explains his conflict with Moriarty. After reading version one, the actors in the workshop kept asking about the characters' motivations. Ken rewrote the scene that evening, and version two gave a backstory to their relationship, providing an emotional through-line for the play. Again, the actors had questions, so version three refined this to become a friendship betrayed.

The play was originally intended to be a romance between Holmes and Adler, but as Ken rewrote scenes, Watson and Adler developed a strong relationship. This was a result of the actors asking what was Watson's skin in the game? After all, his heart must be as much at stake as Holmes's.

Ashley shared the development of another scene, where Adler is tracking Moriarty and Holmes invites her back to Baker Street. As she read the various versions, Watson's and Adler's relationship changed from suspicious rivals to respected allies. We see Watson and Adler solidify their alliance to support Holmes.

She pointed out that *Moriarty* is still a work in progress and once it's cast, Ken will continue to refine it during rehearsals.

We look forward to seeing the final production!



We were so pleased that the playwright himself, Ken Ludwig, was also with us and took part along with Ashley in the lively Q&A session after her talk. Ken explained his two rules of playwriting:

1. The audience tells you everything (Are they laughing and crying where expected? Are they engaged throughout?), and
2. Listen to *everybody* involved with the production. This includes not only the actors and directors, but the set designers and builders, the costumers, and all those who help make a play a success.

Ken confided that although there are times throughout the process when he doubts he will finish, he knows that the play will come together in the end.

After a rousing round of applause for Ashley and Ken, Peter took the podium again. He reminded us of all the upcoming events (available on the Red Circle's website), and ended a delightful afternoon with a raffle for door prizes.