

Better Holmes and Watson

The Granada Series Reviewed

by Richard Valley

THE MUSGRAVE RITUAL
Adaptation: Jeremy Paul
Direction: David Carson

Anyone coming to Granada Television's *THE MUSGRAVE RITUAL* via Universal's *SHERLOCK HOLMES FACES DEATH* (1943), the fourth in the studio's updated series with Basil Rathbone as Holmes and Nigel Bruce as the most bumbling of Dr. Watsons, will have one thought uppermost in mind: Where the hell is the chess-board floor?

Chess figured prominently in that film's version of the Musgrave Ritual, but it has nothing to do with the litany in Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's short story (published in *The Strand Magazine* in 1893, and collected in *The Memoirs of Sherlock Holmes*). Universal's Bertram Millhauser fashioned his own variation of the Ritual, but he was hardly the first to do so: Pride of place goes to T. S. Eliot, who

devised one for his play *MURDER IN THE CATHEDRAL*. ("My use of the Musgrave Ritual was deliberate and wholly conscious," wrote Eliot.)

When it came time to "remake" the story for Granada's *THE RETURN OF SHERLOCK HOLMES*, dramatist Jeremy Paul found that it was once again necessary to make a minor few changes, this time because no suitable location could be found containing the trees essential to the untangling of the puzzle. The solution: a tree-shaped weathervane high atop Hurlestone Manor. (Paul's remodeling met with little if any disapproval, and vast acceptance, the latter in the scowling form of an Edgar, the much-coveted award from the *Mystery Writers of America*.)

The storyline of Conan Doyle's "The Musgrave Ritual" concerns a ceremony handed down from generation to generation, until it finally falls into the hands of Reginald Musgrave, an old schoolmate of



Jeremy Brett

Sherlock Holmes. Unfortunately, the ritual also falls into the hands of Musgrave's butler, Brunton, who, like Jeeves, has a bit more than his master in the brains department (but not enough to keep himself from meeting a grisly fate at the hands of servant Rachel Howells).

The story presents one of Holmes' earliest cases, and is related by the Great Detective to Dr. Watson, who takes no active part in the investigation. Naturally, this would not do for Granada, so Paul cleverly wove Watson into the fabric of the piece, providing the worthy physician with some weighty concerns of his own—namely, Holmes' addiction to cocaine. The episode is one of the few that addresses Holmes' drug dependency, and its inclusion greatly heightens the drama. (Only one later program, Gary Hopkins' *THE DEVIL'S FOOT*, dared tackle the subject; like *THE MUSGRAVE RITUAL*, it copied an Edgar.)

As in every episode of *THE RETURN OF SHERLOCK HOLMES*, Jeremy Brett and Edward Hardwicke remain in peak form. Michael Culver (Reginald Musgrave), James Hazeldine (Richard Brunton), and Johanna Kirby (Rachel Howells) are not very far behind.

Conan Doyle's story ends with Brunton dead and Rachel vanished into the night. Granada's version comes to a far more shocking conclusion. It's the deerstalker cap on one of the best Sherlock Holmes programs ever produced.

BELOW: Michael Culver played the aristocratic Reginald Musgrave in the Edgar-winning *THE MUSGRAVE RITUAL*. **OPPOSITE:** A peek behind the scenes of Granada's *THE RETURN OF SHERLOCK HOLMES*. Holmes and Watson (Jeremy Brett and Edward Hardwicke) are on their way to Hurlestone Manor to visit Holmes' old school chum, Reginald Musgrave. (In the original story, Watson takes no active part.)



