



THE BIMETALLIC QUESTION

Box 883 Stock Exchange Tower
Montreal, Canada H4Z 1K2

MINUTES of the meeting of the BIMETALLIC QUESTION October 2, 2014

Date of next meeting

The next meeting will take place on
Thursday, December 4th, 2014
at 6:30 p.m. at:
The Westmount Public Library
(Westmount Room)
4574 Sherbrooke Street West
Westmount, Quebec

The Quiz at the next meeting

“The Adventure of
the Five Orange Pips”
prepared by
Carol Abramson

Minutes of the MEETING of the BIMETALLIC QUESTION held on Thursday,
October 2nd, 2014 at the Westmount Library (Westmount Room), 4574 Sherbrooke Street West,
Westmount, Quebec.

Present: Carol Abramson, Rachel Alkallay, Jack Anderson, Maureen Anderson, Paul Billette,
Patrick Campbell, M.B.E., Louise Corda, David Dowse,
Chris Herten-Greaven, Raf Jans, Alice Miller, Elliott Newman, Wilfrid de Freitas, Erica
Penner, Arlene Scher, Rebecca Stacey, Bruno Paul Stenson,

Guests: Gilles Bergeron, Charles Blattberg, Philip Ehrensaft, Nathalie Ellis, Kristin Franseen

Regrets: Tash Akkerman, Karl J. Raudsepp

CALL TO ORDER: The meeting was called to order *promptly* at 6:30 by Sovereign
Chris Herten-Greaven.

ITEMS OF BUSINESS AND GENTLE TRANSACTION

(Incorporating Raisins and Almonds, Tea and Sticky Buns, Snowflakes and Dancing)

1. Almost the Ritz

Hey, everybody! Our annual dinner, the once and future beautiful thing, is taking shape as you read this. Sticky buns that would make a vicar pole vault over the steeple, *potage a la crème* (perhaps) that would fortify a landlubber for a Channel swim, and more, much, much more. So, stick a giant translucent fairy (garden variety) on your calendar for JANUARY 17, 2015 as we once again commemorate the birthday of THE MASTER at that stolid building up the hill, THE ATWATER CLUB. Paul Billette announced he would hold a meeting of interested members to plan the evening's festivities, while David Dowse said he had an idea for a speaker. The lucky victim in David's sights is the proprietor of a comic book emporium in Les Galeries de la Cathedrale under Ste. Catherine Street at University, across from The Bay. Food! Culture! Entertainment! The distant sounds of squash balls thwacking off the walls! Who could ask for more?

2. Getting the Lead Out

The trouble with little toy soldiers is that they're always kneeling, or at attention, or scouting, or (if we become impatient or stick to the strict script of history) knock-down dead. In a way, though, they're like the historical curiosities in *A Night at the Museum*, where under cover of darkness, you can enter an imaginary world, see them come to life with a force they hide from our daylight mania, and if you have the right kinds of skeletons in your closet (or bats in your belfry), thrill to the blood coursing through their veins, dive with them behind a tree trunk as shells explode with deafening insistence, and cover your face as your nostrils smart at the stinging harshness of cordite in the air, and the suffocating dust raining down as tranquility is interrupted by folly and violence. Such may be the evocation of the solitary lead soldier which is part of a set of Sherlockian figures from the 1960s, and modestly introduced to us by Jack Anderson from personal and endless collection. In addition, Jack showed us a mailable postcard with Sherlock Holmes on the illustration side, a canonical mini-book, and a tiny Sherlockian mug. One was convinced that after our meeting, under the reign of darkness, Darby O'Gill and his Little People would take over to comment on our strange goings-on.

3. A Bookish Member of the British Empire

Patrick Campbell brought in a number of books of great historical interest. All summaries are sourced as indicated:

A. *A Houseboat on the Styx* (1901) written by John Kendrick Bangs(US) in 1895. (Wikipedia)

The premise of the book is that everyone who has ever died (up to the time in which the book is set, which seems to be about the time of its publication) has gone to the Styx, the river that circles the underworld.

The book begins with Charon, ferryman of the Styx being startled—and annoyed—by the arrival of a houseboat on the Styx. At first afraid that the boat will put him out of business, he later finds out that he is actually to be appointed the boat's janitor.

What follows are eleven more stories (for a total of twelve) which are set on the house boat. There is no central theme, and the purpose of the book appears to be as a literary thought experiment to see what would happen if various famous dead people were put in the same room with each other. Each chapter is a short story featuring various souls from history and

mythology. In the twelfth chapter the house boat disappears, leading into the sequel, Pursuit of the House-Boat.

- B. Penelope Fitzgerald's biography of her remarkable family (*The Knox Brothers*, 2014). 'When I was very young I took my uncles for granted, and it never occurred to me that everyone else in the world was not like them.' In this, only her second book, Penelope Fitzgerald turned her novelist's gaze on the quite extraordinary lives of her father and his three brothers. A masterly work of biography, within it we see Penelope Fitzgerald exercising her pen magnificently before she began her novel-writing career. Edmund Knox, her father, was one of the most successful editors of *Punch*. Dillwyn, a Cambridge Greek scholar, was the first to crack the Nazi's message decoding system, Enigma, and in so doing is estimated to have shortened World War II by six months. Wilfred became an Anglo-Catholic priest and an active welfare worker in the East End of London. Ronald, the best known of the four during his lifetime, was Roman Catholic chaplain to Oxford University's student body, a preacher, wit, scholar, crime-writer and translator of the Bible. A homage to a long forgotten world and a fascinating account of the generation straddling the divide between late Victorian and Edwardian. (Summary courtesy Harper Collins pub.)
- C. *Mrs. Beaton's Book of Household Management* (pre-1913)
- D. An old street guide of the period, showing that SACD made up street names, since some of the streets and roads he referred to did not exist. (We looked, and we observed. Hah to you, Jeremy Brett!)

4. Not your Mother's Average Bar of Soap

Wilfrid de Freitas showed us a cameo of Sherlock Holmes with the complete text of "A Scandal in Bohemia" written all around it. Your Lowly Scribe would like to tell you what the story is all about, but he has not been able to read as far as the first period.

By referring to Sherlock Holmes's monograph # 97 on "The use of the pantograph in the repurposing of myopia among Bornese pygmies," we have been able to expand the characters flailing around the cameo to their maximum size, and this is what we have come up with:

To Mrs. Sherlock Holmes she it always *da* man.

The possibilities are endless. Obviously, they thought we wouldn't check.

5. Rustling Books

Paul Billette told us of the connection between Russel Books, formerly on Sherbrooke Street in Westmount, and Canada's largest used and new book store in Victoria, BC. In its new location on Vancouver Island the business now has children and grandchildren operating the emporium in two locations, at 734 Fort Street, and 702 View Street, as well as out of a house. For more information:

request@russellbooks.com

Perhaps a short hop to the corner bookseller's? Happy reading!

6. The Uncollected Collection

The uncollected stories of SACD have now been collected which means they are no longer uncollected. But that's what the title says. What does this mean, actually? Whom can we complain to? The Logic Police are on a work slowdown, and the Syntax Terrorists are setting up roadblocks preventing us from reaching the end of our ...

7. You didn't really mean that!

We had a bit of a discussion on pejorative language.

The discussion was a good thing, while pejorative language is not.

Rachel Alkallay reminded us that there are many examples of pejorative language (generally, words and phrases designed to call into question the integrity or value of an individual) in Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* in which the Jew, Shylock, gets a bumpy ride through a wasteland of anti-Semitic prejudice, not unmitigated by his callous conduct towards his daughter and Antonio, the prospective donor of the pound of flesh. Rachel said that pejorative language is all about context: what is crude or unacceptable in some situations is not so in others. For example, today, when we refer to someone's being a man's man, we mean that he is a model of masculine achievement: strong, intelligent, a leader, and so on. In the past, a man's man would have referred to a manservant, and in other regards, a homosexual, or a male who provided sexual favors to other males.

8. SACD and HH

Louise Corda read to us from a recent article in the *Gazette* about the friendship between Harry Houdini and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. In one corner: the man who created illusion by escaping from impossible situations (like a hyperactive kindergarten student) and in the other corner: the man who saw fairies in the garden. Really. Imagine the synergy!

9. Sherlock and Pulp

Anne Millar drew our attention to a new publishing effort by a start-up group called Hard Case Crime whose mission is to re-present classic detective stories in a pulp fiction format. The group says:

Hard Case Crime is dedicated to reviving the vigor and excitement, the suspense and thrills—the sheer entertainment—of the golden age of paperback crime novels, both by bringing back into print the best work of the pulp era and by introducing readers to new work by some of today's most powerful writers and artists. Determined detectives and dangerous women...fortune hunters and vengeance seekers...ingenious criminals and men on the run...Hard Case Crime novels offer everything you want from a great story, all in handsome and affordable editions.

The mind-boggling come-on to *The Valley of Fear* by one A.C. Doyle, Best-Selling Author of *The Lost World* reads:

YEARS AGO, A P.I. OUT OF CHICAGO
BROUGHT JUSTICE TO A DIRTY TOWN.

NOW HE'S GOING TO PAY.

A sawed-off shotgun blast to the face leaves one man dead—and reveals a secret that has pursued another across an ocean and set the world's most ruthless criminal on his trail. The man needs the help of a great detective...but could even Sherlock Holmes save him now?

- The legendary classic re-presented, Hard Case Crime style
- Edgar Award winner Leslie Klinger on THE VALLEY OF FEAR: "The first real hardboiled detective story."
- By the best-selling author of THE LOST WORLD
- Inspired by a true story!

10. ET in Montreal

Patrick Campbell mentioned an upcoming conference in Montreal on extraterrestrial activity. He mentioned that since he was a teenager (about a dozen years ago, or so), he's been reading everything he can on the subject.

11. Books and Breakfast

Chris Herten-Greaven informed us that on October 19, there would be another installment of the "Books and Breakfast" series at the Sheraton Center. This Sunday morning series focuses on authors' reading from their works while breakfast is going on in the audience. Tickets are \$32 per person. One wonders if the menu is appropriate to the reading material. For example, if William Shakespeare were to read from his *Hamlet*, particularly the part where a vindictive Hamlet knows that Polonius is hiding behind the arras (drape) and calls out "A rat" as he plunges his rapier through the material, would it not be suitable to serve up rat fricassee running red with tomato sauce? We could go on, but we shall forbear. Well, if you insist. Should we resurrect Susannah Moodie (*Roughing It in the Bush*), it may be just the thing to serve up real beaver tails.

12. The Latest Buzz

Chris then passed around photos of five different types of bees native to Washington State. Not one was cute and fuzzy.

13. What Goes Up Will Come Down

Chris then told us about Richard William Pearse, a New Zealand inventor who took up a heavier-than-air monoplane nine months before the Wright Brothers did their thing. Pearse had a camera crew on hand to film the exploit; however, they left (due to a sudden invasion of Kiwis). Pearse's plane was pulled into the air by horses which remained on the ground, showing the contrast between what goes aloft and what stays planted and casting doubt on dreams we might have had about horses taking to the air.

14. Another Bird of Prey

Chris pointed us to a novel by the late husband of our former Governor-General Adrienne Clarkson. His name was John Ralston Saul. The Amazon blurb on the novel reads:

On a May night in 1968, the plane carrying the French Chief of Staff General Ailleret explodes over the island of Réunion in the Indian Ocean, killing all aboard except for one. Four years later, writer Charles Stone is drawn irresistibly into the mystery that still surrounds the General's death.

"Birds of Prey" is a popular title. Apart from Saul's novel, DC comics had a series under that name. In addition, a Batman cartoon series shares that title, and last but not least, a Wilbur Smith novel with that title was published in 1997.

15. First Toast – To the Master

by Wilfrid de Freitas

In the thirty-five years that our Society has been in existence (yes, it has been thirty-five!) I calculate there must have been, give or take, more than two hundred* toasts to the Master. What can one possibly say that hasn't been said already – probably many times over? Still that does not deter us from proposing a toast to him at every meeting and annual dinner. And so it should be: he is our *raison d'être*. Incidentally, not for a moment do I mean to diminish Dr. Watson's role in the great game that we all enjoy*; if it weren't for him, Holmes's adventures would probably never have seen the light of day, so we should always be grateful to him for that. But this toast is to Holmes. **Warts** and all, he brings pleasure and instruction to our everyday lives. Remember the incident that our member Arlene Scher recounted for us, following the attack, albeit unintentional, that she experienced during a night out. Her first reaction was to think as Holmes might have done: how can I trace this person? Or Rachel being mugged in the lobby of her own apartment building: WWHD? Personally, I like to think of Holmes as a Victorian superman; a court of last resort when all else has failed. It's not the law that concerns him; it's justice. The two should never be confused with one another. He sometimes lets the guilty party go free (or have a head start anyway) because he believes that his criminal action was justified.

As I mentioned at the outset, all this has been said before, and will probably be said again, but it does no harm to state it for the record and remind ourselves why we're here. Ladies and gentlemen I give you The Master.

**Actually, 210 at meetings + 35 at annual meetings = 245 toasts each to The Master and Dr. Watson (L.S.)*

16. A Game of Warts

In this evening's Toast to The Master, our Sovereign Emeritus and Society co-founder Wilfrid de Freitas once again displayed unerring and in-depth knowledge of the canon with his reference to "warts and all" (see Entry #15, above). Knowing very well that there is little or no reference in the official canon to "warts" (save for their being caused by touching the Giant Toad of Sumatra), Wilfrid expanded our universe to his favorite movie of all time, *Sherlock Holmes: A Game of Shadows*, in which the role of SH is performed to perfection by Wilfrid's favorite Sherlockian portrayer of all time, (Sir) Robert Downey Jr. Although he preferred to have us fill in the blanks for ourselves, Wilfrid recalled with perfect clarity the brief dialog passage which went as follows:

Palm Reader:	Ugh, she has a beard!
Sherlock Holmes:	What of the warts?
Palm Reader:	Ugh, she's covered in warts...!
Sherlock Holmes:	ARE THEY EXTENSIVE!?

Aside from the deep symbolic overtones, we may wish to cover, in future meetings, the mysterious use of the onomatopoeiac word "Ugh" which is intended to convey distaste, revulsion, disdain, and downright nausea in the gorge of the reader. You may note that this device is employed twice in three lines (actually, a mere nine syllables apart! Think of it!) in the stichomythic (rapid-fire) exchange between SH and the Palm Reader. We thank Wilfrid for couching in well-camouflaged implication, this profound and climactic sequence.

17. A Propos Jet Streams

Chris Herten-Greaven told us a story about a missing airplane which crashed into the side of one of the Andes mountains (not all of them) in 1946-47 (on one specific crashing event), and whose remains were found in 2004 after the rescuers had a bite to eat. The plane had hit a jet stream and

was smashed into the offending mountain which should have been somewhere else at the time. According to Chris, no international intrigue was involved; just an act of nature.

18. Second Toast – To Dr. Watson

By Raf Janz

No one is better placed than Sherlock Holmes himself to express his deep friendship for Dr. Watson. So here is a quote from Holmes taken from the story “The Adventure of the Empty House”:

“I came over at once to London, called in my own person at Baker Street, threw Mrs. Hudson into violent hysterics, and found that Mycroft had preserved my rooms and my papers exactly as they had always been. So it was, my dear Watson, that at two o'clock to-day I found myself in my old arm-chair in my own old room, and only wishing that I could have seen my old friend Watson in the other chair which he has so often adorned.”

I propose a toast to Dr. Watson.

19. A Blast from the Past

We were visited by a very former member of the BmQ in the form of Philip Ehrensaft. It's always nice to see people some of us are too young to remember.

20. Third Toast – To the Woman

By Maureen Anderson

Irene Adler, the “well-known adventuress,” has become an icon of feminine independence, style, and resourcefulness in the Victorian era.

Irene who radiates compassion, wit, and charm, coupled with her dramatic flair has been branded “The Woman,” and a worthy and lofty adversary to Sherlock Holmes; yet her intelligence, integrity, and intensity have brought her down to earth in a way that makes her a timeless heroine. Her warm smile invites and excites those she encounters. This is amply demonstrated in the way she captivates the Prince, enchants Sherlock Holmes, and entrances her new husband.

Irene's intelligence challenges Sherlock; her smile lifts his spirits. In his eyes, “she eclipses and predominates the whole of her sex” His heart will be forever hopelessly devoted to Irene Adler ... The Woman!

To the Woman!

21. Author! Author!

Rachel Alkallay's trilogy of publications dealing with museums in and around Montreal is well underway. Volume One was launched October 5 at Bibliophile on Queen Mary Road. Forthcoming volumes (even if they are only Numbers 2 and 3, and #4 hasn't been discussed yet) are planned as follows:

Volume Two: Forty more museums in Montreal

Volume Three: Off-island museums

22. Karma Clogs Computers – Da!

Once upon a time in the Soviet Union, according to Jack Anderson, women were causing computers to crash. Women and some men whose proclivities were eventually made apparent.

It was discovered that all women who were working on computers whether for fun, profit, or diversion, were crashing computers. This, folks, was not a hormone thing. Vodka was not

involved. Well, maybe a little. In what ways were these women – hundreds of thousands of them, many years ago – in synch? Had they all read Irving Layton’s bootlegged “Periods of the Moon” and – you know ...? Had they been brainwashed or implanted like *The Manchurian Candidate*? Were millions of mosquito-sized drones flying into their ears and whispering sweet nothings (in Russian, of course) while they slept? Was Irena Adlerskaya sending off disturbing frequencies providing enharmonic imbalances as she pined for rollicking times with Mad King Ludwig? Perhaps, and we congratulate you on thinking outside the box. However, it was discovered that all of these women had one thing in common, and that was all of their undergarments. These items from the land of the five-year plan, although official and approved, were staticky, and therefore inappropriate. They were causing electrical impulses in the form of abrasion sparks to go off as their wearers (the female, and some male, we suspect) – computer operators – shifted, squirmed, rubbed, slid, scratched, hopped, bounced, and demonstrated other signs of life while at work. The static impulses likely travelled through their bodies, through their fingertips, onto keyboards, and along wires into Mother Russia, repeatedly causing the computers to crash. Part of the problem was rectified by having the State underwear manufacturer use a less staticky material. The other part of the problem was handled when the commissars decided to send the male computer crashers for gender debriefing and enlisted them as extras in the next James Bond movie to be filmed in Siberia where their electrostatic reactions would rival the Northern Lights, thereby saving money on the film budget. Perhaps we will never know the entire story. We believe its resolution will be a state secret for generations to come. One thing is for certain, though. In its quest for truth, your Bimetallic minutes will never hesitate to think outside its shorts.

Nota bene: The transcription crew have failed to find any substantiation of this story as yet, but would rather not head further into Soviet Ladies Underwear Research. Or rather have discovered an enthusiasm for the subject, await the illustrated monograph. Whichever.

23. Quiz: “The Disappearance of Lady Frances Carfax”

Prepared by: Raf Jans

Possible total: 62

Winners were:

Rank	Name	Score	Prizes
1.	Carol Abramson	46½	Books
2.	Wilfrid de Freitas	32	“
3.	Erica Penner	27½	“

Next Meeting’s story: “The Disappearance of Lady Frances Carfax”

Prepared by: Raf Jans

24. About the Disappearance

According to critical acclaim, or the ignominy of censure, one thing is certain: the stories of the SH canon provoke thought and discussion. Here is what a quartet of Bimetallicans have opined on this meeting’s story:

David Dowse: It gave us a character that was squirmy.

Jack Anderson: This is one of his weaker stories.

Paul Billette: The double-bottom coffin was ingenious.

Chris Herten-Greaven: Fiction rivals truth. In our time, two famous characters whose lives were taken over by physicians, were ruined and lost. They were Elvis Presley and Michael Jackson. Chris added wisely, “You can’t burn your patients’ candles at both ends,” and continued, “A third celebrity who died recently was Joan Rivers, more a victim of surgery.”

Would Chris be able to furnish us with a legacy of botched dental treatments? Dental fiends? Consider Sir Lawrence Olivier as the White Angel in the movie, *Marathon Man*, written by William Goldman. Wikipedia tells us that Goldman adapted the movie from his novel. Whoopsie! It’s the other way around. The movie was a tremendous hit, and Goldman hammered out the novel in record time. Do not confuse this Goldman with Nobel Prize-winner William Golding, author of *Lord of the Flies* (a.k.a. *King of the Zippers*).

25. Fourth Toast – To Mrs. Hudson

By Natalie Ellis (scheduled)

Not available.

Our most sincere salutations to Natalie and Mrs. Hudson

26. Fifth Toast – To the Society

By Bruno Paul Stenson

“Two dogs of this town have formed themselves into a society for the destruction of grouse, prairie chickens, and other birds now hatching. They should be tied up.” So said a British Columbia newspaper, the *Vernon News*, on June 18, 1891, perhaps begging the questions: “What is a society?”

The 1911 first edition of the *Concise Oxford Dictionary*- which might well have been consulted by our Sherlock Holmes – defines “society” first as “the customs & organization of a civilized nation.” It is with this sense of the word in mind that on June 10, 1968 Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau said that “the Just Society will be one in which the rights of minorities will be safe from the whims of intolerant majorities.” However, this refers to society at large, far too broad a concept to be germane to this toast.

The 1911 *Oxford* further defines “society” as “the upper classes of a community whose movements & entertainments & other doings are more or less conspicuous.” But, as Evan Esar once quipped, “the cream of society seldom rises on the milk of human kindness.” Well, who wants that? It hardly describes the elegantly ragtag assemblage of people currently gathered in this room so it, too, is the wrong type of society. At least for some of us.

Finally, *Oxford* tells us that “society” can refer to an “association of persons united by a common aim or interest or principle.” One might think that the narrower the definition of “society” – and this last definition is quite narrow – the more difficult it should be to fit oneself into it. However, in his book *Walden*, Henry David Thoreau writes that “wherever a man goes, men will pursue him and paw him with their dirty institutions, and, if they can, constrain him to belong to their desperate oddfellow society.”

Now we’re talking! Desperate oddfellows united by common interest in a society, a club devoted to Sherlock Holmes, his life, his times, his methods, his surroundings and all that his Victorian and Edwardian cases encompass.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I give you the Bimetallic Question; I give you the club; I give you the Society!

27. Freebies and other Usurpers of Space

Our society of collectors is changing the places of things of possession.

Wilfrid de Freitas is offering a signed print of the British actor Jeremy Young as Sherlock Holmes, for \$50.

Maureen Anderson gave away a genuine leather satchel that had belonged to David Kellett. Paul Billette informed us that David had made it himself.

28. Next Meeting's Toast Presenters

To the Master	-	David Dowse
To Dr. Watson-	-	Rebecca Stacey
To the Woman	-	Paul Billette
To Mrs. Hudson	-	Philip Ehrensaft
To the Society	-	

Our dear friends, you would confer a great favor upon us by joining us at the next meeting of "THE BIMETALLIC QUESTION" which is being held on Thursday, December 4th, 2014, at 6:30 p.m. Meet like-minded Sherlockians and express opinions you would never dare to utter anywhere else. Micrometer-adjusted snow ruts for reindeer sleighs will be available behind the solarium. Call ahead to give your dimensions, and reserve. The building administration has asked that we do not attempt any more rooftop landings. For the latest society news or updates on our history, please go to www.bimetallicquestion.org where the Sámi will be particularly welcomed.

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