



THE BIMETALLIC QUESTION

Box 883 Stock Exchange Tower
Montreal, Canada H4Z 1K2

MINUTES of the meeting of the BIMETALLIC QUESTION February 1, 2007

Date of next meeting

The next meeting will take place on
Thursday, April 5th, 2007 at 6:30 p.m.at:
The Westmount Public Library
(Westmount Room)
4574 Sherbrooke Street West
Montreal, Quebec

The Quiz at the next meeting

“The Adventure of the Lion’s Mane”
prepared by Carol Abramson

Minutes of the MEETING of the BIMETALLIC QUESTION held on Thursday, February 1st, 2007 at the Westmount Library (Westmount Room), 4574 Sherbrooke Street West, Westmount, Quebec.

Present: Carol Abramson, Rachel Alkallay, Jack Anderson, Maureen Anderson, Albert Aikman, Paul Billette, Wilfrid deFreitas, Geoff Dowd, David Dowse, David Kellett, Anita Miller, Elliott Newman, Joan O'Malley, Erica Penner, Bernard Robaire, Arlene Scher, Cheryl Surkes, Nancy Walkling, Ronnie Zilman

Regrets: Absolutely none. We were all happy to be there.

CALL TO ORDER:

The meeting was called to order promptly at 6:37 by our new co-sovereign Jack Anderson

ITEMS OF BUSINESS AND GENTLE TRANSACTION

(Incorporating Show and Tell, Yin and Yang, East and West, Melbas and Toasts, Rank and Gross, Then and Now, etc.)

1) Mountains and Hartz

Cheryl Surkes informed us that she had been reviewing her social calendar for February and realized that there were all these acolytes of Victoriana at the BmQ to whom she would be delivering Valentine's Day wishes of peace, love, and silk ribbons. With alacrity and a mission, Cheryl thereupon hied over to the Westmount Public Library to look into their valuable collection of old post cards. Her first discovery was a series of post card correspondences between a man and a woman at the turn of the 20th century – over 100 years ago!

This in turn led Cheryl to prodigious research into the origin and evolution of Valentine's Day cards. First, it was important to note that the day is named after St. Valentine. He wasn't, of course, born a saint. When in elementary school, he was most likely called "Hey, you!" by the kids in Grade Seven, and "Jerk" by his older sister who ended up moving to Manchester and was never heard of again. Valentine's first mistake was to sanctify marriages in the name of – you know. It was also his last mistake. To emphasize his thoughtlessness in the matter, the authorities effectively ordered the separation of the seat of his thought from the rest of his body. Before this humane detachment, it was reported that Valentine sent a note in the form of a card. We don't know if he drew a heart on the card, if he sent it to his girlfriend, if a cherub popped out of a television screen and shot a licorice-flavored arrow, or if it was an open card in a local or national newspaper or if it was an early form of advertising, promoting the sale of flowers and chocolates. We are pretty certain it was the last card he ever sent. This action made him famous, much more so than the sanctification of marriages that had got him axed.

Marching ahead a few hundred years, Cheryl discovered the first Canadian Valentine from the 1780s.

Then, in 1847, a Boston printer advertised 30 kinds of Valentine cards. One of the printed messages was, "My heart pants for thee." In this quotation reside several clues to the identity of the sender: (a) It has a heart; (b) It's a dog; (c) It has been reasonably schooled in grammar, taking care to use the accusative rather than the nominative case of the second person singular personal pronoun as receiver of an action (i.e. "pants"); (d) The sender could have written "My heart **pounds** for thee," which would have been a dead giveaway as to its identity as one of the less-fortunate, lower-bred canines who would invariably, at one time or another, have wound up in a dog **pound**. However, the sender slid ever so subtly away from this giveaway, and settled more comfortably on **pants** which is easy enough to decode, once we observe the caveat which is in this case that **pants** does not refer to trousers, leggings, breeches, or in fact, any form of garment.

Next, Cheryl visited McGill's McCord Museum where there is a huge collection of Valentine's Day cards. There, she discovered that the first one was printed in England in 1797. The popularity of this card increased with the expansion of Her Majesty's Postal Service and its ability to be distributed easily by little men in blue shorts.

Then, and quite astonishingly, the proliferation of the Valentine card led to the rise in popularity of the Christmas card. This is proof positive that when discussing the age-old conundrum, "Which came first, the chicken or the egg?" well, we now have it definitively, don't we?

These old Valentine's Day cards were full of rhymes, ditties, and witticisms. Simply full of them.

According to Cheryl, studying this subject is like being on an archaeological and sociological dig. It's a trip through time with so much culture. You can find different materials – a lock of hidden hair, a peacock feather, linen, moving parts, 3-D cards. In one case there was a parasol that opened up. This creative idea may well have inspired children's pop-up books. The world is always looking for a better mousetrap. Did little Artie (SACD) receive such cards from Mummy and Da? Were there fairies on them? Eh? There are even examples of acid-free paper.

As a result of this trip through time, Cheryl no longer sees Valentine's Day as a crass commercial event. No, indeed. It was a step in the evolution of a number of communications-related industries that saw improvements in the development of paper, design and illustration, the postal service, the card industry, Christmas cards, and pop-up books. More than all of this, Cheryl added, "Who doesn't like to know they have a secret admirer?"

NOTE:

Toasts contained in these minutes include some of those delivered at the annual dinner as well as those presented at the recent meeting.

We will not at this time ask you to read them with a grain of salt because most of the food at the banquet was salty.

Except for the cake which got high marks.

Thank you.

2) **First Toast – To the Master**

ONE

By Jack Anderson

Jack's toast was taken from the "Sherlock Holmes" entry in *Encyclopedia Sherlockiana*, written by Matthew Bunson. The entry describes the play, *Sherlock Holmes*, written by SACD, with the ultimate collaboration of the esteemed American actor, William Gillette. Gillette sought and received SACD's approval to introduce a romantic element into TWGCD's life with the following frustrated response: "YOU MAY MARRY HIM, OR MURDER HIM OR DO WHAT YOU LIKE WITH HIM." This paragraph from the encyclopedia is more than noteworthy:

In May 1899, Gillette traveled himself to England to meet Sir Arthur, securing his blessing for the play, including Conan Doyle's grudging acceptance of a romantic aspect to the plot. Returning to the United States, Gillette took the play into production. After opening in Buffalo, it moved to New York, where it was a smash hit. The play moved to London in September 1901, opening at the Lyceum Theatre, an excellent place for it, given the Lyceum appearance in The Sign of Four. As big a success in England as in the United States, the play even drew a visit from the king and queen, on the evening of February 1, 1902. In the touring company of the play, the part of Billy was played by a twelve-year-old actor named Charles Chaplin. Chaplin would reprise his role in September 1905 in the comedy The Painful Predicament of Sherlock Holmes, again opposite Gillette as the great Detective.

TWO

by David Dowse

The archives of any Lowly Scribe are a confusing affair. Of ebbing faculty and waning control, this particula Lowly Scribe has come up with (but not invented) the following Toast to the Master by David Dowse, hitherto unpublished, and therefore pristine, penned by hand with what looks like Mont Blanc burgundy ink, and with a medium-width pen nib from David's extensive collection of valuable, lovely, and state-of-the-art pens. We suspect this toast was delivered at the annual dinner.

How far had the parsley sunk into the butter? What was in that curry served to the groom looking after Silver Blaze? Could potassium cyanide be masked by a special spice? Was death due to natural causes or was the victim's food "doctored?" These were all issues that Sherlock Holmes cared very much about.

Holmes used his analytical chemistry background and in-house lab to get to the root of many mysteries but I feel that he also had a culinary expertise and a test kitchen to help him with those three "soup-spoon" problems.

The whisk, the double boiler, the roasting pan, and the pastry rolling pin were as familiar to him as were the test tube, the pipette, and the Bunsen burner. Cooking is a blend of exact science, experimentation, and inspiration. Holmes was a master chef.

His repertoire went beyond looking for the poison, identifying it, and determining how much was necessary to knock off that young heir, that lonely lady's companion, or that elderly Indian colonel who had something that the murderer wanted.

No, I feel Holmes created marvelous dishes for the pure pleasure that it gave others – a chance to enjoy a feast.

Holmes's consideration for his beloved Mrs. Hudson extended to taking care of business for that late night visitor who fainted for lack of sustenance. He simply whipped up a quick omelet, cut a slice of Stilton cheese, and poured a glass of claret to bring the young man back to health so he could proceed to recount his adventure.

Holmes was up on the latest nouvelle cuisine. On many of his European sojourns he went to see the great chefs in their kitchens as well as finding time to track an assassin to a boulevard in Paris or Odessa.

He knew that the creation of fine food was based on a solid knowledge of chemistry, the use of the freshest ingredients, and the willingness to learn from the experience of master chefs all over the world.

Like his other great tome, any day now we will be blessed with the publication of The Master's Greatest Recipes.

*I give you Sherlock Holmes, who had his finger in many a pie.
To the Master.*

3) **Does this ring a Sherlock?**

Bernard Robaire pointed out that the character of Sherlock Holmes was based on the real-life Dr. Bell, a medical professor of SACD's. Attributions of this influence abound in the television series *Murder Rooms: The Dark Beginning of Sherlock Holmes*, and other media and literary sources.

4) **Non-dental plaque**

Wilfrid deFreitas showed a photograph of a bronze plaque created by the BmQ and affixed permanently to a rock at Reischenbach Falls in Switzerland. The plaque was flown over free of charge by SwissAir, and was secured with long bolts to discourage vandals with short pliers.

Patrick Campbell showed a phial of holy water from the falls, taken May 3 1992. He also produced a sliver of shale from the same location. Will this shale one day will be more valuable than a thread from the Shroud of Turin? Anything is possible.

5) **Midnight flyer**
We were shown a flyer promoting the Sherlock Holmes collection of viewing and listening materials available at the Westmount Library.

6) **Second Toast – To Mrs. Hudson**
By Rachel Alkallay
The toasts at this meeting were delivered slightly out of order in homage to the universe-at-large which some maintain is also out of order.

7) **Quiz – Results**

“The Dying Detective” prepared by David Kellett, was prefaced by an explanation by David about his lack of typing and computer skills.

David: I’m here to answer your questions.
Wilfrid: We’re here to answer yours.

The gloves came off, and the ink flew.

Possible total: 68 points
Winners were:

Rank	Name	Score	Prize
1.	Carol Abramson	59	Large Magnifying Glass
2.	Nancy Walkline	54	Medium Magnifying Glass
3.	Erica Penner	46	Small Magnifying Glass

The next quiz will be based on “The Adventure of the Lion’s Mane,” prepared by Carol Abramson.

8) **Third Toast – To The Woman**
ONE

by Joan O’Malley

Joan informed us that Irene Adler’s stage name was Lola Montez. This name got stuck in the sieve-like mind of your Lowly Scribe quite some time ago. Lola Montès, or Montez was born Elizabeth Rosanna Gilbert (possibly Limerick, Ireland, Feb. 17, 1821 – New York, January 17, 1861). Other attributions of the date and location of birth abound. She became famous and infamous as an exotic dancer, actress, courtesan, and the mistress of (Mad) King Ludwig I of Bavaria.

Lowly Scribe remembers a large painted portrait of Lola Montez skipping across a stream in Bavaria. The viewer’s focus is drawn to the water in the stream which is clear and placid enough so that it reflects perfectly the situation at the joining place of her thighs where under her petticoats, Ms Montez is enjoying the natural and invigorating central air conditioning that only a day in Bavaria can provide. The complete absence of any undergarment would dismay shareholders of the Jockey company, or Victoria’s Secret. The following excerpt from Wikipedia provides a treasure-trove of information about people’s reactions to Ms Montez, as well as to her incontestable inspiration of SACD’s Irene Adler. Keeping the following stuff in mind, can we glean any insight into

the complexity of SADC and the moral regard he may have had for his literary creation, Irene Adler? He was, after all, a respectable Victorian personage ^(by day) Here, then, is what Wikipedia offers on the subject of Lola Montez:

In 1823 the Gilberts moved to India. Shortly after arrival her father died of cholera. Her mother remarried the following year and sent Eliza back to the British Isles to live with relatives of her stepfather.

In 1837 sixteen-year-old Eliza eloped with Lieutenant Thomas James. The couple separated five years later and Eliza became an exotic dancer under a stage name. Her London debut as "Lola Montez, the Spanish dancer" in June 1843 was disrupted when she was recognized as Mrs. James. The resulting notoriety did not hurt her career and she quickly became famous both for her self-created "Tarantula Dance", and the expression "Whatever Lola wants, Lola gets." It was around this time that she became involved in the practice of living on an income from wealthy men, as their courtesan. By her late teens, Montez had become aware of the financial gains of serving as a courtesan to powerful and wealthy men. Amongst her lovers and benefactors during this time were Franz Liszt and Alexandre Dumas. Liszt had introduced her to the circle of George Sand, which was one of the most sophisticated and advanced in European society.

In 1846, she travelled to Munich, where she was discovered by, and quickly became the mistress of, Ludwig I of Bavaria. She quickly began to use her influence on the king and this made her unpopular with the local population, particularly after documents showing that she was hoping to become a naturalised Bavarian citizen and be elevated to the nobility were made public. Despite the opposition, Ludwig made her Countess of Landsfeld on his next birthday, August 25, 1847. She first met Ludwig when, as a dancer at the Bavarian Opera, he had asked her in public if her bosom was real, to which her response was to tear off enough of her garments and prove it. It seems likely that his relationship with her contributed greatly to the fall from grace of the previously popular king. In 1848 under pressure from a growing revolutionary movement Ludwig abdicated, and Lola fled Bavaria for the United States. This effectively ended her career as a courtesan.

From 1851 to 1853 she performed as a dancer and actress in the eastern United States, then moved to San Francisco in May 1853. There she married Patrick Hull in July and moved to Grass Valley, California, in August. By the mid-1850s her marriage was failing. Lola moved to Victoria, Australia to make her fortune by entertaining miners at the gold diggings during the gold-rush of the 1850s.

Historian Michael Cannon says "In September 1855 she performed her erotic Spider Dance at the Theatre Royal in Melbourne, raising her skirts so high that the audience could see she wore no underclothing at all. Next day the Argus thundered that her performance was 'utterly subversive to all ideas of public morality'. Respectable families ceased to attend the theatre, which began to show heavy losses." She spent nearly four years in Victoria. At Castlemaine in April 1856, she was "rapturously encored" after her Spider Dance in front of 400 diggers (including members of the Municipal Council who had adjourned their meeting early to attend the performance), but drew the wrath of the audience by insulting them following some mild heckling.

She earned further notoriety in Ballarat when after reading a bad review in The Ballarat Times she chased the editor, Henry Seekamp with a whip. The "Lola Montes Polka" composed by Albert Denning was inspired by this event. She later moved to New York. On June 30, 1860, she suffered a stroke and was partially paralyzed for some time.

In mid-December she had recovered enough to walk with a slight limp and went out for a stroll in the cold weather. Her life as a courtesan was over, and her money was by now gone. Lola began to seek out the word of God. In her dying days, she was cared for by a priest - though she reportedly determined first that he was not a Jesuit, having many bad memories of that order - not least from some of those who had held key posts at Ludwig's court.

She contracted pneumonia, lingering for nearly a month before dying one month short of her fortieth birthday. She is buried in Green-Wood Cemetery, in Brooklyn, New York.

LOLA MONTEZ IN FICTION

Montez was portrayed by Martine Carol in the 1955 film *Lola Montès* directed by Max Ophüls.

Montez also appears in *Royal Flash* by George MacDonald Fraser, where she has a brief affair with Harry Paget Flashman. She is also a character in the film of the same name, in which she is played by Florinda Bolkan.

Montez is featured prominently in the final installment (*Spider Dance*) of the Irene Adler mystery series by Carole Nelson Douglas. Montez is rumored to be the title character's mother.

She has been portrayed by Carmen D'Antonio in *Golden Girl* (1951), Sheila Darcy in *Wells Fargo* (1937), Yvonne De Carlo in *Black Bart* (1948), and Rita Moreno in an episode of the 1950's TV show *Tales of Wells Fargo*.

(Dear Sherlockians – Is it not astounding that the erudite writer or consortium of writers of this article failed to mention “The Woman” from “A Scandal in Bohemia?”

TWO

By Erica Penner

Somehow, Lowly Scribe is swamped by an embarrassment of riches – not one toast to The Woman, but Two!! Here is Erica's submission. The mysterious costume may be explained in part when you read the preceding bio on Lola Montez and conclude that *in flagrante* is not a spicy sauce.

When Wilfrid called me a few days ago entreating me to present the toast to The Woman he said it should be two to three minutes in length, more elaborate than the toasts at our meetings, something that had not been done before, and humorous. I found this to be a rather daunting task so I thought I would Google “Irene Adler” to get some elaborate, funny ideas. The first thing I saw was this photograph. After I recovered from the initial shock, I admit that I found it entertaining. I toyed with the idea of using it as a model for a costume as it would not require any sewing, but realized that I had no pearls. The next thing I found was this photo of Brittney Spears as Holmes, so I gave up on Google and figured out something else. I am pretty sure this has not been done before. No one else would be quite so bad.*

IRENE ADLER

I is for **I**ntelligent – she was smarter than Sherlock,
His logic and deduction she gleefully did mock.
R is for **R**eherent, Holmes' disguise she saw through,
Her own boyish attire was superior, if not new.
E is for **E**ntertainer, a former contralto in La Scala,
She also charmed fans in Poland – fa-la-la-la-la-lala.
N is for **N**ew Jersey, her place of birth,
And for Godfrey **N**orton, her bridegroom of worth.
E is for **E**agle which is Adler in German,
A wily bird of prey, as regal as **E**rmine.
A is for **A**dventuress, a woman of **A**ction,
Who inspired in men an **A**dmirable reaction.
D is for **D**istracted – was it the smoke or Irene?
The one symbolic – the other like a queen.
L is for **L**ove which Holmes disdained,
Yet for Irene his admiration remained.
E is for **E**motion, which she **E**voked in our sleuth,
A surprising, tender side in one usually uncouth.
R is for **R**ansacked – a house and a heart,
Which only proves, men like women smart.

Here's to The Woman who, from Victoria to Brittney*, continues to inspire!

* The entire BmQ apologizes to Erica for having exposed her to anything related to Brittney Spears. This was never our intention. We wish Erica a speedy recovery.

- 12) **Ahhhhh!**
We had a brief review of our annual dinner. It was generally agreed that we all preferred the locale. However, we also agreed that the food wasn't as good as we had expected and hoped. 44 people were in attendance at this meeting, compared with 54 last year.
- 13) **Are you feeling lucky?**
David Dowse suggested a Sherlockian potluck dinner. In view of one we had more than two years ago, to which exquisite delicacies were brought, this is not a bad idea.
- 14) **Fourth Toast – To The Society**
by Wilfrid deFreitas
- 15) **Unbreakable plates**
Wilfrid informed us that we may ask author Leslie Klinger for an autographed, personalized book plate for our own copies of Klinger's *Annotated Sherlock Holmes*.

- 16) **Up from the sands of time**
Cheryl Surkes announced that the Westmount Library was built in 1898. The conservatory was added in 1927, and is a miniature version of London's Palm Court Conservatory.

Cheryl asked if we would like a tour. We all enthusiastically said we would. She will arrange it.

Jack Anderson said that if it could be arranged, maybe we could get into the conservatory half an hour before the start of our next meeting.

- 17) **Book sale**
Carol Abramson said that the Sha'are Hashomayim Synagogue, 450 Kensington at Cote St. Antoine, Westmount, has closed its library and was having a book sale on Feb. 13 and 14. You see? If you'd have come to our meeting, you'd have known about it.

- 18) **Fifth Toast – To Dr. Watson**
by Patrick Campbell
(Read by Elliott Newman)

Our story for this evening is "The Adventure of the Dying Detective." Although this is one of the lesser stories, it exemplifies very clearly one of Dr. Watson's most praiseworthy characteristics, that of loyalty.

At the time of this story, Holmes and Watson had been together for some ten years, eight at Baker Street, and a further two years after Watson's marriage to Mary Morstan. Watson is summoned urgently to the bedside of his dying friend, only to be told that, "facts are facts, Watson, ... after all you are only a general practitioner with very limited experience and mediocre qualifications."

And Holmes goes on, "... shall I demonstrate your own ignorance ... What do you know ... of tapanuli(?) fever ... (or) the black Formosa corruption?"

And Holmes asks Watson to go and bring him a more competent doctor.

Watson, to his credit, does just that for his friend, and for that, and for that alone, he is entitled to our toast tonight.
To Doctor John Watson.

- 19) **Sixth Toast – To the Society**
By Geoff Dowd

In 1979, all of us here tonight were either 28 years younger, or not yet born.
In 1979 Margaret Thatcher was elected PM of Britain; not to be outdone, Canadians elected Joe Clark, happily a correctible error.

In 1979 Saddam Hussein became president of Iraq ... Things Change!
In 1979 the Sony Walkman was introduced, the Rubik Cube became an obsession for some, and Trivial Pursuit was invented.

In 1979, the Apple II Plus desktop computer, featuring an amazing 48K of computer memory, sold well for only \$2,638 US ... plus tax.
Radio hits that year included Rod Stewart's "Do you think I'm Sexy?" and "Bad Girls" by Donna Summer.

In 1979, new TV shows included *WKRP Cincinnati*, *The Dukes of Hazzard*, and *The Antiques Roadshow*. On radio, *A Radio Prairie Home Companion* made its debut and continues its run, as do other institutions.

In May of 1979, Wilfrid deFreitas and David Dowse put out the call for Montreal Sherlockians to gather and share their mutual interest in the Master, both the Canon itself, and the world of imagination inspired by the stories. The Bimetallic Question was born, and thrives yet. In this company of friends new and old, it may no longer be 1979, and we may be a little older, but it's always 1895.

In 2007, unfortunately, Rod Stewart still asks whether we think he's sexy: serious thinker everywhere are divided on this point. That the Bimetallic Question thrives yet is clear. The Society's motto, *venation adest* – the hunt has begun – reminds us that the adventure of enjoying our varied interests in the Mater and his Victorian world is not a solitary pursuit, and that our sharing of Sherlockian enthusiasms in fine company and comfortable locales is a continuing quest made possible by this association, both its founders, and those who've come after. Ladies and gentlemen, I give you the Society.

Our dear friends, you would confer a great favour upon us by joining us at the next meeting of "THE BIMETALLIC QUESTION" which is being held on Thursday, April 5th, 2007, at 6:30 p.m.

For the latest society news or updates on our history, please go to www.bimetallicquestion.org