



THE BIMETALLIC QUESTION

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VENATIO ADEST

Minutes of the meeting of The Bimetallic Question August 1st, 2013

Date of next meeting

The next meeting will take place on
Thursday, **October 3rd, 2013**
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
Shoscombe Old Place"**
prepared by Rachel Alkallay

Minutes of the MEETING of the BIMETALLIC QUESTION held on Thursday, August 1, 2013 at the Westmount Library (Westmount Room), 4574 Sherbrooke Street West, Westmount, Quebec.

Present: Carol Abramson, Tash Akkerman, Rachel Alkallay, Paul Billette, Louise Corda, Wilfrid de Freitas, David Dowse, Susan Fitch, Chris Herten-Greaven, Raf Jans, Erica Penner, Arlene Scher, Rebecca Stacey
Guests: Carole Gossiaux, Tom Hugher, Anne Millar, Lee Miller, Luke Miller, Tessa Miller, Vidya Sigh
Regrets: Maureen Anderson, Jack Anderson, Patrick Campbell, Kayla Piecaitis, Elliot Newman, Karl Raudsepp

CALL TO ORDER: After a reconfiguration of the tables, the meeting was called to order twice, first at 6:40 by David Dowse, and then once more by our (slightly delayed) Sovereign Chris Herten-Greaven, just after 7:00pm.

1. A Celebration is in Order

Secret details concerning the surprise-gathering for Bimetallic Question's esteemed member Patrick Campbell's 90th birthday were discussed. The BBQ will take place on September 1st at the Greene Centre in Westmount.

2. First Toast - To the Master

By Rebecca Stacey

For Rebecca's toast, she presented a mini-quiz, inviting those in attendance to match the Holmesian quotation to the Holmesian actor:

[My mother] sees a lot of me in Sherlock which both makes her laugh and is slightly embarrassing. I suppose it's my rushing around, my impatience. I came late to Sherlock Holmes. I arrived about three years ago and am still arriving; I have read them all now. I began at the beginning and in A Study in Scarlet I realised the books are the blueprint for any characterisation and make playing Sherlock a gift I think it's a very apparent in the book that his glee and his joy comes at the beginning of the case and when he's solved it. It's all about the game. The game is on, the hunt is on. He's an animal on the scent.

- Benedict Cumberbatch

"Well, I don't mind, now, I mean . . . Uh, there was a time when people would say, 'How do you enjoy playing Holmes?' and I would say, 'I wouldn't cross the street to meet him'. I then discovered that, of course, I meant that he wouldn't cross the street to meet me. -- I'm so miscast; I'm a romantic-heroic actor. So I was terribly aware that I had to hide an awful lot of me, and in so doing I think .. maybe sometimes [I'm] even slightly rude. In fact Dame Jean Conan Doyle did once say to me, 'I don't think my father meant You-Know-Who to be quite so rude', and I said, 'I'm terribly sorry, I'm just trying to hide me'."

- Jeremy Brett

"The real center of the story is his relationship with Watson. -- to tell you the truth, the more you watch the old stuff, the more you realize how not traditional it is—it's not like the stories at all. Part of the tableau in which Holmes is always thought of is him, in profile, with a deerstalker hat and with a curved pipe in his mouth. -- When I see Holmes portrayed with those two props now, I always think, "Really? That's not what the writer meant. I really wanted to portray Holmes as Doyle wrote him. So I went and hung out with him, I read through his book, I read all of them. [...] There have been so many legacies that respond to Holmes's character. He can be a little cocksure and full of himself, but Holmes is also like that freaky roommate everybody has once in their life, that guy who is a math genius but could never pay his part of the rent. And at the same time, he has this dedication to doing the right thing to the exclusion of doing all other things. He sacrifices everything so he can become better at what he does. As a character actor, I found that trait endlessly compelling." - **Robert Downey Jr**

"In the books, I found him to be a much more understanding guy. I feel that he really likes people a little bit more than I had seen recently -- not that he can necessarily communicate that very well. He likes the underdog, and he likes people who are downtrodden, who are having a hard time. He generally wants to help. I found him to be a much more helpful person, so I tried to put a bit of that in, even though he doesn't quite pull it off."

- Jonny Lee Miller

3. Second Toast - To Doctor Watson

by Rachel Alkallay

(Due to a number of unavoidable circumstances, this toast was improvised. I've done my best to transcribe them from the recording, and take full responsibility for any unintentional mis-transcription and/or omissions)

Doctor Watson is a bit of an underappreciated character, he's often portrayed as a bit of a dolt or a fop, but the truth is -- after all -- that he was a doctor. He was quite an intelligent fellow. But knowing that the Master -- being the Master -- did not like to be shown up, he became very adept at playing his role. Very often, he acted as a conduit for Holmes' genius, and it was his words that clued-in Holmes; aiding him in his quest to unravel the case.

He always struck me as the kind of friend that would be good to have. Someone you could call up at three in the morning and drag out of bed and say 'come on, we have an adventure to go on' and he's always be ready to go along with you. That is my kind of friend, someone who you can call upon who is willing to and would drop everything to go with you on an adventure. That is a friend.

To one half of one of the greatest friendships of all - to Doctor Watson!

4. Woodrow & House

In response to the toast, Chris brought up *another* of history's greatest friendships; that of **Woodrow Wilson** and **Edward Mandell House** (July 26, 1858 – March 28, 1938) who was a renowned American diplomat, politician, and presidential advisor. Commonly known by the title of **Colonel House**, although he had no military experience, he had enormous personal influence with [Wilson](#) as his foreign policy advisor throughout [World War I](#).

5. Is Watson Bumbling, or Bumbling Watson?

Wilfrid de Freitas mentioned that, perhaps the most well-known of the Watsons, Nigel Bruce, was not particularly Watson-like at all. And while he's remembered for his comic-relief and fumbling ineptitude, it's barely a reflection of how the good doctor appeared in the canon at all.

6. Meretricious

A quote from the recent Gazette's Mystery Puzzle:

"It is not really difficult to construct a series of inferences, each dependent upon its predecessor and each simple in itself. If, after doing so, one simply knocks out all the central inferences and presents one's audience with the starting-point and the

conclusion, one may produce a startling though perhaps a meretricious effect."

Which brought about a discussion on the definition(s) of meretricious:

1. Apparently attractive but having in reality no value or integrity: "meretricious souvenirs for the tourist trade".
2. False
3. Also, occasionally related to a prostitute, or appearing as a prostitute.

7. Summer Theatre - The Hound of the Baskervilles & Segal Theatre Reviewed.

Theatre Lac Brome put on a production of *The Hound* during their summer season: *Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's most celebrated Sherlock Holmes story gets a gloriously funny makeover. When Sir Charles Baskerville is found dead on his estate, with a look of terror still etched on his face and the paw prints of a gigantic hound beside his body, the great detective Sherlock Holmes is summoned from Baker Street, with Dr Watson in tow, to unravel the mysteries surrounding his death, the ancient curse of the Hound of the Baskervilles...*

Tash Akkerman, Kayla Piecaitis, Paul Billette and Rebecca Stacey were able to attend a performance in late July. Those in attendance at the meeting all agreed that the comedic interpretation of the Conan Doyle story was delightful. Paul had this to say about the experience: *"It was a gallop -- a romp -- it was a belly-laugh comedy. It was really well done. A British play, (adapted by Steven Canny & John Nicholson) inspired by The Hound of the Baskerville, and the acting was just superb. They engaged with the audience; were spot-on and clever with their improvised responses."*

Rebecca added: *"I really enjoyed it -- I had no idea, going in, that it was a comedy. It was incredibly well-done. I like theatre that engages with the audience, mostly because I think it reflects the unique quality of theatre which you can't get with film and television. They basically destroyed the fourth wall, It reminded me a lot, style-wise, of the movie Clue -- it was similarly fast and high-energy."*

Paul Donnelly, of the Gazette, reviewed the *Sherlock Holmes* play. He said that the play "has some of the modern tendency to colloquialise the character. But [in this] he remains, sans cellphone and riding invisible horse-drawn carriages, in the Victorian era where he belongs. [Baruchel's] energetic portrayal fits director Andrew Shaver's beautifully staged production of Kramer's irreverent parody based on several Conan Doyle works and is surrounded by an outstanding ensemble."

8. Sherlock Holmes - Tragically Unoriginal

David Dowse mentioned that, while he enjoyed the performance, he had hoped for more new-Holmes material and found the mashed-up retelling of old stories and the rehashing of tried-and-true Holmes tropes to be a bit disappointing.

Rebecca agreed, citing the Robert Downey Jr. films as -- while being a different interpretation of Holmes -- were an original story, and expressing that she feels that Holmes is so much a part of public consciousness that a new story is not necessarily too much to ask for. Though it has on occasion been done poorly -- mentioning *Sherlock Holmes and the Titanic Tragedy* as an example of this.

Another example of a tragic Holmes outing was invoked by Anne Millar, the novel *The Italian Secretary* which involves *actual* ghosts and was rather disappointing. Millar expressed there was simply not enough gin in the world to help this particular pastiche go down smoothly.

Anne concluded on a counter-point, however. Bringing up the fact that in one of the first Holmes-in-Film outings, the silent movie with John Barrymore, they combine interpretive new elements (such as having Holmes and Watson meet in university) with old stories and ideas and that sometimes, when confronted with zany situations like Holmes on the Titanic, facing ghosts or Dracula, one can almost find themselves longing for something recognisable and concretely *Sherlock Holmes* in the mix.

9. Приключения Шерлока Холмса и доктора Ватсона

David suggested, in the quest for something new and something *Sherlock*, the society move to a showing of the incredible Russian Holmes series at the February meeting. Tash raised the point that perhaps we should consider a between-meeting night for the viewing, and it was decided that we decided to plan the night for some time in November. Stay tuned for more information!

10. Baker Street Sale

David Dowse is offering up a few of his Holmes-items for sale to interested collectors. He brought in (and promptly sold) a few examples of his collection at the meeting and will be offering up more Holmesian memorabilia at the October meeting.

Tash Akkerman offered up the services of her mother, a professional archivist, to organise and properly catalog the past minutes and quizzes of the society. Hopefully, making them available electronically so that the past 35 years of minutes can always be accessed and enjoyed by present-and-future Bimetallic Questioners.

11. God for Harry, England, and Saint George

Wilfrid de Freitas brought to our attention that there are Sherlock Holmes references in Shakespeare. (Although Rebecca insisted that if we accept the modern definition of the direction of time, it would have to be that there are Shakespeare references in

Sherlock Holmes. Unless, of course, Conan Doyle had a time machine. Evidence pending.) The Society's motto: *Venatio Adest* or "The Game is Afoot" appears in King Henry V, Act 3 Scene 1 –

*I see you stand like greyhounds in the slips,
Straining upon the start. The game's afoot:
Follow your spirit, and upon this charge
Cry 'God for Harry, England, and Saint George!'*

12. Third Toast - To the Woman

Written by Elliot Newman; delivered by David Dowse

Six months ago, almost to the day, I delivered what I thought was a pretty lucid and enlightened toast to The Woman, about her origins in the real-life Lola Montez (a pseudonym) with references to a wide-ranging career with possible borderline or bipolar overtones. What a crazy and at times exalted life Señorita Montez pursued. Mistress to mad King Ludwig of Bavaria, embroiled in the periphery of a national revolt, dance hall personality in the goldfields of Australia and California, and at last, an invalid in New York City where she is buried, she was truly a colorful soul with tons more talent than Xaviera Hollander.

Leave it to the consummate skill, finesse, and artistry of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle to skim the dross from such a figure and recreate her on a canvas of allure, intrigue, subtlety, and power. With Doyle, less is more. He wrote away the excess of a real life, and created a larger-than-life heroine who has taught millions the virtue of feminine mystique.

Ladies and Gentlemen of the Society, whatever your imagination brings you, and wherever it takes you

I give you The Woman, and usher you into the circle of a distinctive brand of Literary Genius.

13. The Quiz?

Unfortunately, due to a power outage, Rachel Alkallay's "**Shoscombe Old Place**" quiz was not in attendance. The quiz sent its regrets, and promises to be in full-form at the October meeting.

14. From Russia with Love

Our first Show and Tell item of the evening was a delightful set of Sherlock Holmes nesting dolls, brought in by Anne Millar. The dolls were colourfully painted and featured Holmes, a very fancy Watson, Lestrade, a very Lex-Luther-looking Moriarty (or possibly Mycroft) and -- last but certainly not least -- the hound of the Baskervilles

(or alternatively, perhaps Holmes faithful four-legged companion in *Sign of Four*, the detective more reliable than all of Scotland Yard: Toby!...depicted viciously.)

Anne also wore some sporting Holmesian fashion, showing off a *Sherlock* T-shirt with a screen print of a classic Batman comic book cover re-interpreted to feature Benedict Cumberbatch and Martin Freeman as Batman and Robin.

15. Cleanliness is Next to Godliness

Tessa Miller presented our second showcased item -- an exciting used bookstore find: an interesting Victorian scrapbook, featuring posters and artwork from the era which included a lovely advertisement for **Hudson's Soap**.

16. Tag - You're It!

Rebecca passed around a set of custom made British Military Captain John Watson (RAMC) identification tags which she had made to rival Tash Akkerman's similar set of Sebastian Moran tags. Watson's military number featured on the tags, 74375625 spells out SHERLOCK if dialed into a telephone.

17. Michael Dirda - On Conan Doyle

Tash Akkerman brought in Michael's book, bringing special attention to the fact that the book goes into some detail about the origins of a notorious Holmes character, Langdale Pike. Pike is a gossipmonger whose columns are published in numerous magazines and newspapers (referred to as the "garbage papers" by Watson). He's introduced in *The Adventure of the Three Gables*, he does not actually appear in the story itself and is only referred to by Watson who describes Pike as "strange" and "languid" and states that all of Pike's waking hours are spent "in the bow window of a St. James's Street club".

But the character has been expanded on elsewhere. In William S. Baring-Gould's biography of Sherlock Holmes it is claimed that Pike is a college acquaintance of Holmes who encourages a young Holmes to try his hand at acting. Here his real name is given as 'Lord Peter'. In Bert Coules' radio play, Pike's real name is said to be Clarence Gable. Here he is also an old school-friend of Holmes's and is nervous of strangers and reluctant to leave his club for this reason.

The name Langdale Pike is probably taken from Great Langdale in a valley in the Lake District National Park in the county of Cumbria, in the northwest of England. It is often simply referred to as Langdale, and one of the best known features of Great Langdale are the Langdale Pikes, a group of peaks on the northern side of the dale.

18. Fourth Toast - To Hudson

by Tessa Miller

To Sherlock Holmes, she was always the... no hang on, wrong woman. But truly, Hudson was as essential to Holmes' work as the men of Scotland Yard. Were it not for her and 221B, Holmes might still have been living in his old flat on Montague Street, never to have met his faithful biographer that day in 1881. We would have no stories to read and Holmes would have no faithful friend.

Her role in Watson and Holmes' lives did not end in providing a place to live. She gave them food, cleaned the flat, showed clients in, and with a saintly amount of patience and forgiveness, did not kick either of them out when Holmes decided to doodle on her walls with a revolver. Perhaps more impressive, she crawled across the floor to slightly move a wax mannequin of Holmes in *The Empty House*, despite knowing that she was going to be shot at, and despite Holmes nearly giving her a heart attack earlier in the day.

To the clients and criminals that visited Baker Street, Hudson was nothing more than a landlady, unimportant and forgettable when compared to the detective himself. But, though she was not always mentioned in the stories, she is always present, and a Baker Street without Hudson is not a Baker Street at all. To Hudson.

19. Mysterious Murdoch.

The Murdoch Mysteries episode "A Study in Sherlock" featured a character who believed he was Sherlock Holmes. A traumatic childhood event has the man suppress his real identity and live instead as Sherlock Holmes. It also features an appearance by Arthur Conan Doyle, who was apparently visiting Toronto at the time. The official episode synopsis is as follows: *After an armed robber is murdered by his accomplice during a heist, Murdoch's prime suspect is an incredibly perceptive man who claims to be Sherlock Holmes. Geraint Wyn Davies makes a brief return appearance as Arthur Conan Doyle.* David Dowse was very impressed with the actor playing the character who thought he was Holmes was well-done, but found the Conan Doyle character left much to be desired.

20. Modern Interest -- or Timeless Treasure?

Paul Billette posed a question: the 21st Century seems to have erupted with an interest in Sherlock Holmes, with the Robert Downey Jr and Jude Law films, *Sherlock*, *Elementary* and the recent stage productions. He was curious as to what the society thought was the reason behind the recent resurrection.

Rebecca answered explaining that while she was doing her research for the quotes she used in her toast, she came across Benedict Cumberbatch's explanation as to why Holmes had suddenly leapt to the forefront of pop culture: the copyright on the

Sherlock Holmes works has expired, allowing more people to use and interpret the original material

Paul continued to wonder what it was about these characters, and what is happening in our society now that makes these characters, so interesting, to which Rebecca argued that the interest in that Holmes-Watson relationship has never gone away and that numerous characters in film and television specifically are modeled after the original dynamic duo, such as Kirk and Spock. Now that the modern trend is to reboot or rehash everything (once again, like Star Trek) it only makes sense that instead of creating characters based on Conan Doyle's, we're simply calling them Sherlock Holmes and John Watson once again.

David Dowse added that there is so much within the stories themselves, the well-written lines and meaty characterisation that so warrants revisiting and reuse that it certainly makes sense to want to bring it all to the forefront once again.

21. Sixth Toast - To the Society

by Carol Abramson

Society - a gathering, a fellowship, a company. All of these descriptions are an apt fit for our Society, the Bimetallic Question. As we gather bi-monthly in this beautiful and appropriate space, it is for the purpose of sharing the fellowship of others in our quest, the study of the Master. Together we share knowledge, explore interests, and imbibe a few spirits to warm the night. The company is jovial, the topics discussed thought-provoking. In this group all are equal members, and all express their options without hesitation. The Master has brought us all together, the warmth of Society keeps us coming back.

To the Society.

In Conclusion

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, October 3rd, 2013, at 6:30 p.m. Bring a friend. Bring two. Airport shuttle available. For the latest society news or updates on our history, please go to www.bimetallicquestion.org

In Elliott Newman's absence, these minutes were prepared by Rebecca Stacey, who did her very best and has never done them before. She welcomes your critiques, your corrections and your inquiries

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