



THE BIMETALLIC QUESTION

Box 883 Stock Exchange Tower
Montreal, Canada H4Z 1K2

MINUTES of the meeting of the BIMETALLIC QUESTION February 2, 2005

DUES ARE DUE!

If your copy of these minutes has a red "X" on the front page, it means we haven't received your dues for 2006. If you'd like to remain a member and continue receiving the highly entertaining minutes of our bi-monthly meetings, please send your cheque for \$18 payable to The Bimetallic Question, right away to the address below:

Wilfrid de Freitas
369 Kitchener Avenue
Westmount, Que.
H3Z 2G1

Date of next meeting

The next meeting will take place on:
Thursday, April 6, 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 Yellow Face"
prepared by Rachel Alkallay. and
based on the Baring-Gould edition.

Minutes of the MEETING of the BIMETALLIC QUESTION held on Thursday, February 2nd, 2006 at the Westmount Library (Westmount Room), 4574 Sherbrooke Street West, Westmount, Quebec.

Present: Carol Abramson, Albert B. Aikman, Rachel Alkallay, Jack Anderson, Maureen Anderson, Paul Billette, Richard Buche, Patrick Campbell, Renée Charron, John Coyne (guest), Wilfrid deFreitas, David Dowse, David Kellett, Elliott Newman, Anita Miller, Mireille Patoine (reporter from the *Westmount Examiner*), Erica Penner, Arlene Scher, Cheryl Surkes.

Regrets: Excellent meeting, no regrets.

Graphic Detection Strikes the Bimetallic Question

Dot your I's!
Cross your T's!
Repent before it is too late!

Early arrivals at the February 2 meeting of the Bimetallic Question were met with a strange request from a usually lucid former Sovereign who presented everyone with a piece of paper, requesting that we:

- Print our name at the top;
- Write our signature beside it;
- Fold back the paper concealing what we had written; and
- Copy a dictated sentence.

Following this exercise, David Dowse collected all of the papers. He promised that at our next meeting, he will provide a handwriting-based character analysis for each of us. Despite the expected guffaws, there were a few concerned facial expressions as our amateur graphologist carefully filed away the potentially lethal documents in his briefcase.

CALL TO ORDER:

In the absence of our Sovereign Paul Billette who appeared a few moments later, David Dowse called the meeting to order at 6:32 p.m.

ITEMS OF BUSINESS AND GENTLE TRANSACTION:

1) **A Moveable Feast**

It was pointed out that our annual banquet had had the privilege of hosting four members from the Jane Austen Society. Furthermore, two women who attended the dinner came to tonight's meeting. The corollary is that if we have dinners more frequently and invite non-members, we will be able to enjoy greater attendance at our meetings – and potentially greater membership!

2) **Toast to Dr. Watson**

by Albert Aikman

Tonight's second toast came first because the first toast-giver was late. We apologize for any inconvenience.

3) **Show and Tell I**

- a) Patrick Campbell showed a letter from a former Bimetallic Question member. The former member in question is Marcus Geisser, and here's a quote from his recent letter "just before I left for Darfur, West Sudan." Patrick also showed a post card featuring a picture of a 1924 Red Label Bentley, owned and splendidly restored by a friend of his.
- b) Patrick reminded us of the early booking discount at the end of March to attend the Toronto Bootmakers' Symposium: "ACD at 35" in October.
- c) Rachel Alkallay pointed out that certain paid-up members continue not to receive their BmQ Minutes. These omissions have been rectified.
- d) Paul Billette showed a flyer produced by the Redpath Museum, describing a two-hour walking tour of Old Montreal. Part of the tour shows where fossils are embedded in the stones, much like stoned fossils embedded at the bar at Thursday's downtown. We discussed the possibility of having a BmQ outing in May, when, presumably, the weather turns warmer. Elliott Newman mentioned that our confrères (confrèthren?) of the Vermont Goose Club loved Old Montreal, and would we like to think about inviting them?
- e) Joan O'Malley passed around two sheets to each person: a phrenology diagram and three paragraphs from two of the canon stories: "The Adventure of the Dying Detective," and "A Study in Scarlet." She then circulated a curious object floating in fluid in a glass case, and she asked us to make a connection between the sheets and the object. Around the time it was revealed that it was a brain segment floating in the glass case, a few otherwise stalwart BmQ members decided to leave the room for a while. This illustration of an out-of-body experience was easy enough to rectify, since all they had to do was walk out of the Reading Room with their bodies, and come back when it was convenient. Far more complicated and challenging, however, was the dismal plight of some cadaver in the McGill Pathology department that could not reverse its out-of-brain experience. It makes you think. Which is difficult when all or part of your brain is – you know, like ... gone?
All of which was Joan's unforgettable and most appreciated way of illustrating for us Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's use of phrenology to demonstrate intellectual capacity through the size and development of the brain.
Joan also pointed out that the collection of body parts, ostensibly for scientific purposes, is a far-from-recent phenomenon. For example, Sir William Osler's brain was removed and sectioned in Philadelphia. The US army still has a collection of 150,000 body parts proudly showing gunshot wounds and other injuries.
- f) Wilfrid deFreitas brought in a copy of the *London Times* of 1891, and referred to the "agony" column often referred to by Holmes in connection with his cases". Paul Billette added that these columns were still popular through the 1970s.

- g) Rachel Alkallay noted that she had been unable to wear her highly publicized cape because it does not exist. This is not a repeat of the story about the Emperor's new clothes. Rather, it is the sad tale of a clothing pattern, a fabric, and not enough information. The story is that yes, Rachel was quite intending to appear at our recent banquet, resplendent in a flowing velvet cape. We feel certain she would have whirled and twirled just to demonstrate the dramatic helicopter effect that sometimes results from such a maneuver. However, alas, Rachel could not find a piece of velvet wide enough to conform with the pattern she had chosen, and further alas, the cape was not to be for this year. However again, and with it the triumphant chase music from Rossini's *William Tell* overture, Cheryl Surkes rode in to the rescue with the name of Les Tissures Doré, a specialty fabric store at 5425 Casgrain. And you thought all we did was talk about the WGCD! Cheryl is an interior designer among other accomplishments, and we trust that now Rachel will be able to source the 150-cm.-wide velvet for her cape and we will all have the opportunity of seeing the famous before long. Rachel, what color is the satin lining? Oh, wow!

4) **Toast to the Master**

by Joan O'Malley

Tonight's first toast came second due to reasons noted above.

I have noticed that a number of toasts begin with the words 'I looked on the web ...' Well, in preparation for my toast to the Master this evening, I looked on the web. I was immediately launched onto a sea of more than a half-million web sites about the translations of the Canon into 63 languages, plus Braille and shorthand, the writings about the Writings, Sherlockians and their societies, memorials and memorabilia, games, puzzles and quizzes, phonograph records, audio and video tapes, compact discs, laser discs, ballets, films, musicals, operettas, plays, radio and television programs, parodies and pastiches, children's books, cartoons, comics, and a multitude of other items – from advertisements for penis enlargers (STOP!!! Your devoted scribe has to know: was Sherlock ...{gasp} small?) to an invitation to stay with the real Holmes for a mere \$699 US per night.

I calculated that it would be faster to get inspiration by reading through the 1300 pages of my Annotated Sherlock Holmes than wade through the material I found on the web.

Serendipitously, I found an interesting article entitled, 'What is it that we love in Sherlock Holmes?' The author theorizes that we love the Master because of the period he recalls: a kinder, gentler bygone era when we knew who the good guys were and who the bad ones were.

In spite of my relief to have found the inspiration for my toast, I proceeded with caution.

I remembered the following pronouncement made by Holmes in 'A Scandal in Bohemia:' 'It is a capital mistake to theorize before one has data. Insensibly, one begins to twist facts to suit theories, instead of theories to suit facts.'

I am sure the Master would approve of my technique. First, let us look at the question, 'What is it that we love in Sherlock Holmes?' Well, first things first. Let us not begin by begging the question. Do we indeed love Sherlock Holmes? What is there about Holmes that is lovable? Let us see:

1. He attended Cambridge for three years and Oxford for two years without being admitted to a degree.
2. He was still living with a roommate until past middle age, did not seem to be able to have a stable relationship with his family, or the capacity to build a relationship with a woman.
3. According to Watson, he never took exercise for its own sake.
4. He was an incessant pipe smoker. His left canine tooth was missing, and he was a sufferer of chronic pyorrhea along with his tobacco-stained teeth.
5. By September 1888 he indulged in 7% cocaine; perhaps, as it has been suggested, to relieve the chronic dental pain.
6. He did not seem to have a job.

Well, Sherlock Holmes is starting to sound like a poor excuse for a human being. But wait, that is perhaps why we love him. He sounds real! He is so utterly, truly, really human, with faults, foibles, and problems: he is real! Please raise your glass to a real fellow human being: To the Master.

5. Show and Tell II

- h. Rachel discussed the formulaic structure of the old Nancy Drew mystery series. She demonstrated true reverence for the title character as follows: "Nancy was so perfect. That's why I read her, but (that's) also why I can't stand her."
Jack Anderson noted that writers of those series of novels (Nancy Drew, The Hardy Boys, Judy Bolton) were at one point paid \$30 per full-length novel. According to Jack, in many cases, none of the credited "authors" were the author we had grown to revere. However, Jack observed that the first 29 Hardy Boys novels were written by a Canadian. After 1960, the series became "trendy" and not quite as appealing as the earlier books. For those of us to whom Fenton W. Dixon was heroically elevated to godlike status as the writer of the Hardy Boys series, imagine the emotional crash when he was discovered to be an assemblage of androgynous body parts, various heads, different-sized feet. No wonder we grew up with identity problems! The heroes we had built up in our minds were never there at all!
- i. David Dowse shared *The Big Over Easy* novel with us. Its main character is the detective Jack Spratt and his assistant is Mary Mary (in that order). Together they are investigating the murder of Humpty Dumpty.

6. Toast to The Woman

by David Dowse

(Entitled "To the Woman – Another Point of View", this is an insightful and original composition, and not reproduced from the web or a book.)

It seems an up-and-coming European potentate fancies that he has become her Prince Charming and that she is madly in love with him.

Can you imagine a woman like Irene Adler being in love with this egotistical, flamboyant buffoon?

Hardly!

I feel that all Irene wanted from this Prince was an arm to hold onto while she moved in exalted circles, where she could radiate her charms and intelligence. All he was to her was a ticket to power.

Then what happens? The Prince no longer finds her suitable company, or should we believe that it was really Irene Adler who finally realizes the worthlessness of the shallow man and decides to drop *him*. She sees that he is only a puppet for much stronger forces and that any further attachment to this Prince would not advance her aims.

It is Irene Adler who must divorce herself from this man's petty irrational emotions of obsession and fear. She flees to London not with jewels or gold but with a simple moment of a briefly enjoyable but quickly-to-be-forgotten interlude in her life.

Then this proud, abandoned clown concocts a fairy tale to dupe the great Sherlock Holmes into enacting his revenge against Irene Adler. The elaborate plot, the many clever disguises, the extravagantly orchestrated ruse, all were – I suppose – amusingly observed by this master artist, Irene Adler. In the end she gives in to Holmes, admitting that her small souvenir is not worth the effort and trouble. She lets Holmes have the letters.

We must ask ourselves: what was Irene Adler's opinion of Holmes?

I feel that she would have been disappointed in Holmes, a man about whom she had undoubtedly heard, a man she would have like to meet under entirely different circumstances. I think she would have expected Sherlock Holmes to dismiss the inferior Prince with a mere wave of his hand. She perhaps would have envisioned that she and Holmes could together have made a great team.

Alas, it was not to be.

All the great Sherlock Holmes turned out to be was an errand boy.

Only in London, you say. Pity.

I give you a superior person, Irene Adler.

7. Quiz

“The Adventure of the Solitary Cyclist”

Presented by: Carol Abramson

Possible Total: 83

Winners were:

Rank	Name	Score
1.	Rachel Alkallay	67½
2.	David Kellett	67
3.	Wilfrid de Freitas	62

The 1st and 2nd prizewinners received books.

Next quiz will be based on “The Adventure of the Yellow Face,” prepared by Rachel Alkallay.

8. Toast to Mrs. Hudson

by Erica Penner

I first read the complete Sherlock Holmes when I was a teenager and remember that I wanted to know more about Mrs. Hudson whom I found fascinating. Hers was not an easy task – Holmes was moody, often stoned, untidy, and rude. He shot his pistol indoors, conducted smelly science experiments, and had seedy callers arrive at abnormal hours. I believe that she was well paid for her rooms and her services, including, I suppose, taking care of Holmes’s disgusting undercover disguises. Surely an easier, cleaner, and nicer tenant could be found? But where is the thrill in that? I do not think she did the job for money or out of generosity of spirit or compassion. I think it gave her a rush.

At a time when women had few options Mrs. Hudson lived vicariously through Sherlock Holmes. She hovered, lingered, and hung around because it was exciting. She liked to watch. Sometimes she was asked by Holmes to participate in some way and she never refused even if she did not know the purpose or the risk. In *The Sign of Four* Holmes cautioned Watson not to tell women too much because they “are never to be entirely trusted – not the best of them”. In *A Scandal in Bohemia* Holmes said, “Women are naturally secretive, and they like to do their own secreting.” He knew.

So here is to Mrs. Hudson – the luckiest fly-on-the-wall I can imagine and a girl who likes to have fun!

9. Show and Tell III

- j. David Dowse shared some observations on “The Disappearance of Lady Frances Carfax,” the story of a con man preying on wealthy, unattached women. Holmes was brought in because of the disappearance of Lady Frances.

David took issue with a few flaws in logic, notably:

- Why didn't Holmes stake out the pawnbrokers around London? After all, it was only by coincidence that Green met the woman pawning a jewel in one of the shops.
- The critical point was: getting a search warrant. Why couldn't Holmes's reputation suffice to secure a warrant?
- Why didn't Holy Peters dispose of Lady Frances sooner? Why did he bother bringing her back to London? Peters was risking everything by bringing her back. Holmes should have known that Peters would have wanted to kill Lady Frances because he was a hardened criminal. Why then did Holmes declare: “These people had never, to my knowledge, done a murder.” It would have been logical to assume that they would stop at nothing, not even murder.
- Why is Holmes so sidetracked that he allows Peters and his wife to escape?
- With the house surrounded by police, how was it possible for them to escape?

Joan O'Malley reminded us of the Victorian fear of being buried alive. This image often appeared in Victorian Gothic stories of horror, notably the stories of Edgar Allan Poe and many others. This fear accounted for the reluctance to submit to anesthetic in surgery. The image of the dead/undead prevailed in British culture and literature prior to the Victorian age. For example, the image of the Frankenstein monster evolved from this philosophy. The fear of being buried alive also gave rise to the bell string in the coffin: anyone underground could tug on the string and presumably, an attendant in the graveyard would come running, disinter the victim, dust him or her off, and life would go on.

10. Toast to the Society by Anita Miller

To Mr. Sherlock Holmes:

We of the Montreal Chapter of the Sherlock Holmes Society can't find the words to thank you for introducing us to such diverse, fascinating personalities, as alive today as when you brought them onto the scene: Watson, The Woman (Irene Adler), Mrs. Hudson, Moriarty. They are unique and vibrant. What other fictional characters, from Frankenstein to Rob Roy to Emma, have ever received post cards and letters forwarded to them by the post office from the four corners of the world, with their senders waiting with bated breath for a reply? At 152 years of age you haven't lost your ever-growing army of fans. Your every adventure sends chills up and down our collective spines.

Your genius lives on. We stand in awe.

11. Show and Tell IV

- k. Wilfrid de Freitas noted that for years we've been reciting an incomplete Musgrave Ritual at our annual dinner. The omission has been rectified.
- l. Richard Buche delivered a report on the annual dinner:
 - "The best dinner I've ever seen ... It was wonderful"
 - "The room was divided, giving us enough area to mingle. There was plenty of space."
 - Our speaker was okay, but not everyone was enthusiastic about him.
 - Last year's speaker, Michael Blair was about to have a book launching from 7-9 p.m. at the Nicholas Hoare bookshop on Green Avenue.

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 6th, 2006, at 6:30 p.m.

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

