



THE BIMETALLIC QUESTION

Box 883 Stock Exchange Tower
Montreal, Canada H4Z 1K2

WANTED!

A new Sovereign for The Bimetallic Question.

It's probably escaped your notice that Paul Billette is now into his third year as our Sovereign and, understandably, he'd like to hand over the reins (or should that be reign?) to someone else. The Sovereign's principal official duties are presiding over our bi-monthly meetings and the annual Birthday Dinner in January. Unofficially, it depends on how involved one wishes to get but, like any job, it's what you bring to it that makes it rewarding. There's a good back-up team in place for the other positions which enable the Society to run smoothly, but the secret is having the right person at the helm - and Paul has certainly been that!

Please consider this matter carefully. The pay is lousy but if you'd still like to offer your services contact Wilfrid de Freitas by October 31st, at the number/e-mail below. On the other hand, if you think someone else in particular would fit the bill, you can let him know this too. Remember, our Society depends on its members to keep it going, so if you'd like to help in any other way let's discuss it!

Tel: (514) 935 - 9581
wilfrid@defreitasbooks.com

MINUTES
of the meeting
of the
BIMETALLIC QUESTION
August 3, 2006

Date of next meeting

The next meeting will take place on
Thursday, October 5th, 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 Ryegate Puzzle”
prepared by David Kellett.

Minutes of the MEETING of the BIMETALLIC QUESTION held on Thursday, August 5th, 2006 at the Westmount Library (Westmount Room), 4574 Sherbrooke Street West, Westmount, Quebec.

Present: Carol Abramson, Jack Anderson, Maureen Anderson, Stanley Baker, Mac Belfer, Paul Billette, Donna Burne, Patrick Campbell, John Coyne, David Dowse, Tanya Iermieri (*Westmount Examiner*), David Kellett, Aimi Kuura, Anita Miller, Elliott Newman, Joan O'Malley, Kathryn Radford, Bernard Robaire, Janet Small, Cheryl Surkes.

Regrets: Rachel Alkallay, Wilfrid de Freitas, Erica Penner.

CALL TO ORDER:

Our Sovereign Paul Billette called the meeting to order at 6:38 p.m.
Due to the new attendees, round-table introductions were made.

ITEMS OF BUSINESS AND GENTLE TRANSACTION

(Incorporating Show & Tell, Stand & Deliver, Cease & Desist, Stir & Fry):

1) **All Write**

Paul Billette introduced David Dowse and his long-awaited analysis of our handwriting taken from samples of seventeen attendees (34 hands) of last February's meeting.

Each person provided a brief writing sample on a sheet of paper.

While each paper was identified at the very top of the sheet, David had asked us to fold back the sheet so he would not be able to see our names while he was doing the analysis.

The technique for the analysis was an article on handwriting, which provided instruction how to relate a person's writing characteristics to their personality.

David announced that it was possible to determine (within reason) characteristics in the personality traits of the respondents. He looked at the following indicators: size, slant, width, pressure, stroke, spacing, margins (of words and phrases), and some other factors.

David further emphasized that while he continued to keep himself in the dark regarding the authorship of each sample, he did make certain subjective decisions in the analytical process.

Nonetheless, in reviewing the detail and meticulousness with which David studied the unworthy sample of Your Humble Scribe, we (rather *We*) are impressed. While the first impulse is to challenge that which pegs us as less than godlike, a period of sober reflection may turn on certain lights and we will acknowledge the truly fine and balanced mercators of perception David has brought to this elusive practice.

As a group, we responded with varying degrees of temperature to these analyses. For example, if David found certain among us to have natural leadership qualities, astute judgment, extraordinary intellect, deeply resonating and limitless humanity, compassionate decisiveness, etc., according to the loops and slants, and clarity and economy of our graphic expression, we agreed warmly with David's conclusions and congratulated him on his brilliance and perspicacity.

On the other hand, when some of us were deemed to be hesitant, fearful, badly forming our letters and our lives (just kidding), we tended to withdraw behind icy fortresses of denial, and vowing secretly never to write with anything but a keyboard. Glowering and muttering finally dissolved in the acids of the first toast and we were able to enjoy the rest of the meeting and warmly thank David for this unique and enjoyable experience.

For an encore, David will do his next analysis blindfolded.

2) **First Toast – To the Society**

By David Dowse

(Toasts were given out of usual sequence at this meeting. No, it's not at all like drinking backwards.)

It was one or the other. Give it up as too much trouble or take the plunge and make the call. As some of you know me quite well, I am a rather shy, reserved, cautious fellow so I can't explain my rash action of writing a letter to the secretary of the Bootmakers of Toronto, asking if anyone of their society besides myself resided in the Montreal area. The reply arrived with the name and phone number of one Mr. Wilfrid de Freitas. I was at a loss as to how to properly pronounce this name and I was having second thoughts about contacting him.

Was he young or old?

Was he a Sherlockian expert or a novice like me?

Did he have a beautiful unattached sister or was she old and married?

Many things were going through my mind.

I picked up the phone and I made the call.

I was immediately struck by Wilfrid's honest enthusiasm. He too was fed up making the long drive to Toronto for the sometimes overly formal meetings of the Bootmakers.

What Wilfrid and I felt was needed was a more relaxed, casual gathering of like-minded lovers of the Victorian mystery. We would learn and grow in our appreciation of the details of the Canon.

Now, over 25 years later, Wilfrid and I are still active members of the Bimetallic Question. Our brainchild has experienced many remarkable individuals who have curled up in big armchairs to share their adventures and discoveries. We truly have a big old tin dispatch box of memories and I hope we continue to cram it with new ones.

*To our society! May it live long and prosper!
To the Society!*

3) **Undershaw Overlooked**

Paul Billette shared a newspaper article on Undershaw, the home built by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle (SACD) for his consumptive wife. History and culture notwithstanding, the present owner is planning to demolish the building.

4) **Arthur, George, and Stanley**

Stanley Baker brought to our attention a book written by SACD in which he defended in print a man name George who had been accused of killing his wife. SACD pointed to poor police work. Although we are not quite clear if race, religion, or social class played a part in influencing the police procedure, we note the comparison in some respects between this case and that of The Dreyfus Affair in France in which a Jewish officer in the French army had been falsely accused of treason. The celebrated author Emile Zola had written the celebrated book, *J'accuse* in which he pointed out the all-too-facile way in which French society was willing to accept the guilt of a Jew whose race had never been considered as capable of loyalty to whatever land they lived in. As with Zola's intervention in France, it was believed that SACD's intervention in England was instrumental in leading to George's exoneration. For England and George!

5) **Hot off the Press**

Kathryn Radford read aloud the preface of a collection of "the as yet unpublished stories of Sherlock Holmes" collected by Vithal Rajan under the title of *Holmes of the Raj*. Ms Radford provided us with an approved and faithful copy of one of these stories, "The Case of the Murdering Saint," which took place in 1888 in London, with an opening reference to a news item in India. These stories must have somehow been slipped a century ago into a trunk by Mrs. Hudson when she was helping Doctor Watson pack a number delivery of goods for delivery to distant relatives in India. Having glanced at the subject matter of the above-cited account, the good Mrs. Hudson may have deduced improperly (she looked, but she did not see) that these India-based accounts of the exploits of TWGCD were intended to be returned to that land, and without confirming her fallacious assumption with her second most famous lodger, simply packed them into the trunk along with three pairs of Argyle socks, a pair of man's itchy breeches, several books on occidental medical home remedies for catarrh, ague, vapours,

cretinism, wood and metal splinters, and sundry afflictions, four well-sealed Christmas fruit cakes, a rather heavy heather-colored turtleneck sweater from the Shetland Islands (for India??!?) loaded with naphtha crystals, (mysteriously) a lady's plain but pretty white silk blouse, four pounds of Cavendish shag cured with just a hint of whiskey, a half-pound of Turkish latakia, a similar quantity of perique tobacco (with more bite than a man-eating Bengal tiger), a collection of six Sheffield kitchen knives of various sizes and shapes, a seldom-used hand pistol from Birmingham Small Arms, and miscellaneous items of a personal nature. Suffice to say that for lo many years, these valuable accounts of the unannounced exploits of TWGCD have lain undiscovered, unopened, and unloved and will now further enlarge our appreciation of his unparalleled methods and genius. It is with divinely-guided fortuitousness that the hand of Mr. Vithal Rajan of Hyberabad, India had veered in the direction of Dr. Watson's notes and manuscripts, perhaps drawn by the esoteric emanations of the cloth-bound package supporting the wicker basket of some swami's music-loving, altitude-seeking snake in a seedy Calcutta bazaar so many years after Mrs. Hudson's well-intended *faux pas*. After urgent negotiations, these manuscripts fell into the legal and moral ownership of Mr. Rajan (who due to unrelated matters has recently become an Officer of the Order of Canada). Following much verification and (dare we say it?) some editing of Dr. Watson's accounts by Mr. Rajan, these reportages have been deemed fit for our consumption. By further dint of some Sheaffer-assisted calligraphic art and the auspices of P. Lal, Publishers, of Lake Gardens, Calcutta 700045, India, these valuable pieces are now offered to us and to the world. Each of these volumes is a work of art. Our own BmQ member Ms Radford is in possession of a number of valuable and never-before-seen copies which exemplify the highest standards of faithful reproduction. You may purchase a complete volume for the conservative sum of only \$20.00.

6) **The Flavor of *Pastiche***

Paul Billette pointed out that the collection of Sherlock Holmes stories cited above are *pastiches*. According to a very old Webster dictionary, a *pastiche* is "a literary, artistic, or musical work that imitates the style of a previous work." In the sense that Doctor Watson employed a self-invented and recognizable formulaic structure to all of his Holmesian accounts, we may concur with Paul that Watson was in fact writing *pastiches* of his previous accounts when he prepared the works assembled under the banner of *Holmes of the Raj*.

7) **Stranded Again**

Bernard Robaire showed us an 1893 bound volume of *Strand* magazine, containing five Sherlock Holmes stories.

8) **Disappearing Holmes – There Goes the Neighbourhood**

Patrick Campbell showed us Volume 29, Number 4 of *Canadian Holmes*. He passed it around the table to up the awe factor.

Unfortunately, the publication never made its way back to Patrick so it's now MIA (missing in action).

If anyone has inadvertently taken this *Canadian Holmes* home from the meeting mixed in with other books and papers of their own, Patrick would greatly appreciate its return at or before the next meeting.

Please check your briefcases to ensure you don't have this item. Thank you.

9) **Not Your Standard Restaurant Fare**

Patrick Campbell showed us a book review by *Toronto Star* science reporter Peter Calamai who was a welcome and knowledgeable guest at a recent BmQ meeting that coincided with a conference he was covering in Montreal. Spanning the history of forensics from the time of Sherlock Holmes, and in fact citing the application of forensics by TWGCD, New York crime historian and author Ms E.J. Wagner points to the science that increasingly assists crime busters in getting to the truth. But quoting Mr. Calamai who quotes Holmes: "there are 'realms of conjecture where even the most logical mind may be at fault.'" The book, published by John Wiley and Sons, is entitled *From Baskerville Hall to the Valley of Fear: the Real Forensics Behind the Great Detective's Famous Cases*.

If forensics is of interest to you (you do watch the *CSI* series on TV, don't you?), you might want to look at any of the Lincoln Rhyme mysteries by American writer Jeffrey Deaver. Lincoln Rhyme is a quadriplegic, a master of forensic technology, and usually appears on a murder case after the police have exhausted all their fingerprint dusting powder, are still sneezing, and have no reasonable clues. There's a spicy love interest in these novels in the form of Rhyme's assistant, a former model who only gets more beautiful and sexier from one story to the next. However, since all five of Lincoln's limbs are as inert as Xenon gas, we do wish, in the classical sense, to suspend our disbelief and pray for something to happen to requite the obvious chemistry between the two characters. With novels such as *The Bone Collector*, cinematized with Denzel Washington, Angelina Jolie, and even Queen Latifah (you get to guess right now who the love interest is), Deaver has struck on an aspect of the genre that will continue to influence crime literature, television, and film for a long time to come.

10) **Another Tome or Two**

Patrick also brought in a published giant index of Sherlockian books available for sale in England.

He also showed us his most recent effort in literary scholarship, a book entitled *At the End of the Final Line*. It is a history of Canadian Vickers. He talked about its successful launch in the Pointe Claire shopping mall.

Congratulations, Patrick! Your talent and industriousness are awe-inspiring!

11) **We Like Kinky**

Cheryl Surkes shared with us her observation of the use of Sherlockian mannerisms and props in the mysteries of Texas writer Kinky Friedman.

12) **Second Toast – To the Woman**

By David Kellett

In delivering his toast without the use of prepared text, scrolled electronic messages, hidden microphones, or appurtenances of any kind, David informed us that this was about to be a unique toast. The reasons were that:

- Since he was a high school student, the character we commonly know as Irene Adler was known to him as Irena Adler.

- Upon verification, the Granada edition does identify her as Irena Adler. (ergo, David must have first read the story in the Granada version. Brilliant deduction, Lowly Scribe!)
- The second conundrum begins when Ms Adler gives Sherlock Holmes a sovereign which he intends to put on his watch chain.
- This conundrum continues when in the Granada edition only, the sovereign is referred to again as being on the watch chain.
- Holmes asks for the photo of Irene Adler.
- The only future reference to it is when he refers to her photograph. It *may* be among the visible memorabilia in his room. We are not sure.
- He refers to her as "Irena Adler, the woman of dubious and questionable memory."
(In what sense is she of "dubious and questionable memory?" Are she or parts of their shared experience a figment of Holmes's imagination? This indeed may be the tip of a Sherlockian iceberg. What is it about her character that fascinates us so? This merits some study. Well done, David!)

13) **Man Sherlock and His World**

Paul Billette shared with us a book he purchased recently on the second floor of Indigo in Place Montréal Trust: *Sherlock Holmes: The Man and His World*.

14) **Everything Ode is New Again**

Paul also showed us a poem he "borrowed" from the internet. "Ode to the Stradivarius" is devoted to the violin owned by Sherlock Holmes.

15) **Quiz - results**

"The Adventure of Black Peter"

Prepared by Patrick Campbell

The creation and administration of this quiz has raised the bar for quizzes at the BmQ. Prior to the meeting, Patrick ensured that all participants had a sheet of paper upon which was printed a block of horizontal rectangles 10 wide by 18 high, some shaded and numbered down the extreme left side, beginning on the second row: 1 through 16. Of course, participants needed to have read the story, a point which Patrick doubted several times while noting the response levels. However, the unique process of assigning prize winners may have worked in favor of some of the participants who had not managed a close reading of the text. According to Patrick's instructions:

"First prize goes to the master of deduction.

"Second prize goes to (the) participant with the lowest score.

"Third prize goes to (the) participant with (the) highest score."

Winners were:

Rank	Name	Score
1.	David Kellett	Master of Deduction Prize: Oxford Book of Detective Stories
2.	Joan O'Malley	Lowest Score Prize: Georges Simenon - novels
3.	Carol Abramson	Highest Score Prize: not noted (blame the Lowly Scribe)

Next quiz will be based on "The Ryegate Puzzle," prepared by David Kellett

16) **Third Toast – To Mrs. Hudson**
By Stanley Baker

Borrowed from an anonymous poet, this toast took the form of thirteen quatrains in essentially iambic tetrameter with smatterings of the trochee, and to a lesser degree, other accent patterns.

The rhyme scheme, *abab*, is consistent, lilting, and evocative. For example, stanza #4 below is most satisfying, appetizing, and aromatic when one prefaces the last word on the second line with "liver" or "knock" while changing its "o" to a "u."

We worked the arithmetic and concluded that even without a title, the poem comes out to 52 lines. Add the blank lines between quatrains and title, as well as the title itself, and we would have a total of 66 lines.

In the interests of conserving our forests, we are presenting only the more exciting stanzas here:

#4:

*Mrs. Hudson is now most famous
for housing London's very worst
tenant. Her long-suffering would shame us.
At what she endures our tempers would burst.*

#6:

*My famous lodger's most untidy,
plays music at the oddest hours,
fired bullets indoors just last Friday
yet I'm in awe of his thinking powers.*

#7:

*Since he's a chemist, I'm often treated
to some malodorous experiment.
Perhaps so that I won't feel cheated,
his payments make a princely rent.*

#8:

*Although he tries my patience often,
I have become quite fond of him.
His overbearing ways can soften
toward womankind, though he dislikes them.*

17) **Fourth Toast – To Dr. Watson**

By Joan O'Malley

With my very modern train of thought, I have a need to “classify” Watson. Is Watson a sidekick or a companion, friend, straight man, prop, accomplice, affiliate, aid, ally, assistant, buddy, chum, collaborator, companion, crony, fellow, friend, helper, pal, partner, peer?

Perhaps sidekick.

The list of examples of sidekicks is long: Tonto and the Lone Ranger, Batman and Robin, Booboo and Yogi Bear, Iolaus and Hercules, Kato and the Green Hornet, Mr. Smee and Captain Hook, Obelix and Asterix, Puck to Oberon in A Midsummer Night's Dream, Ron Weasley to Harry Potter.

Dr. Watson is generally described as a sidekick to Sherlock Holmes. The stories are told as his journals. Watson, an ex-military man, is also Holmes's “muscle,” bringing along his service revolver on tough cases. If Watson had not existed, there would be no record of Sherlock Holmes's adventures at all.

According to Wikipedia, he is indeed a sidekick.

From Wikipedia:

“A sidekick is a stock character, a close companion who assists a partner in a superior position. Sancho Panza in Don Quixote, Dr. Watson in Sherlock Holmes, and Robin, Batman's companion, are some well-known sidekicks.

“The origin of the term comes from pickpocket slang of the late 19th and early 20th century. The ‘kick’ is the front side pocket of a pair of trousers, and was found to be the safest pocket from thieves. Thus the ‘side-kick’ became an inseparable companion.

“In fiction, the term ‘sidekick’ most commonly refers to assistants to heroes, usually in a crime-fighting capacity. The sidekick has the literary function of playing against (sic) the hero, often contrasting in skill, asking the questions the reader would ask, or performing functions not suited to the hero.”

(Lowly Scribe wishes to interpose that in this vein, the Greek chorus – that group of characters who usually introduced the background to the action at the beginning of a play, and reappeared from time to time to comment on the pickle the hero is in (e.g. Stan Laurel: “A fine mess ...”) may have been the originators of the neo-classical (Sancho Panza) and modern sidekicks who vocalize what we hope the protagonist is, or should be, thinking. Because modern sidekicks are from a lower social stratum, they seem not to have the constraints of class, and may say things the hero cannot.)

“Those functions may include being funny. The comic sidekick was a common feature where Fuzzy Knight, Al ‘Fuzzy’ St. John, and Andy Devine had longer careers than some of the heroic singing cowboys for whom they took pratfalls. In science fiction a subtype of sidekick has been established – namely, the Alien sidekick.

“A villain’s supporters are normally called henchmen, minions, or lackeys, not sidekicks. While this is partially a convention in terminology, it also reflects that few villains are capable of bonds of friendship and loyalty, which are normal in the relationship between a hero and sidekick.”

*So, here’s to a sidekick. We would all be so lucky to be one! To Watson!
Please raise your glasses.*

18) **Fifth Toast – To the Master**
By Paul Billette

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, October 5th, 2006, at 6:30 p.m.

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