

Minutes of the meeting of The Bimetallic Question October 4th, 2012

Date of next meeting

Thursday, December 6th, 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 Man with the Twisted Lip”,
prepared by Raf Jans

Minutes of the meeting of THE BIMETALLIC QUESTION held on Thursday, October 4th, 2012 at the Westmount Library (Westmount Room), 4574 Sherbrooke Street West, Westmount, Quebec.

Present: Carol Abramson, Rachel Alkallay, Maureen Anderson, Paul Billette, Patrick Campbell, Wilfrid de Freitas, David Dowse, Susan Fitch, Raf Jans, Elliott Newman, Karl J. Raudsepp, Lawrence Reich, Carole Rocklin, Ron Zilman, plus the following guests: Tash Akkerman, Mark Altosaar, Kayla Piecaitis and Rebecca Stacey

Regrets: Jack Anderson, Marie Burrows, Roger Burrows

CALL TO ORDER:

The meeting was called to order promptly at 6:30 by Sovereign Ron Zilman.

ITEMS OF BUSINESS AND GENTLE TRANSACTION

(Incorporating Show and Tell, Aches and Pains, New and Old)

1. Getting to Know You

We were pleased to welcome a new guest, Mark Altosaar, nephew of Karl J. Raudsepp.

2. BmQ's Illustrious Membership

An article from the *Montreal Gazette* was circulated at the meeting regarding the 125th anniversary of the elite private girls' academy, Trafalgar School, on Côte des Neiges Road. It is of interest to us since our own Sherlockian, Geoff Dowd, has been the principal of that institution. Among the school's highlights were the famous names associated with its founding and development, at the top of which was Donald Smith, later Lord Strathcona, who was undeniably Canada's wealthiest man at the time, according to *Gazette* writer John Kalbfleisch. Smith contributed \$25,000 to the school, a fortune in 1884. He would later dangle \$120,000 in front of McGill University, to entice that institution to admit women for the first time. They had been to college and were not idiots. They accepted.

3. "Tides of the Wight" Reading at the Greene Centre

Ron Zilman asked for feedback on our reading of Patrick Campbell's pastiche play, *Tides of the Wight* on Thursday, September 20th. The star-studded cast included Carol Abramson, Tash Akkerman, Paul Billette, Patrick Campbell, Wilfrid de Freitas, David Dowse, Ann Elbourne, Susan Fitch, Chris Herten-Greaven, Raf Jans, Elliott Newman, Kayla Piecaitis, Karl J. Raudsepp, and Nancy Walking.

Patrick lauded Susan for her flawless job in adapting the text and producing the play which came together seamlessly after only one-and-a-half rehearsals.

In celebration of the performance, and in response to the *tsunami* demands of a mass audience, Patrick had several hard-cover volumes of the play reprinted and autographed them at the meeting for thrilled buyers from within our society.

As noted, the play was intended as a fund-raiser for a pet project of Susan: greyhound rescue. To the astute, evidence of a greyhound could be found in the lobby of the Greene Centre. The large, obedient, and docile animal, itself a former racing celebrity, graciously offered paw and lick to chosen well-wishers. In a warm display of coming together, the BmQ raised \$200 for greyhound rescue.

Chris Herten-Greaven ruminated that he had asked himself "Why greyhounds?" and found his own answers when he discovered that Sir Arthur Conan Doyle himself was a dog lover.

Patrick Campbell pointed out that in England, greyhound racing is known as cherry oggs.

Some of the BmQ attended a greyhound Rescue Day in front of a pet store on St. Laurent Boulevard in September, and were impressed with the docility of these animals. Considering the fierceness with which they pursue the mechanical rabbit around a track, they are paradoxically placid up close. We were warned, however, that if they slip off their leash, they will be gone in a flash, since they are bred to run. One saving grace is that they are designed to sprint which means that unlike a Timex or Eveready, they will not run forever. While they cannot come close to the cheetah's immense speed, they do emulate its bounding gate. One has only to hold a greyhound on a lead to develop an appreciation of its great strength and quiet, compliant disposition.

4. **The Starving Artist in the Garret**

In response to the question of how much did SACD make from the canon in his lifetime, when successful writers today of such collections as the Harry Potter series, *The Hunger Games*, and more, list revenues in the millions, we were told that the Sherlock Holmes author was paid a flat £25 for his first novel, *A Study in Scarlet*.

5. **Events and Expenses**

Upon learning that Susan Fitch had gone out of pocket for some of the expenses related to the play reading, the society agreed that expenses related to events held in our name, with our approval, should not be the responsibility of individual members. As a matter of protocol, Susan will be reimbursed since the society does have funds to cover such things.

6. **Why the Wight?**

It was not until Susan Fitch read Patrick Campbell's bio that we were to understand why Patrick had chosen the Isle of Wight for the setting of his play. While Patrick was born in Selkirk, Manitoba, his parents died when he was young. As a lad he would spend summers with family on the Isle of Wight. This would explain his intimate knowledge of its landmarks, its people, and the dialect.

7. **It's a Crime**

Paul Billette introduced a book by Dorothy and Thomas Hoobler, *The Crimes of Paris*, which uses the 1911 theft of the *Mona Lisa* as the backdrop to a history of crime in Paris. It follows a line of literary criminals and crime-stoppers, from Poe's Dupin, and shows how SACD's novel *A Study in Scarlet* imitated (in some respects) Gaboriau's *L'Affaire Lerouge*. "In France, the writers liked the bad guys," Paul said. "They're the heroes, while in England, the Brits showed the lawbreakers as bad guys."

At one point in the canon, Holmes makes an uncharitable comment concerning LeCoq, the French detective. Holmes, on his part, believes that detection should be an *exact* science.

According to Paul, the book shows that sometimes the writers were ahead of real-life detection, and at other times borrowed from flesh-and-blood detectives.

David Dowse asked if SACD read French. Paul responded that he probably did, and read these stories in the original language.

8. **Trashing the Canon? Nay, Say It Ain't So!**

The works of dead authors are like puppy dogs: you can take their stories, novels, and poems home, and they won't bite if you feed and water them, spread the newspapers around, and bring them into bed with you. This is because in the case of dead writers, they have said all they're ever going to say, and it's up to you, the gentle or fierce or analytical or critical reader to make what you will of the many little black things on paper in front of you. How much more comfortable can we get?

The canon of Sherlock Holmes is like that. In our society, we have passed convivial hours and years spreading the *pâté* of imagination on the crackers of resistance, sharpened with the cheese wedges of speculation. A hair's breadth short of certifiable, some of us have travelled across the Pond to bolt a metal plaque to a rock over eternal clouds of spume. We have donned forwards-and-backwards peaked tweed caps, and doffed them ceremoniously at the bygone times of choking fog, the familiar (we pretend) clopping of horses' hooves, and a certain kind of genius which enriches and entertains beyond the grave. How normal it is to luxuriate in the reminiscence of something most of us have never experienced!

In this vein, we speculate nearly, but not quite, *ad nauseam* about The Woman, Irene Adler. We are in two camps about her, a lovely bifurcation ideal for discussion. As *The Woman (!)*, she has been wronged, is charming, resourceful, talented, experienced, supremely intelligent and crafty, and hard done-by. The faction focusing on these attributes may dutifully erect a shrine to her memory. The other Irene Adler, according to some critics, was the real-life Lola Montez, sometime mistress of Mad King Ludwig. Knowing full well that SACD derived much of the material for the canon from real life, familiarity with the exploits and achievements of Ms Montez would raise the hair on our necks. But then, isn't the creation of literature, like life, all about making choices? The rest of us can erect our own monument to Ms Montez a.k.a. Irene Adler. Or not.

What this implies for our society in particular and Sherlockians in general is that there is a world of wealth out there. Choosing our fodder and agreeing to disagree is what makes the BmQ fun. We're not the only ones doing this. Read the books. Check the web. That puppy on the rug who has just chewed up our prized Doubleday edition might just about be the best thing we ever brought home.

9. This Younger Television Generation

A number of us mentioned several relatively recent television programs dealing with crime and Sherlock Holmes.

In *The Murder Room*, real-life experts describe how they would solve current murder cases. Rachel Alkallay likes it, giving eight cats' claws up.

Elementary is a new CBS series with Lucie Liu (a former Montrealer, trained at the National Theatre School here) as Watson. The switch is that she solves the cases. Karl J. Raudsepp likes this show better than the gadgetized Benedict Cumberbatch series.

Rebecca Stacey informed us that we can expect an end to Cumberbatch as Holmes since he's signed a number of movie commitments

Carole Rocklin prefers the older portrayals of Holmes.

Ron Zilman expressed wistfully and with a whisper of a warning: "Holmes is Holmes. You can't cosy up to him."

10. First Toast – To The Master

by Raf Jans

I often play a game with my five-year-old son, where he has to think about something and, via questions that can only be answered by "yes" or "no", I have to guess what he is thinking about. This time, he was thinking about one of his favourite heroes. After a couple of general questions, I thought I was on the right trail and I started asking some very specific questions:

Does he have a cape and a nice hat? Yes
Does he help others when they are in trouble? Yes
Does he have a magnifying glass? Yes

And then I started asking some tricky questions.

Does he have a helper who is a doctor? Yes
Does he play the violin? Yes
Is his main enemy a professor? Yes
Is he sometimes working on "chemical" experiments? Yes
Does he sometimes disguise himself? Yes

By now, I felt that I had almost nailed the case, and there remained only one more clue to be checked:

Does he live in Baker Street? Yes

By now, all of you will also have guessed which hero my son was thinking of. It is of course Basil, the great mouse detective, who lives in the basement of the familiar address at 221B Baker Street.

Here's to the Master!

11. Playing Around. Again.

Ron Zilman informed us that the Segal Centre on Côte Ste. Catherine Road near Décarie will be hosting a nearly month-long run of a Sherlock Holmes play, from May 5-26. Paul Billette announced that the Greene Centre is planning to go as a group, and suggested we might attach ourselves to this excursion. The regular price of \$29 per ticket would be increased slightly to include a donation to the Greene Centre. Carole Rocklin will look into the availability of seats for our society, with the likeliest convenient time being a Sunday matinee. Chris Herten-Greaven opined that it would be a good opportunity for exposure for our society if we were to go as a group. More information is forthcoming.

12. Early Ruminations about the Annual Dinner

Our dinner is scheduled for Saturday, January 19. We believe it will be held at the Atwater Club once again, and we believe that reservations have been made.

It was suggested that at our annual dinner, we prepare roasts of the main characters as a lively form of entertainment. This would replace the usual jokes and scripted humour we have had over the past years, but would not replace the toasts. We would need a roastmaster. This idea was greeted with enthusiasm.

Chris Herten-Greaven said pinpointing the dates was confusing because of the conflict between the Julian and Gregorian calendars. As noted earlier in these minutes, we agree to disagree. We have yet to introduce the Hebrew calendar (a few thousand years off) and the Chinese one too. If you have a favourite calendar we haven't mentioned, this would be the time (get it? "time?" Ach! The travails of Your Lowly Scribe are never-ending!) to inform us.

13. Election of Officers

The arduous process of the election of officers (at gunpoint) was over in seconds.

After a two-year term as Sovereign, Ron Zilman is stepping down. Under Ron's stewardship, we have moved forward as a group, attracting valuable new members who have rolled up their sleeves and pitched in to add strength and interest to the society.

As has always been the case, and in keeping with the name of our society, The Bimetallic Question, we name our officers after British coins.

Our new president, or symbolically, Sovereign, is Chris Herten-Greaven who told us he was honoured to be asked to be Sovereign, and a Sherlockian speech of some mystery led us to understand that he had accepted.

Paul Billette will be our treasurer, or Florin.

Our organization will be undergoing a radical sex change as Mrs. Hudson becomes, simply, Hudson, when Raf Jans assumes the role.

Our new Webmaster/Webmistress will be Susan Fitch. We will assign the proper coin-of-the-Royal term to this position, as we will to Tash Akkerman who will take over the job of printing and mailing the Minutes.

To all those who have provided yeoman service, and to those who have no idea what they're letting themselves in for, our sincere thanks.

As usual, knowing where to pigeon-hole the Lowly Scribe in terms of coin proved an impossibility. As noted in the case of SACD's remuneration for *A Study in Scarlet*, fledgling writers work for peanuts. It will take a committee designed by a horse to assign an appropriate coin to the position of Lowly Scribe. However, since Lowly Scribing is more a way of life than an actual position, perhaps some watery gruel and a crust of mouldy bread would be more suitable.

In order to help us in assigning the appropriate title to each Bimetallic officer, we had to dip into reality for a picture of what the British coins are, and their value. Thanks to Patrick Campbell for compiling the following information:

| <u>Designation</u> | <u>Value in shillings/pence</u> | <u>Number of references in the Canon</u> | <u>Bimetallic Question Officer Equivalent</u> |
|--------------------|---------------------------------|--|---|
| Coinage | | | |
| Sovereign | 20/- | 9 | President |
| Half-Sovereign | 10/- | 7 | Secretary |
| Crown | 5/- | 15 | (open) |
| Half-Crown | 2/6 | 6 | Caterer (Mrs. Hudson) |
| Florin | 2/- | 2 | Treasurer |
| Shilling | 1/- | 8 | Vice President |
| Sixpence | 6 ^d | 3 | Toastmaster, Vintner, Commissionaire |
| Threepence | 3 ^d | 1 | (open) |
| Penny | 1 ^d | 8 | (open) |
| Halfpenny | ½ ^d | 1 | (open) |
| Farthing | ¼ ^d | 1 | (open) |
| Non-Coinage | | | |
| Guinea | 21/- | 6 | not a coin |
| Half-Guinea | 10/6 | 1 | not a coin |
| Tin Box | | | Archivist |
| Late Sovereign | | | Ex-president |

(There are 16 mentions of the pound accompanied by a number and one calling the pound a "quid.")

Patrick suggested "Guinea" and "Crown" could be used for our two founders.

14. Second Toast – To Dr. Watson

by Carol Abramson

When contemplating a toast to Dr. Watson, I tried to think of him in relation to Sherlock, and came up with the term “sidekick.” Trying to define “sidekick” as a sort of accompanist, I looked for other examples, and the only one that kept crossing my mind was Batman and Robin. But in analyzing the relationships, Robin was no comparison to Dr. Watson. Robin had neither the obvious intelligence, nor the probing mind of Watson. Robin could not stand alone as a character. He was there for physical power alone. While ever-loyal, Robin was not really needed by Batman, as the later movies and adventures show. Dr. Watson, however, while often needed for his abilities with a fist or a gun, had a much more important purpose – that of chronicler of Sherlock Holmes’s cases. Without the writings of Dr. Watson, Sherlock Holmes would well have faded into the obscurity of time. It is only through Watson’s determination to inform the world of the amazing abilities and adventures of his friend, Sherlock Holmes, that we are able to be here tonight, remembering the master of detection. Therefore, our thanks to you, Dr. Watson!

15. What’s Going Around is Coming Around

Chris Herten-Greaven, who as we have learned, has a particular interest in things that we take in past our teeth, brought a yellowish, apple-y-looking fruit to the table. It had the consistency of a fruit covered with a tough peel stretched over a very hard interior. Although the smell was nearly that of an apple, it had been diluted perhaps due to the length of time from a tree, or distance from where it had grown and been plucked from life. This fruit, quince, is abundant in South America and Chris read us a five-line poem about it. Quince is quite popular in jams and marmalades when bolstered, we believe, by a tart citrus. It is known as *cotogna* in Italian, and *coing* in French.

16. Sad History in Muskoka

Patrick Campbell informed us that in 1940 a military airplane went missing in Ontario. In response, a search plane carrying two men began to look for it, but crashed in a lake in the Muskokas. This second plane had on board Peter Campbell, Patrick’s cousin, and someone named Bates. This second aircraft, a Northrop Nomad, Plane #3521, was located not long ago, and will be raised this month, still entombing Patrick’s cousin. Patrick has been invited to the ceremony which will honour the sacrifice of the two men.

17. Third Toast – To the Woman

by Rebecca Stacey

I’m relatively new to the “Question,” so while I did take some time to look at the minutes and review some of what has already been said about *The Woman*, my approach tonight – if you’ll permit me – is to talk a bit about why Irene Adler has always been important *to me* personally and to me as a female Sherlock Holmes fan.

Back in May, I was lucky enough to go to New York City for a screening of the BBC’s premiere episode of Series Two of *Sherlock: A Scandal in Belgravia*. This was, of course, based on the classic canonical story of a very similar title, “A Scandal in Bohemia.”

The head writer and co-creator of the show, Steve Moffat, has been criticized for a number of changes he made to the story, specifically, regarding the fate of Irene Adler. During the Q & A session that followed the screening, a fan asked him to address some of these changes and explain why he made them. I’m not going to tell you what those changes were *per se* – I’d hate to spoil it for anyone who hasn’t seen the episode – but he did offer up a bit of an explanation:

"I love the original story, but (Irene's) triumph in the original is to move house with her husband ... Do you know what? I remember reading that story. I loved it. I love all the Sherlock Holmes stories. But this one had a better beginning than an end. It starts off with Watson's informing us that 'To Sherlock Holmes she was always *The Woman*.' As a twelve-year-old boy I was sitting there going, 'Well! What's this going to be? I can't imagine what torments are in store! What magnificent thing is she going to do? (As things turned out) running away wasn't it. Actually, at that age I was (thinking), 'Sherlock, why are you so keen on her?' There is something else going on for you here because I'm not getting it."

As an audience member, as a fan of the BBC show, and as someone who has grown up loving Sherlock Holmes, I knew Holmes has always admired Irene Adler for her cunning, wit, and the magnificent way she beats him at his own game. Therefore, I was nothing short of mortified by Moffat's assessment of her character and especially of her story.

Not only did what Steve Moffat have to say belittle her accomplishments, it also tarnished her happy ending. There is nothing wrong with a woman whose story ends with her falling in love and getting married. It makes her, in the very simplest of terms, and to reiterate and rephrase the quote, "To Sherlock Holmes, she was always *The Woman*" who got away! She is captivating because she remains – and will forever remain – a mystery, which is one thing that Holmes can never resist. At the same time, it's very important to point out that it isn't Holmes who decides to keep her a mystery; it's her choice!

Irene Adler is set apart. Throughout Dr. Watson's narrative, her significance to Holmes is highlighted by her similarities to him: Holmes with his Bohemian soul, to Adler's adventuress; his violin to her voice; his "cold, precise ... balanced mind" to hers which is described as being as resolute as any man's. Let us not forget her "soul of steel" which Holmes had to employ treachery to shake.

The most significant similarity between the two of them, of course, comes at the climax of the story when Irene wears a costume to trick Holmes in much the same way he has dressed as a clergyman to fool her. In imbalance, only one of them is deceived completely, since Irene escapes with the husband whom Holmes has helped her secure while Holmes is decidedly lacking in his own prize at the story's end.

Historically, the Sherlock Holmes fandom has been a gentleman's club. New York City's Baker Street Irregulars, founded in 1934, only started to invite female members as recently as 1991, while many groups, such as The Speckled Band of Boston still refuse access to female members. This is a problem, especially when so many of the younger fans of the series are women. This closed door makes no sense to me, considering that one of Holmes's greatest adversaries and – I'll say it – equals was, in fact, a woman.

To Irene Adler: proof positive that great minds think alike.

18. Quiz - Results

Story: *The Adventure of the Bruce-Partington Plans*, prepared by Wilfrid de Freitas.

Possible total: 60 points

Winners were:

| Rank | Name | Score | Prize |
|------|------------------|-------|--|
| 1. | Raf Jans | 57½ | Candle snuffer |
| 2. | Carol Abramson | 40 | Collectible 1967 Canadian bimetallic coins |
| 3. | Karl J. Raudsepp | 32 | Program copy of the Bimetallic Colloquium |

The next quiz, based on *The Man with the Twisted Lip*, will be prepared by Raf Jans.

19. Fourth Toast – To Mrs. Hudson

by Maureen Anderson

Mrs. Hudson is the landlady of the house located at 221B Baker Street. It is she who lets rooms to Holmes and Watson as her tenants. She is most definitely not a servant, employed by Holmes, but a businesswoman in her own right.

Much of what has been written about Mrs. Hudson is pure speculation, so I will take this opportunity to speculate on her knowledge of poison remedies, being the landlady of Sherlock Holmes, and known to be a long-suffering woman. Not only was her first-floor flat invaded at all hours by throngs of singular and often undesirable characters but her remarkable lodger showed an eccentricity and irregularity in this life which must have sorely tried her patience, weakened her lungs, and unravelled her nerves.

POEM ON POISON CASES

Send for doctor (Watson), name the drug suspected,
Keep every cup where poison is detected,
In every case, whatever the poison be,
You give water, milk, raw eggs or tea.
Oils may be given, but two exceptions lie
In phosphorus poisoning and in Spanish Fly.

In every case where staining is not found,
To give emetics is both safe and sound.
To mix at once, be quick and don't get flustered –
Two tablespoons of salt or one of mustard.
If stains are present, then proceed with care.
And of EMETICS, most of all: Beware!

The poison known to make the patient placid,
For alkaline corrosives, give an acid.
An acid swallowed, reverse the matter,
And give an Alkaline to kill the latter.
The acid antidotes in household use
Are table vinegar and lemon juice.
What alkalines to give need no revealing,
Take whitewash, chalk, or plaster from the ceiling.

In Opium poisoning, he snores like some old Druid.
Give him 3 tablespoons in pint of water of Condy's Fluid.
In carbolic acid poisoning, to make the patient easier,
Give him ½ oz. of Epsom Salts to pint of milk, or two
Teaspoonfuls of sulphate of magnesia.
In Strychnine, Opium, or where there's a long stagnation,
Resort to artificial respiration.

We should all be so lucky to have a Mrs. Hudson in our lives. Please raise your glass and join me in toasting a remarkable woman!

To Mrs. Hudson, Landlady Remarkable!

20. Four-and-a-halfth Toast – To Professor James Moriarty

by Tash Akkerman

(Note: It was decided to have, from time-to-time, an honorary toast to a canonical character of significant interest. This toast is the first in our series.)

A toast to Professor James Moriarty, Napoleon of Crime, the Arch-nemesis of Sherlock Holmes, His Intellectual Equal (in the words of Sherlock Holmes):

“The greatest schemer of all time, the organizer of every deviltry, the controlling brain of the underworld, a brain which might have made or marred the destiny of nations – that’s the man! But so aloof is he from general suspicion, so immune from criticism, so admirable in his management and self-effacement, ... a man of good birth and excellent education, endowed by nature with a phenomenal mathematical faculty. At the age of twenty-one he wrote a treatise upon the binomial theorem, which has had a European vogue. On the strength of it he won the mathematical chair at one of our smaller universities, and had, to all appearances, a most brilliant career before him. He is the celebrated author of *The Dynamics of an Asteroid*, a book which ascends to such rarefied heights of pure mathematics that it is said that there is no man in the scientific press capable of criticizing it. But the man had hereditary tendencies of the most diabolical kind. A criminal strain ran in his blood, which, instead of being modified, was increased and rendered infinitely more dangerous by his extraordinary mental powers.

“But Watson, you have probably never heard of Professor Moriarty?”

“Never.”

“And there’s the genius and the wonder of the thing.”

To Professor Moriarty

21. Fifth Toast – To the Society

by Rachel Alkallay

Extemporized and heartfelt.

22. Next Meeting’s Toast Presenters

| | | |
|----------------|---|------------------|
| To the Master | - | Karl J. Raudsepp |
| To Dr. Watson | - | Paul Billette |
| To the Woman | - | Raf Jans |
| To Mrs. Hudson | - | Patrick Campbell |
| To the Society | - | Ron Zilman |

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, December 6th, 2012, at 6:30 p.m. Bring a friend.

For the latest society news or updates on our history, please go to:

<http://www.bimetallicquestion.org>