



THE BIMETALLIC QUESTION

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VENATIO ADEST

Minutes of the Meeting of The Bimetallic Question February 4th, 2016

Date of our next meeting: Thursday, April 7th, 2016 at 6:30pm at the Westmount Public Library, Westmount Room, 4574 Sherbrooke Street West, Westmount, QC.

The quiz at the next meeting: *The Adventure of Black Peter* - prepared by Raf Jans.

Next meeting's toast presenters: The Master: Rachel Alkallay; Dr. Watson: Raf Jans; The Woman: Elliott Newman; Mrs. Hudson: Paul Billette; The Society: Ronnie Zilman.

Minutes of the meeting of the Bimetallic Question held on Thursday, February 4th, 2016 at the Westmount Public Library, Westmount Room, 4574 Sherbrooke Street West, Westmount, QC.

Present: Carol Abramson, Mark Altosaar, Chris Herten-Greaven, Susan Fitch, Elliott Newman, Ronnie Zilman, Paul Billette, Arlene Scher, Philip Ehrensaft, Miyako Matsuda-Pelletier, Raf Jans, Bruno Paul Stenson, Kristin Franseen, Bernard Robiare.

Regrets: David Dowse, Wilfrid de Freitas, Maureen the Mink Anderson, Jack Anderson, Patrick Campbell, Louise Corda, Rachel Alkallay.

[How do I have my regrets included in the minutes? Simply call or email a Sherlockian colleague(s) whom you think will be attending the meeting. Ask them to express your regrets at the start of the meeting, and they will be duly recorded on the attendance sheet and in the minutes !]

Call to order: The meeting was called to order by Sovereign Carol Abramson at a tad after 6:30pm to give latecomers a chance to arrive in the winter weather.

ITEMS OF BUSINESS AND GENTLE TRANSACTION

Dear Society Members,

Our co-founder and recording secretary David Dowse was actively engaged on a challenging case and couldn't be with us at our February meeting. I impetuously decided to leap into the breach (ouch!) Therefore, please ascribe any errors or omissions in the minutes contained herewith to me.

– Susan

Thank You to Jim Reicker !

We would like to extend a big Sherlockian thank you to mystery book expert Jim Reicker of Ottawa for his generous and thoughtful donation of books to The Bimetallic Question. Members keenly enjoyed at the start of tonight's meeting choosing favourite Sherlock Holmes and other mystery titles to bring home!

Welcome Back Phil !

We are very pleased to welcome returning member Philip Ehrensaft back to The Bimetallic Question membership rolls. It's great to have you with us again !

1. Toast to Dr. Watson by David Dowse, read by Susan Fitch

Does Sherlock Holmes really need Dr. Watson to be who he is?

Apart from being the chronicler of Holmes's adventures and the facilitator to get them to the literary agent, some would say NO.

Holmes has the ultimate powers of observation which Watson lacks.

Holmes can use his superior brain to deduce actions and individuals which Watson is unable to do.

Holmes has the greater physical stamina and strength.

Holmes has the encyclopedic memory for people, places and events.

Holmes has the organizational skills to form an invisible army of eyes and ears to gather information on the streets and in the alleys of London.

Holmes is a master of disguise that even his closest friend can not see through.

Holmes is not persuaded by power or title, save for his devotion to Queen Victoria.

Yes, Holmes is a Superman and Superman had no side-kick.

Yet, it takes Watson to bring out Holmes's human streak. Watson shows that Holmes is not just a cold calculating machine that plays the game just for the sake of playing. Holmes can be as easily touched by the plight of a poor man as by a rich lord or prince. He takes the situation into account when resolving a case, not just the letter of the law.

The hard shell he exhibits craves companionship. His strengths are enhanced by Watson's able presence. He loves Watson and would have committed murder if he were harmed.

Watson made Holmes a household name and someone we would all love to go to as a last resort to solve our problems.

I give you Dr. Watson

2. Hearty Congratulations to the Birthday Dinner Team

All members present joined Chris Herten-Greaven in applauding all the hard work done behind the scenes by Paul Billette, Wilfrid de Freitas, Carol Abramson and all Society members involved in making this year's January 16th Sherlock Holmes Birthday Dinner such a resounding success. Highlights such as our super speaker Bill Brownstein, terrific toasts, Bruno Paul Stenson's musical performance, Peter Lekx's violin virtuosity, Dan Fuch's photos (great on our web page!), the delicious menu, and fine camaraderie in beautiful surroundings all contributed to make the event a joyous occasion. Our motto going forward for next year is: Why mess with a such an effective formula?!!!

Show and Tell

3. Lost Victorian Britain

Chris followed up on the book that Karl brought to our last meeting in December (noted in item 5 of our previous minutes), which concerned creatively imagined and depicted famous houses from literature. Now Chris showed us a recent book about real Victorian architectural treasures. *Lost Victorian Britain: How the twentieth century destroyed the nineteenth century's architectural masterpieces* by Gavin Stamp, was published in London by Aurum Press in 2010. This generously illustrated scholarly book was dedicated to the Victorian Society.

4. Cousins of The Hound Are at Large

As an addendum to the December minutes (item 11, in which Chris told us how Australians learned through a tragedy to be much more careful when camping around dingos) Chris discussed how they are in some ways similar to our own native coyotes. We are seeing how as human populations encroach more and more on the habitat of wild creatures, they can become habituated to our presence and we to theirs. But Chris reminded us to be safety conscious around our wild neighbors, especially where our children and family pets are concerned. Bruno noted his experience of a fox keeping pace with him cycling on a back river bike path, and Paul reported foxes at Meadowbrook golf course. Phil recalled his father telling him about a sighting of a thoroughly nonchalant coyote walking along the street in the middle of downtown Chicago, and remarked on their amazing intelligence.



One cousin of The Hound:
Our Native North American Coyote

Editorial note from Susan:

I had the opportunity to investigate this subject personally when I participated February 13th as a "zookeeper for a day" in a special event at The Ecomuseum Zoo. Located in Ste. Anne de Bellevue, it is an accredited refuge for rescued wild creatures. Among the animals and birds you can encounter there are a coyote, two arctic foxes, two red foxes, two timber wolves, a golden eagle, a bald eagle, and three porcupines. The bears are sleeping!
www.zoecomuseum.ca

In the Montreal area we can also contact Urban Animal Advocates at (514)366-9965, info@uaa-aau.org for advice on how best to deal with close encounters with our wild neighbors.

5. Hockey Night in Westmount

Bruno Paul Stenson indulged our interest in Montreal's Victorian sporting life with an excellent interactive slide presentation on the Victoria Rink and the origins of hockey. Congratulations, Bruno, on guiding us through such an interesting conversation.

The Victoria Rink was located in Montreal in the block bordered to the west and east by Drummond and Stanley, and to the north and south by Ste. Catherine and Dorchester (now Rene Levesque). A multi-floored parking garage stands on the site now. Bruno scoured the area for clues and found not a trace of a plaque anywhere in the vicinity to commemorate the glories of the Victoria Rink, where on March 3rd, 1875 the first recorded indoor ice hockey game in history was played.



Bruno facing off with his hockey presentation.



William Notman composite photograph of the Victoria Rink, from the McCord Museum collection.

6. Coming Soon to a Museum Near You: The Cabinet of Curiosities

Bruno promised to bring us in the not too distant future a presentation on his collection of more than 250 "weird and wonderful" musical instruments, (think didgeridoos etc!) which he both owns and knows how to play. He'll try this presentation out on us before bringing it to the Stewart Museum on St. Helen's Island, where he has been invited to speak in conjunction with their upcoming Cabinet of Curiosities exhibition. <http://www.stewart-museum.org/en/upcoming-exhibitions-159.html>

7. Toast to the Master from Carol's collection, read by Chris Herten-Greaven

Tonight it is my honour to propose a toast to the most recognizable Englishman in the world today. A man noted for his brilliant deductive reasoning and keen observational skills. The name Sherlock Holmes conjures up gas lamps and London fog, hansom cabs, mysterious moors and glowing hounds. Just speaking of him, we are instantly swept away to a world of monographs, secret codes, chemistry experiments, disguises, and even opium dens. Sherlock Holmes provides us with a taste of mystery and a touch of lethargy, and allows us to observe his sardonic wit, and inspiring intellect. We are privileged to study and enjoy his Canon, and share it with our fellow Society members. And thus, my friends, I propose this toast. To the Master.

8. Contemplating a Cherry Blossom

On behalf of all Society members Paul thanked Miyako for her thoughtful and beautiful New Year's Card to us all. Along with a hand-made flower collage, it contained her *R.S.V.P.* for the Birthday Dinner explaining how she would love to be with us but would have to be on duty that evening as one of the staff team at *Sakura* (which means cherry blossom). *Sakura* is a popular restaurant with many Montrealers, serving Japanese and Korean delicacies. We learned it's located at 3450 Drummond, and Elliott recalled that this is the former location of the Club El Morocco. We all hope Miyako and her husband Claude can be with us at the dinner next year! <http://www.sakuragardens.com/>

9. Dickens and Holmes in the News

Many thanks to Miyako for bringing us these recent Dickensian and Sherlockian news articles for show and tell, and as new additions to our Bimetallic Question archive:

What the Dickens? Ex Habs enforcer Laraque, lawyers and entrepreneurs take part in Geordie's *A Christmas Carol* fundraiser by Bill Brownstein. The Montreal Gazette, Thursday, December 10, 2015.

Sherlock special debuts, cage marathon kicks off by Denise Duguay in her The Watchers column, The Montreal Gazette, Monday, December 28, 2015.

Sherlock influence on TV profound: Arthur Conan Doyle's detective seeps into modern procedurals by David Berry of The National Post. Published in The Montreal Gazette, January 5, 2016.

10. Canada's *Totally British Magazine* and Japan's Love for *Sherlock*

Miyako intrigued us with her presentation on two magazines that were completely new to all of us:

Totally British: Canada's own British TV and Entertainment Magazine, is a light and fun publication bringing its readers the latest production news and local listings for a host of British favourites, from *Downton Abbey*, to *Endeavour* (Morse, that is), and from *Midsomer Murders*, to (of course, *our own favourite*) *Sherlock*. Of particular interest to our Dickens Fellowship colleagues in the February 2016 issue is a feature on the new TV series called *Dickensian*, now showing in the United Kingdom. We

learn here that it is a "re-imagined world...uniting Charles Dickens' iconic characters on one bustling Victorian street." Hmm...Remind anyone of *Corrie*?

Screen Magazine is a high quality entertainment publication long-established in Japan, and Miyako noted it has for many years introduced Japanese fans to some of the best film productions from around the world. To demonstrate just how popular Sherlock Holmes is in Japan, she showed us the July 2013 issue which contained many photos, several small items, and one large feature on Benedict Cumberbatch and his *Sherlock* series. Miyako translated and quoted for us from the article with him by *Screen* journalist Ms. Yoko Narita:

Benedict Cumberbatch says, "I'm living in Venice Beach for the time being and renting a small cottage near the house of Robert Downey Jr. I thought I should say hi to him and say I'm also playing Sherlock Holmes like him, but I never did. People tell me that I'm No. 76 who is playing Sherlock Holmes. I think Holmes is like Shakespeare's Hamlet and this character is loved by people of all ages since his creation by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle...

This 21st Century version of Sherlock Holmes whom I play is a man who hates bureaucratism, because he finds it inefficient. He thinks he could do it much more efficiently with his own method of solving crimes etc. But his character is portrayed as a weak man emotionally. He can't adjust and adapt himself to the society and environment. And his lacking adaptability is probably why this new Sherlock is popular among young people who can see how difficult it is to adapt in this fast-changing world. Some viewers say that maybe Sherlock and Dr. Watson are homosexuals, or enjoy their *bromance*. I suppose that's an interesting idea as well. We live in the 21st century and we should accept that all things are possible regarding differences of race, sexual orientation etc...

Ms Narita asked Mr Cumberbatch about another Sherlock Holmes TV series, *Elementary*, and he said "Oh yes, Johnny Lee Miller and I have been good friends since we played Frankenstein on stage in London many years ago." In fact they received Evening Standard and Laurence Olivier Awards...

The article concluded with the observation that Japanese fans think this 21st century Sherlock is someone who needs to learn how to be human. Because he's just too smart and thinks people are so stupid and he can't sympathize with average people. He looks down on them. Can he become more humane? Ms. Narita really enjoyed Mr. Cumberbatch's British English, she says, and his fine manners.

11. He's a Doll !

Miyako noted *Animeland* magazine, published in France, features in its issue #207 a *Sherlock Hound* doll, modelled on the film animation character created by Hayao Miyazaki, as inspired by Conan Doyle. You can also order a model electric car for Hound to get about town in while solving cases !

12. Crazy about Lily, Keeping in Touch, and the Sherlock Holmes Russian Connection

Chris says you can laugh yourself to sleep reading *Crazy about Lily*, by William Weintraub 2005. It concerns a preppy young Westmount gentleman and his rascally uncle from the East End, not to mention Montreal's Gaiety Theatre and the golden age of burlesque.

Reproductions of very old postal covers were a fascinating addition to a stamp catalogue brought by Chris. These showed envelopes with the address of a person in a far off land, and the postage required, back in Conan Doyle's era, to keep in touch with one's correspondent from here in Canada. We saw these in the Canadian stamp auction catalogue issued by Eaton & Sons for *The C.S.D.A. Show Auction, June 17th and 18th 1988*, Toronto, Canada.

Bill Brownstein had questioned at the Birthday Dinner if Sherlock Holmes has any Russian

connections at all. Chris in response now cited *The Odessa File: Sherlock Holmes and Imperial Russia* by Wladimir V. Bogomoletz, from *The Sherlock Holmes Journal*, Winter 1996, Vol 2 No 13. The paper recounts the real-life Borky incident in which the Imperial family narrowly escaped death in a train derailment in 1888. Bogomoletz goes on to examine historical events between 1878-1888 potentially linking that possible terrorist act to Holmes's being summoned to Odessa as mentioned by Watson in SCAN.

Ronnie noted that in the 1970 film, *The Private Life of Sherlock Holmes*, the agent of a Russian ballet star tries to make a match between Holmes and this prima ballerina. The effort fails and Holmes asks why had he not tried to pair her off with some Russian personage of note? The agent replies that he did. He had tried earlier with Tchaikovsky. "It was a total disaster, because women not his glass of tea!"

13. Toast to Mrs. Hudson by Mark Altosaar

What hasn't been said about Mrs. Hudson?

The collection of Sherlock Holmes adventures do not provide very many details about the land-lady of 221B Baker Street. She has only actually appeared in 11 of the 60 stories. And of those 11, she only speaks in 3 of them. She may have been married at one point, hence the term Missus. She may also be of Scottish descent, but that remains to be seen, as it is only a possibility from a mention by Holmes himself. She seems older, but has been portrayed by a younger woman in films and television.

I believe she is an important character because she takes care of the cooking and cleaning chores for Holmes, which prevents us from having to read about Holmes daily laundry or preparing dinner for himself and Watson. She also puts up with his experiments, violin practicing, drug use, smoking, late night visitors, and occasional target practice, which is not unlike what my own mother did for my brother and I when we were growing up, except maybe for gun play. She must have been a very patient woman to put up with Holmes and Watson, and their adventurous lifestyles, at all hours of the day and night, for which they must have been very grateful. To Mrs. Hudson.

14. Our Annual Birthday Dinner Annual Discussion

Echoing comments at the start of the meeting, there was unanimous agreement that we should stick with our winning formula. And on the subject of winning, warm congratulations were offered to Ronalee Zilman for stylishly winning the Ladies' Best Costume prize at our January 16th Sherlock Holmes Birthday Dinner, and to Paul Billette for likewise capturing Gentlemen's Best Costume honours at the event! Carol led our hearty congratulations to Raf on his Quiz Master Trophy win. The time has come for us to add another tier to the trophy itself, to accommodate the names of future winners.

15. We've Got a Solid Gold Dickens of a Meeting Coming Up in April

Paul reminded us not to miss our very special meeting coming up on April 7th, when we will be joined by members of the Montreal Dickens Fellowship and noted Doylean scholar Clifford S. Goldfarb. Cliff is chairman of the Friends of the Arthur Conan Doyle Collection at the Toronto Public Library, and he'll be delivering a talk entitled, "If Arthur Conan Doyle Met Charles Dickens". We will also have the opportunity to purchase copies of the book he wrote jointly with friend Hartley Nathan, *Investigating Sherlock Holmes*. Paul encouraged everyone to be sure to be there for what is guaranteed to be memorable evening. What could be better than making new friends while discussing our two favourite authors with a real expert in the field?!

16. Toast to the Woman - Irene Adler by Kristin Franseen

I ended up giving the toast I had originally written for this meeting at the annual dinner, so my apologies for the cobbled-together nature of these comments. As many of you know, I am working on a dissertation on musicality as a facet of writings on gender and sexuality in turn-of-the-century medical and musicological literature. You might be surprised to know that "The Woman" crops up now and then in scholarship on the subject. For the purposes of this toast, I am less interested in the traditional Sherlockian speculation on her personal life, and more on what a musicologist might glean from the Canon about her career. Holmes's index tells us that she was for a time prima donna at the Imperial Opera in Warsaw. Putting aside the historical realities that such a place did not exist in the 1870s and (if it did) it would be unlikely to hire a contralto from New Jersey as its prima donna, what types of roles might she have performed?

In SCAN, she is famously able to disguise herself so successfully as a young man that she (however briefly) fools Holmes. As she writes, "male dress is nothing new to me." This admission is perhaps supposed to make her sound even more scandalous to the average Victorian reader and thus make her apparently respectable marriage to Godfrey Norton all the more surprising. Yet this is less shocking given her vocal range, which would have been particularly well suited to trouser roles (think Cherubino in Mozart's *Le nozze di Figaro*) and roles that would have in earlier centuries been intended for castrati. Furthermore (and perhaps more in line with her "scandalous" character), male impersonators enjoyed great success in British and North American vaudeville throughout the late twentieth century. The creators of the Holmes miniseries that aired in Russia in 2013 may have had the likes of Vesta Tilley and Ella Shields in mind when they chose to make Irene a vaudeville performer rather than an opera star.

These are just some notes on an aspect of Irene's character that has received far less attention than Holmes's musical interests. I'd like to thank the members of the Society again for letting me get away with chatting about music history for another toast to the Woman. To the Woman!

♪ *Here's a special musical note sent by Kristin to accompany her toast in the minutes:*

Since both my favorite bit of dialogue from *The Private Life of Sherlock Holmes* and the issue of sexuality in the Canon came up in our discussion, I thought I'd share that I'm actually working on a paper for the London College of Fashion's upcoming conference "Exploring Queer Cultures & Lifestyles in the Creative Arts in Britain c. 1885-1967." My paper deals with how two British musicologists/critics at the turn of the century dealt with (or didn't deal with) the more scandalous aspects of music and music history in their research. I'll be talking at length about Rosa Newmarch, who wrote the first English-language biography of Tchaikovsky.

(We should perhaps remember that Holmes himself was something of an amateur musicologist, authoring a monograph on the "Polyphonic Motets of Lassus" in 1895, making him a scholarly contemporary of Newmarch's. Watson tells us that this work was "said by experts to be the last word upon the subject" (BRUC). I've never been able to decide whether or not this was sincere praise, or the sort of joking I get from family members when I talk about the incredibly specific research interests one finds in the field.)

17. Quiz on *The Adventure of Wisteria Lodge* prepared by Susan Fitch: *The Wisteria Lodge from A to Z Quiz.*

The results: 1st Raf Jans 50
 2nd Carol Abramson 47
 3rd Kristin Franseen 35 ½
 4th Ronnie Zilman 33

Quiz prizes:

London: The Biography of a City by Christopher Hibbert, *Queen Victoria: An Illustrated Biography* by E.F. Benson, and *The Lost World and Other Stories* by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle

The winner of the previous quiz, Raf Jans, generously donated the prizes and declined to claim one. So we were able to give a prize to our fourth place quiz winner this time!

18. Our Valentine's Month Thoughts on the Quiz Story: ♥ ♥ ♥ ♥ ♥

Perhaps we were inspired by this being Valentine's month! In keeping with a theme running throughout our meeting of accepting and celebrating love in all its forms, Miyako discussed the notion of homosexuality in the story. Scott Eccles' description of Garcia could be considered one of physical love for his host. Elliott noted how homosexuality in Victorian times could not even be spoken of, and was called "The love that dare not speak its name." The exiled Oscar Wilde would have been arrested if he had returned to England. He died in France. Chris recalled how Second World War hero Alan Turing committed suicide in 1954, as a result of the horrific sexual discrimination he faced.

19. Toast to the Society by Bruno Paul Stetson

Societies have a very long history. As far back as Ancient Greece there were *hetaireiai*, clubs of wealthy men. Since then there has been a long list of societies including guilds (associations of artists or merchants), unions (industry-specific associations of workers), clubs (associations of hobbyists or fans of a given artist), not to mention fellowships, alliances and various other assemblages of likeminded people sharing an interest.

Sherlock Holmes, on the other hand, has a shorter history. First coming to public attention in 1887 with the publication of *A Study in Scarlet*, Holmes was born in 1854. Though wildly popular during his active lifetime - the publication of his adventures sometimes generated astonishingly long queues at newsstands carrying them - the first proper societies of Holmes followers date only to 1934 with the founding of The Sherlock Holmes Society in London and The Baker Street Irregulars in New York City. Others followed in countries as far as India, Australia and Japan, such that today there are an estimated 250 Sherlock Holmes societies around the world.

Our very own Montréal Sherlock Holmes society, The Bimetallic Question, was founded in 1979 by David Dowse and Wilfrid de Freitas who shared then - and continue to share now - two important characteristics: a love for all things Sherlockian and an overabundance of time on their hands. Surprisingly to some, including Montréal *Gazette* columnists, but not surprising to Dowse and de Freitas, there were other Holmes aficionados in town and there continues to be such fellows.

We, those fellows, are unabashedly intellectual, literate, curious, history-minded, fans of a good story and admirers of the 162-year-old friend of John Watson. And yes, we have too much time to spare. What better place to spend that excess time than in the company of fellows in The Bimetallic Question.

Ladies and gentlemen, I give you The Society.

20. Close of the Meeting

The meeting was adjourned by our Sovereign Carol at 9:00pm.

21. Letter to the Editor

Dear David,

Throughout the ages pigs have had to be vigilant. It has been necessary for us to speak out tirelessly against misrepresentations of the pig persona at every turn and wherever they occur.

It has not escaped my notice, nor indeed that of the L.P.J.N. (League for Pig Justice Now), that the Sherlock Holmes story *The Adventure of Black Peter* contains a shocking reference concerning a pig as a mere subject for forensic study by Holmes.

Please publish my letter in your Bimetallic Question minutes so that a social justice balance regarding this matter can be achieved.

The Victorians were world leaders in animal advocacy. And I know that things change with the times. Doubtless if Sir Arthur Conan Doyle were writing new Sherlock Holmes adventures today he would be one of the first to champion the rights of pigs such as myself as the sentient and wonderful creatures we really are.

Yours truly,

Miss Piggy

P.S. Did I mention we Muppets are Sherlock Holmes fans? C'est vrai ! Perhaps we should start our own Sherlock Holmes society !



Miss Piggy of Jim Henson Productions

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 7th, 2016, at 6:30p.m.

If you detect any errors or omissions in these minutes please do not hesitate to contact our recording secretary David Dowse at daviddowse@hotmail.com .

Please be encouraged to forward the electronic version of your toast for inclusion in the minutes to our webmaster and secretary Susan Fitch at susanruthfitch@yahoo.ca .

A tip of the deerstalker hat to our sergeant-at-arms and vintner Hudson, Raf Jans, for printing and mailing Society minutes to all members requesting the paper version.

