



THE BIMETALLIC QUESTION

Box 883 Stock Exchange Tower
Montreal, Canada H4Z 1K2

September 27/04

Welcome

Professor James Moriarty, often maligned as the Napoleon of Crime, has indeed been cited by Baker Street's most famous cocaine addict as a genius and at least, as his own intellectual equal. While Moriarty has been credited with a brilliant treatise upon the binomial theorem and the no less impressive *Dynamics of an Asteroid*, we have recently unearthed the dark professor's revolutionary foray into the realm of literary appraisal, an achievement overlooked for whatever reason, by the World's Greatest Consulting Detective and his selective, bumbling, well-meaning Boswell.

Hamlet and Insects: The Latest Buzz was penned by Moriarty during the summer of 1867 while on sojourn in Copenhagen under the joint auspices of The Prairie Home Companion Booster Club and the King of Denmark. Pursuing a longstanding conviction that Shakespeare's *Hamlet* was actually a dramatic interpretation of a series of intermittent transverse brain slides of drones in a hive of killer bees, Moriarty posited that Shakespeare (or whatever passed for Shakespeare in the playmaking process at that time) reworked key points of dialogue into acceptable English from what initially would have had audiences scratching their heads in confusion.

The famous soliloquy "To be or not to be" in which Hamlet, commonly believed to be morbidly frustrated and depressed due to his indecisiveness over avenging his father's murder, ponders his own mortality, karma, and *zittfleisch*, is actually, according to Moriarty, seeking escape into some bizarre fantasy world in which bees do much more than cross-pollinate. In effect, Moriarty claims, "They (the bees) cross-dress. The superficial static ineffectuality of Hamlet gives way to an interior monologue that rives the soul and the id with a hurricane of self-doubt and inward castigation. The *adjusted* text reads, as we know it:

"To be, or not to be: that is the question.
Whether 'tis nobler in the mind
to suffer the slings and arrows ..."

Moriarty's research shows that a sizeable bees' nest had been erected outside Hamlet's bedroom suite. Further, Hamlet and his coterie of attendants, except for Fortinbras who repelled insects through unnatural secretion from his armpits, had all been stung on numerous occasions by those very bees. To add credence to the thesis, Queen Gertrude, the fat prince's light-headed mum, had placed a ban on spraying Raid or in any way interfering with the safe conduct of bees throughout the land. Moriarty posits that King Hamlet I, the prince's father, had most likely been offed by having had the forbidden insect repellent poured into his ear by Claudius, Gertrude's new husband, and who had access to the keys to the royal insecticide repository.

According to Moriarty, the original text of perhaps the most famous soliloquy of our language, originally read:

"To bee, or not to bee: there is no question.
When garters these hose do bind
I suffer such stings and arrows ..."

So hopelessly was young Hamlet bound up in his shadow-existence as a bee that he even began to talk like one. When confronted by the doddering courtier Polonius, father of Ophelia, Hamlet parrots Polonius' insincere ministrations with "Buzz, Buzz." Taken as rudeness, this response is easily dismissed as a signal of Hamlet's deteriorating psyche. But this diction is no accident and becomes entirely clear in light of Moriarty's cogent explanations. Hamlet's refusal to entertain any courtship with Ophelia, his buzzing-off of Polonius, and his "bee" soliloquy are only a few of the examples of the play's original intent in its shaping of the interior life of the title character. We are indebted to Professor James Moriarty for these elucidations and lament that he did not persist in this worthwhile area of endeavour.

Date of next meeting

The next meeting will take place on Thursday, October 7th, at 6:30 p.m. at:

The Westmount Public Library
(Westmount Room)
4574 Sherbrooke Street West
Montreal, Quebec

The Next Quiz: The Adventure of the Red Circle, prepared by **Carole Abramson**.

Minutes of the MEETING of the BIMETALLIC QUESTION held on Thursday, August 5th, 2004 at the Westmount Library (Westmount Room), 4574 Sherbrooke Street West, Montreal, Quebec.

Our Sovereign Paul Billette called the meeting to order at 6:35 p.m.

Present:

All those who scratched some form of identifying mark on the attendance sheet included: Carol Abramson, Rachel Alkallay, Jack Anderson, Mac Belfer, Rachel Berman, Paul Billette, Patrick Campbell, Wilfrid de Freitas, David Dowse, David Kellett, Anita Miller, Joan O'Malley, Arlene Scher, and Colin Semel. At least one person went scratchless.

Regrets: Elliott Newman

1) David Dowse recounted the enjoyable time all those who attended, had at Elliott and Eva's home on Saturday July 31 when about a dozen members of The Goose Club of the Alpha Inn from Burlington, Vermont, came up to Montreal for the weekend. There was much socializing and our members brought all manner of delicious comestibles and potables to share with our guests. The Montreal contingent pulled together to create some lovely fare. Perhaps the dish meriting the most enthusiastic rave reviews was Maureen Anderson's Hunan meatballs in peanut sauce. Once everyone had had their fill, we settled down to the serious business of the first quiz. One of the Geese (if we may so call them) had brought along a game which he'd devised and which, in its simplicity, lulled us into a false sense of hope that it was going to be a cake walk; not so. Two teams were formed by the simple expedient of dividing the room down the centre. Each question was drawn at random from a hat (OK, from a paper bag!) and had four parts, in ascending order of difficulty. Intra-team conferring was permitted, indeed encouraged, but if one of the parts couldn't be answered then it was thrown open to the other team. As is the wont with quizzes, there were a few glitches with the scoring but these were soon taken care of by The Resident Lawyer (who else!) in the person of Rajpattie Persaud, aka Paul's wife, who ruled firmly but fairly and immediately put down any outrageous claims for a half point here or a quarter point there. The get-together bounded from one summit to the next, with more games and a wonderful atmosphere in which people some of whom had met cross-border once or twice in the past, got to rekindle old acquaintanceships. From Eva and Elliott's, we wended our way under soggy skies to Old Montreal where we converged upon a restaurant terrace for an continued evening of good times. After more eating and sensible quaffing, we splintered off with our guests to our respective homes for a richly deserved good night's rest. For most of us, the spirit lingered into Sunday when over our respective brunches, we bade farewell to our American Sherlockians.

2) David Kellett proposed, and we are pleased to record it here, a formal vote of thanks to Elliott and Eva for their generous hospitality in hosting this event! All and sundry will be pleased to note that Eva and Elliott kindly accept this vote of thanks. They have volunteered to do it again!

3) Paul then proposed the first toast, to The Master, "without whom we would not be here this evening".

4) For Show and Tell, Patrick had brought along some individual issues of The Strand Magazine containing the first appearances of some of the Holmes adventures. He passed them around for general inspection being careful to note that the same number came back as went out! Wilfrid (who's a bookseller with a specialty in Holmes and Conan Doyle material) noted one of his original invoices in one of the magazines and was impressed at the low price at which he'd sold it to Patrick: it's probably three times the price now!) The popularity of The Strand in

the 1880s and 1890s can hardly be imagined today: of course there was no television to compete for the public's attention then, but even by Victorian standards it had a huge circulation. In fact when a new issue containing the latest Holmes adventure was just about to go on sale, people would be lined up at the newsstands, grasping for their copy, just to see what Holmes had been up to!

5) Paul then proposed the second toast, to Dr. Watson.

6) Somehow we got on to discussing bookshops and buying books on the internet. Paul said that he thought there was no substitute for actually going into a bookshop and browsing the shelves, holding the books, feeling the books, smelling them even! Wilfrid thought that while the internet might be a more efficient way of acquiring a sought-after title, it certainly diminished the serendipity of coming across in a secondhand bookshop a book that one never knew existed. He then related an interesting (well, at least he thought it was interesting!) tale of recently finding a previously unrecorded edition of one of ACD's most well known science fiction titles, *The Lost World*, in a bookshop in Scotland. Had it been on the internet, the chances are that he wouldn't have given it a second glance because he'd have had no reason to suspect it was an unrecorded edition.

7) The talk then turned to the recent and sad death in London of Richard Lancelyn Green, the world's foremost authority on Arthur Conan Doyle and Sherlock Holmes. This occurred back in April and the unusual feature of the case was that the coroner returned an open verdict; that is he could not say whether it had been by suicide, accident, or foul play. There had been some conjecture that Richard was depressed by the dispersal at auction of a large and recently discovered treasure trove of ACD material, which had been known about for the past fifty years but whose present whereabouts had been unknown. The sale went ahead at Christie's in London on May 19, and made just under £1,000,000 rather than the £2 - 3,000,000 that had been talked about. A fine obituary appeared in *The Independent* newspaper in London; it's too long to reproduce here but anyone wanting a copy has only to ask Wilfrid (at 935 - 9581) and he'll be pleased to send it.

8) Paul then proposed the toast to *The Woman* (by now you'd think Paul would be "toasted"; not so...read on).

9) There was then some discussion of our twenty-fifth anniversary publication: Wilfrid reported that so far he'd received six submissions: Patrick Campbell, David Kellett, Bruce Holmes, Tom Holmes, Kevin Chappell and Dr. Joe Schwarcz, in addition to his own contribution, and asked those present who had indicated their willingness to participate please to let him have their pieces by the end of August. Much work remains once all contributions are in so please complete yours as soon as possible, but in any case no later than ***September 30 *** and e-mail it to wilfrid@defreitasbooks.com.

10) The time then arrived for the dreaded quiz, on "The Adventure of the Illustrious Client," set by Rachel Berman a welcome guest and second time visitor (which means of course that she won the last quiz at her first meeting!). She allowed twenty minutes (nice touch!) and at first glance the questions were deceptively simple; however, once you set pen to paper they indicated such a devious turn of mind that the winner, Carol Abramson, triumphed over the rest of us with a modest 19.5 points out of a possible 30. Nice work Rachel, but go easy on us next time - please!

11) There was some discussion of interesting points about the case: Wilfrid wondered if Dr. Watson would have carried his medical bag with him (thereby being able to administer to Baron Gruner after the vitriol-throwing incident), but someone in the cheap seats reminded him that Victorian doctors almost always carried their bags with them, wherever they went. Point taken, but then why does Baron Gruner question Watson's claim to be a doctor? If he had been suspicious, would he not simply have had Watson's bag surreptitiously checked by one of his servants, where it was probably left on the hall table? Hmm...

Note for the next quiz: if, while reading the case, anything strikes you as unusual, make a note of it on your cuff and raise the matter at the next meeting: this way we can get some different perspectives on the story. Carol has chosen "The Adventure of the Red Circle" for the next quiz.

12) Paul, still standing, proposed the toast to Mrs. Hudson!

13) Somehow the discussion then turned to the use of the title Doctor, as in Dr. Watson. Be thankful that we don't go into the nitpicking minutiae here except to say that David Kellett (supported by the evening's unidentified guest (who said she'd written a paper on the subject) maintained that "Doctor" could only be used by someone with a Ph.D. and that a doctor of medicine didn't have such a degree. Wilfrid maintained that "Doctor" was the medical equivalent of a Ph.D. in any other discipline. The discussion got quite heated with both sides remaining convinced of their positions.

14) We were treated to a further reading from Patrick Campbell's play The Tides of the Wight. Parts were distributed randomly with the cast ending up as follows:

Rev. Keed.... Jack Anderson
Alice Keed....Carol Abramson
Dr. Watson....Colin Semel
Sherlock Holmes....Mac Belfer
Inspector Pragnell:.... Wilfrid de Freitas

We are indeed fortunate to have among us such an accomplished author and playwright as Patrick Campbell, whose literary talents now extend to four published pastiches and two Sherlockian plays - thank you, Patrick for the pleasure which your work brings to our meetings!

15) The final toast of the evening, To the Society, was proposed by... no, not Paul Billette, but Wilfrid de Freitas. Clearly something had gone wrong here with Paul's determination to hog all the toasts, but Wilfrid prevailed. He said that the previous Saturday's get together with the Vermont Sherlockians was just the sort of thing that he enjoyed about being a member: our only criterion for membership was a liking for Sherlock Holmes and his world, and that he especially enjoyed the friendships he had made during his quarter century within its ranks.

16) IMPORTANT NOTE REGARDING TOASTS.

As you know we propose the following five toasts at each meeting:

Sherlock Holmes
Dr. Watson
Irene Adler/The Woman
Mrs. Hudson
The Society

Since we don't know in advance who'll be attending the meeting, it would be a great help to our Sovereign Paul Billette if you would call him at 324 - 9999 (office) a day or two in advance and volunteer to propose the toast which appeals to you. The toast can be anything you want: as long as somehow it links back, no matter how tenuously, to your chosen subject. If you can write it down so much the better; it would help the secretary **and** we can reprint it in the minutes for the delectation of those who missed the meeting!

17) Paul formally closed this meeting at 8:40 p.m.

Special Post-Script from Mrs. Hudson's Corner

The Mystery of the Death in the Peanut Gallery A Hunan Whodunnit, also known as Very Few Hunan Remains

Drawing on recently declassified Sherlock Holmes files, Chinese secret official histories, and the memoirs of the master himself, "Death in the Peanut Gallery" is the first full account of the vital role played by Mrs. Hudson's culinary skills in solving the mystery behind this Hunan Whodunnit. The mystery surfaced at the July 31 meeting between the Goose Club of the Alpha Inn and the Bimetallic Questions. By popular demand, Mrs. Hudson is pleased to offer you its solution here.

Should you dare to attempt to traverse the Hunan swamp of dastardly floating things yourself, this recipe contains the following mysteries:

Ground Beef, Chillies (Sauce and Oil), Sesame (Sauce and Oil), Sugar, Peanut Butter, Maggie Sauce, a hint of salt, and the most important ingredient, boiling H₂O with a hint of salt.

The Sauce

Specifically, and before going any further, you should arm yourself with:

- ½ cup each of:
 - Sugar (unless you are used to rapid recoil action, you might want to attempt only 1/3 cup of sugar).
 - Smooth Peanut Butter (Do not use crunchy: it reminds most people of grinding bones.)
- 2 Tablespoons of Sesame Paste (minus the formaldehyde: we're not concerned with embalming yet.)
- 1 Tablespoon each of:
 - Chili Oil (for the full-bore effect, try 1½)
 - Sesame Oil
 - Maggie Sauce
 - Minced Ginger (see note on Chili Oil, above)
 - Chili Sauce (ditto Chili Oil and Minced Ginger)
- 1 cup water

Mix until smooth, no lumps, please.

The Dumplings

Lengthy preamble:

As with all great larcenists, we are permitted to cheat.

Mrs. Hudson has been known to procure her meatballs from M&M, already made.

Another source is IKEA. Their Swedish meatballs offer the ideal balance of Swedish spices and sawdust. It makes us pine for funeral casket ateliers.

A point of relief, if you are going to buy meatballs at IKEA, is that they are not called Olaf, Sven, Sigrit, or Gerrit.

Just tell them you want meatballs, and they will know what you mean.

Once you've got past the preamble:

Double the sauce recipe (above) as you will require two portions.

Why did we not double it for you in the first place?

Dunno. Maybe Mrs. H. likes to travel light.

Cook the meatballs in half of the doubled sauce portion.

Reheat your pre-cooked meatballs at 300 degrees for 45 minutes to an hour.

Baste at the 20-minute point. Mix well.

Use the second half of the sauce as a dipping agent.

This agent is not Dashiell Hammett's Continental Op.

Imagine if you will, a smooth, viscous, bubbling fluid of the brown variety.

Project yourself into the realm of holding a fork, tining your hunan meatball, and lowering said meatball into said dipping agent.

"Dipping agent" is another word for a sauce that sits there and must be visited by the dippee agent, said meatball.

What Mrs. Hudson does when she's at home and not out in the field assisting the WGCD

When she has a bit more time and is willing to add an extra step or two to the preparation process, Mrs. Hudson will wrap her little meatballs in a doughy film and will either fry them or steam them.

Whether frying or steaming, Mrs. Hudson splits each IKEA or M & M meatball in two.

Not because she's looking for odd growths, no.

It's because the store-bought shells might be a little small to completely cover a meatball.

She places ½ of a dumpling in the middle of a round dumpling shell.

She folds the shell in half and moistens the edges with water.

Using the index finger and thumb to bring the sides of the shell together, she pleats one edge while keeping the other edge smooth.

If she is not pulled off-task by the WGCD, she pinches the pleats together, then pinches them to seal.

Amazingly, she does this for each and every dumpling she wants to present in a shell.

Mrs. Hudson respectfully reminds us all that shells for Fried Dumplings differ from Steamed Dumpling shells.

She cautions us to focus on a fixed and clear purpose if indeed we are planning to enrobe our meatballs in a casing that is high in bad carbohydrates.

Those of us with or without a Wok will know what she means.

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 7th, 2004, at 6:30 p.m.