



THE BIMETALLIC QUESTION

**Box 883 Stock Exchange Tower
Montreal, Canada H4Z 1K2**

Welcome

**to another newsletter of the Bimetallic Question
wherein we address profound issues
pertaining to a philological
acolyte's canonical
quandary.**

Once again the illustrious Dr. Doyle holds up words like mirrors to the psyche of his collective and individual readers and gives ... us ... pause ... to ... think. For readers not steeped in Latin, the creeping and crawling of elaborate, foreign-sounding words into the Sherlock Holmes canon's lexicon provides a calorie-filled feast that would turn any confirmed ascetic into an obese glutton within a short paragraph or two.

The enticing tidbit this time (we defy you to stop at just one) is "pertinacious," a seemingly innocuous, seemingly English word twice rooted in Latin, wherein "per" offers us "through," and "tenac-, tenax" leads directly into our beloved "tenacious," that usually admirable quality which when coupled with vision and ability enables paupers to rise from the gutter, send their offspring to college, build multi-national corporations, drive everybody crazy at the dinner table, and spend Sundays pottering around in the workshop. It also lends motivation to raccoons to revisit our garbage cans nightly despite our best-laid plans to divert them to a neighbour.

"Pertinacious" is a cognitive elision wherein we English speakers who have no language of our own have wrested fragments from many other tongues and have developed our own uniquely Anglophonic ear for the improbable, and have deemed it palatable, palpable, and real. This social, psychological, and linguistic caprice of combining words, thoughts, and ideas from other peoples and languages, distorting them in an inimitable and maddening fashion, and calling them our own has lent us the unique attribute of being able to stand up to face the world with complete confidence even though we are wont to suffer from a sometimes comical lack of comprehension of what we are saying, however impassioned our words and phrases are. Alas, we proceed, dear friends, on the basis of winged emotion while our belief in the verity of our words causes us to build statues of ourselves with our feet planted firmly on a rocky base carved from the boulders of Babel. This is the perplexing and entertaining nature of the beast and

provides us with part of what makes us so endearing to ourselves. (For other parts, read the canon. Read anything.)

Consider, for example, the comfort and conviction we derive from our favourite aphorisms; the special personal meanings we attach to those time-worn phrases that our elders have repeated from infancy to the grave, much as their elders before them. Is this linguistic democracy, or more likely, emotional or even tribal anarchy? How often do we bend to the East in prayer with words we accept because we were told to in Grade Six by that wizened teacher we were certain was suffering from a combination of brittle-bone disease and venom over-production? We swore we saw split hoof prints where she passed in the snow and pools of fire wherever she walked, summer or winter. Long before then, and ever since, we have each in our own way been on our own grail quest to find meaning in life through words and beyond words, deep within our separate selves in a lifelong impulse to connect with each other, to learn and study together, and to explore principles and beliefs that ennoble our present lives and flutter some teasing emblem of credos and lofty goals we have not lived, but hope to.

"Pertinacious," according to Webster's *Dictionary*, is an adjective that means "adhering resolutely to an opinion, purpose, or design," "perversely persistent," "stubbornly unyielding or tenacious." *syn.* See OBSTINATE.

Why "pertinacious" and why now? The word appears at the end of the first sentence of this month's quiz story, "The Adventure of the Blanched Soldier." In any given group, let us assume that one of us already knows what the word means before reading the story (certainly not yours truly!). Three or four of us think we know what it means (positively yours truly, and boy, was he wrong!). Some half-dozen of our socially responsible paid-up membership who don't know what it means and don't intend to look up the word, will mentally file it in complete confidence that they will be able to figure out its contextual meaning as they read through the story. Tragically, while they might have learned about the Doppler Effect in High School Physics, they never came close hearing about Avocado's Paradigm: *The ability of the human mind to retain an unfamiliar word in a short story diminishes inversely as the distance from that word increases, at the rate of $\pi \times 10^{-2375.6}$ under standard temperature and pressure conditions.* If anyone is familiar with Avocado's Paradigm, I would like to hear from them. Please send a stamped, self-addressed envelope, and be patient.

Worst of all, we have to accept that in every group, there will be a few people – certainly, a minority, thank goodness! – who have never cared, don't care, and will never care what "pertinacious" means. They will not revel, as the rest of us do, in its romance origin. They will not wax ecstatic over the goose bump-raising phenomenon of combining words to create a satisfyingly sensual word experience. They will connect with Dr. Doyle, but only in another life.

Sadly – and this is probably a first for all of us – "pertinacious" is so seldom used in our language that there are no/none/niente/nada/nein/zero/bapkiss entries for the word in *Bartlett's Familiar Quotations*. Obviously, the WGCD had no qualms about using it, believing, we assume, that his contemporaries would understand it, and not slam shut their copy of *The Strand* in rebellion once achieving the end of the first sentence of the story. Nay, the WGCD was secure in his readership. Lack of popular comprehension notwithstanding, he did not revert to his American predecessor Noah Webster's alternative of "obstinate" as some cheap trap-door ploy to evade confronting posterity

with a really interesting word. Nay, friends, "pertinacious" is *le mot just*, implying with each of its four assertive syllables a deceptively gossamer quality that shimmers at dusk, appears as a holographic face over the fireplace much like Snow White's evil queen's *doppelganger* in the mirror, inspires and haunts Vincent Price in his Poe films, and flows like a stream through varying topography under lighting conditions that range from Rembrandt to Constable to Winslow Homer to Lawren Harris to Mrs. Doyle's interior decorator.

Viva "pertinacious." Wasn't this worth the effort? Were you aware that Dr. Doyle thought so highly of the word that he used it once again in the story? Where? Why? Words, words, words! Aha!

Date of next meeting

The next meeting will take place on Thursday, February 3rd, at 6:30 p.m. at:

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

Can you believe that no one to date has asked for the postal code? Does this mean they have given up on the idea of mailing themselves to our meeting?

The Next Quiz: "The Adventure of the Blanched Soldier" last presented in August 1989.

Minutes of the MEETING of the BIMETALLIC QUESTION held on Thursday, December 2nd, 2004 at the Westmount Library (Westmount Room), 4574 Sherbrooke Street West, Montreal, Quebec.

Present:

A significant and happy throng, including:

Carol Abramson, Rachel Alkallay, Jack Anderson, Stanley Baker, Paul Billette, Helen Buck, Patrick Campbell, Wilfrid de Freitas, David Dowse, David Kellett, Joan O'Malley, Erica Penner, Kathryn Radford, Lawrence Reich, Arlene Scher,

Regrets:

Maureen Anderson

CALL TO ORDER:

Our Sovereign Paul Billette called the meeting to order promptly at 6:30 p.m. Since there were a few new faces around the oaken tables, Paul asked everyone to introduce themselves.

ITEMS OF BUSINESS AND GENTLE TRANSACTION:

- 1) David Dowse recounted the founding of the society at his parents' home in Dorval 25 years ago, with Wilfrid deFreitas.
- 2) Paul Billette informed us that last June, Radio Canada taped our meeting which it broadcast on radio Saturday, November 27, 2004. Paul mentioned that we could all hear this program on <http://radio-canada.ca/refuge>. We were further advised to left click on "*semaine dernière, the deerstalker hat, and the headphones*. We believe that this program might no longer be available by the time anyone reads this. That being the case, we firmly maintain it's the thought that counts.
- 3) First toast to the Master, in original poetry, was delivered by Patrick Campbell, as follows. The society of The Bimetallic Question is honoured in that the *double-entendre* in this poem may well be the first in history to elicit not the usual groan, but admiration at Patrick's adroitness in tying the piece together. Bravo, Patrick, and thank you!

*At Reichenbach as I recall,
the roaring icy waters fall;
and down and down the waters go,
into a cauldron there below:
This roaring echoes face to face
to overwhelm this fearful place.
Here died our hero and his foe
or so the story has it so,
but Holmes escaped the deadly grip,
a masterpiece of brinksmanship!*

To the master!

- 4) David Dowse read two whodunits for us to solve from *The Little Giant Book of Whodunits*.
- 5) Second toast to Dr. Watson was by Lawrence Reich:

I have the honour tonight to propose a toast to Dr. Watson, longtime friend, associate, chronicler, and devoted biographer of the great detective Sherlock Holmes. It is because of Dr. Watson's dogged loyalty and fidelity that Holmes is known in such remarkable detail and colour.

Although he may at times appear to be hopelessly bungling, it is important to note a reference that Sherlock Holmes made about his assistant in The Hound of the Baskervilles. I quote: "It may be that you are not yourself luminous, but you are a conductor of light. Some people without possessing genius have remarkable power to stimulate it."

To Dr. Watson!

- 6) In the "Now isn't that a coincidence?" department, we have had both Holmes and Watson to our meeting. We later discovered they were Nero Wolfe and Philip Marlowe traveling under assumed names that they had picked up somewhere or other.

- 7) Show and Tell.

A.

Patrick Campbell showed us the Thursday, April 5th, 1979 edition of the *News and Chronicle* which ran a story on the founding of our society.

Patrick produced a sheet listing all our sovereigns since our illustrious inception.

Patrick presented Paul Billette with a computer diskette from the Second Bimetallic Colloquium. Paul agreed to identify the contents.

Patrick had been working on an updated list of all the quiz stories from 1985 to the present. He gave this to Jack Anderson who will pass it on to Maureen who in turn will maintain and publish the list.

Patrick showed us a book recently received from Sarah Dawbarn, the cultural attaché of the British Council, who had attended our meeting last June. It contains new prose writing from England and will be available for our members to read.

À propos our last meeting's discussion of the origin of wristwatches, Patrick informed us that his recent research into the subject revealed that the invention of the wristwatch predated the time we had assumed. We attribute this confusion to the fact that calendar wristwatches had not yet appeared, so it would not be unreasonable for us to get the dates wrong.

Patrick revived the issue of whether or not Watson should have been given the title "Doctor" in "The Field Bazaar." The answer is probably not, since general practitioners were called "Mr." as were specialists.

B.

David Kellett showed us a postage-stamp-sized cookbook of 824 pages. He gave it to Jack to convey to Maureen, our very own Mrs. Hudson.

C.

Someone donated three flyers regarding activities of the Bootmakers in Toronto.

D.

David Dowse read an article on a detective in a new television series entitled "House." The main character is a brilliant surgeon of an irascible nature, and with a piercing wit, and is based somehow on the WGCD. It's on the Fox network Tuesday nights, and stars Hugh Laurie. It might be read as Laurie Hugh, but that would be a dyslexic crossover and doesn't count as useable information.

David also showed us a poster produced by our society in 1983. Comment on the poster was noted in the society's minutes on that historic occasion:

Don Williams' splendid picture of Holmes and Doctor Watson was the topic of much excitement. As a special guest, Don graciously presented his work of art as a free gift to the Bimetallic Question. In return, on a proposal from Danuta Padowicz, seconded by Mietek Padowicz, and unanimously carried, Don Williams was made an honorary member of the Bimetallic Question. Don made a brief but enthusiastic acceptance speech. A vote of thanks was also made to Mietek for bringing such an outstanding talent to our society.

David reminded us that we are producing a book commemorating our 25 years as a society. He asked people to send their contributions as soon as possible, since we are hoping to distribute this valuable, very limited edition to our equally limited edition members at our forthcoming banquet.

E.

Stanley Baker read to us about a literary parrot which opened a consulting office on Green Avenue in Westmount. The Parrot was mentored by Sherlock Holmes and was therefore very old. Although we have not been so informed, we assume it was also hard of hearing, and was molting. It was known to toss off indecorous insults at Nick's Restaurant during lunchtime as it tore into its tomato and lettuce sandwich on whole wheat toast.

This reminded David Dowse of a Bizarro cartoon in *The Gazette* on "The Parakeet of the Baskervilles."

When last we heard, said parakeet was served upon toasted whole wheat bread along with the usual lettuce and tomato to the Sherlockian parrot at Nick's Restaurant resulting in the only compliment ever uttered by the parrot, and overheard by someone quite hard of hearing who in turn repeated to this writer:

Luck! Luck! Luck!
Fit on toast could hardly be better!

Thank you, Stanley.
Thank you, David.
Individually, you are impressive.
Together, you are an inspiration!

F.

David announced that he has received a set of DVDs of Sherlock Holmes programs starring Ronald Howard, from the mid-1950s. More on this after David has had time to go through them. We look forward to the Happy Days when we will be listening to these historic programs!

G.

Wilfrid deFreitas showed us evidence of the first Holmes story, "A Study in Scarlet," printed as a stand-alone volume in 1898, one year after its debut in *Beaton's Christmas Annual*. (Quiz item: What year was the annual printed?)

H.

Rachel Alkallay extemporized a memorable toast "to Mrs. Hudson who was not a slave (to the Master)."

I.

David Dowse posed the question: "What if Sherlock Holmes and Mrs. Hudson reversed roles?"

This provocative question may give rise to a series of new short stories. As you know, there are many Sherlockian writers who are not named Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. For example, the contemporary Texan, Carole Nelson Douglas has issued a prolific outpouring of feminist Victoriana in which the WGCD, although depicted as brilliant and indefatigable, pales beside the genius, intuition, feminism, beauty, talent, and energy of Irene Adler, "the woman" from "A Study in Scarlet."

As far as yours truly knows, no one yet has reversed the Holmes and Hudson roles. Yet, why not? David, the prospect is not simply intriguing; it is the treasure-trove at the bottom of Pandora's box. Although something of an epicure, can S.H. actually cook? And if anyone could coax more discipline into those Baker Street Irregulars, we all agree it would be Mrs. Hudson. What fun! Any takers?

J.

Jack Anderson pointed out a series by L.M. Trow in which Lestrade is the genius. We wonder how he can tolerate the kudos' going to S.H. Or do they? Jack, can you get us a sample of the prose, and an outline of one of the stories?

K.

YE BIMETALLIC QUIZ

Participants who took a breather from the Honolulu triathlon participated in "The Killer Quiz" on "The Final Problem," prepared by David Kellett. They found David's quiz a lot harder than the triathlon. There 75 questions to be answered in 20 minutes, and none of them easy. David's caveat was that answers were only valid if they came from this story, since similar but not identical information may be found in some of the other canonical stories.

The information upon which the balance of the minutes are loosely based has been provided by David Dowse. For this occasion, David used a vintage Italian Omas Paragon pen and Siamese ink. We hope that these subtleties are adequately conveyed in your copy of the minutes. It was a delight for this writer to copy from notes crafted in so fine a hand and with so distinguished a pen and ink.

Here are the results of the quiz:

1 st .	Patrick Campbell	47½
2 nd .	Carole Abromson	46½
3 rd .	Jack Anderson	36

The prizes were collections of mixed nuts. (Are we ever!)

Each of the three prizes were wrapped in gold, silver, and red paper as a metaphor for our Bimetallic Question. Red represented blood. (Can we ever use the word "metaphor" without "for" after?)

A lively discussion ensued as to the merits and curiosities of the story.

Paul stated that when reading "The Final Problem" he thought of past sovereign and air gun expert, our beloved Charles Purdon, a great friend to the Society. Holmes utters to Watson that he is afraid of air guns but then immediately proceeds to ask for a light, thereby offering any would-be marksman an illuminated target. It makes no sense and has no bearing on the adventure. (Yes, but how many mystery stories have you read where somebody asks somebody for a light? It's almost an icon in the genre. Even more so since the appearance of Budweiser.)

However, Paul continued, this may have been the seed planted by Conan Doyle to subconsciously bring back Holmes from Reichenbach Falls in "The Adventure of the Empty House" in which an air gun played a pivotal role.

Joan O'Malley was astounded by the complexity of hiring a "Special" to run directly from London to Dover. Moriarty's criminal connections must have allowed him the opportunity to cut through all the paperwork involved, to say nothing of the expense. Joan was also puzzled why Watson would go off and leave Holmes in such a dangerous circumstance with the rather flimsy excuse of an English woman's needing his medical services. We feel that Holmes knew that the letter was a ruse and that he wanted to confront Moriarty alone, while at the same time not wanting to put his friend Watson in any danger.

Patrick cleared up the question of Professor James Moriarty and his brother "James." It was common practice in Irish families to name siblings by the same name.

Oh.

All agreed that "The Final Problem" is a superior Sherlock Holmes story. When it first was published, people took it so to heart that they went around wearing black armbands in mourning for the death of Sherlock Holmes.

L.

A correction was made to our web site address, since it appeared wrong in our last newsletter. It should read:

www.bimetallicquestion.org

M.

A toast to The Woman, by Stanley Baker:

In Professor Moriarty, as described in "The Final Problem," Holmes did find an antagonist who was his intellectual equal. But Irene Adler could be considered blessed with an intellect superior to Holmes. It may also be significant that this superiority was present in a member of Holmes' opposite sex. Should we gather any clue from the fact that in none of the canon is there a hint of his romantic involvement with any woman. In the time the stories were written, had there been a suggestion that Holmes liked members of his own sex, the stories would never have been published. So we have to assume that he had no sexual interests, as they might have interfered with his sleuthing. Irene does command our great respect for her prowess in dealing with the greatest detective of all time.

Raise your glasses – to THE WOMAN!

N.

The plans to celebrate the Master's 150th Birthday at our **Annual** Banquet were put on the table for final digestion. The date was fixed on **Saturday, January 22, 2005**. The location of **Le Vieux Port** on St. Paul Street in Old Montreal was chosen over the Montefiore Club.

It was announced that the membership will receive further details as well as a form to fill out indicating how many will come, to be returned to Wilfrid along with a cheque.

O.

Wilfrid asked us to raise our glasses one last time to our Society, the Bimetallic Question.

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, February 3rd, 2005, at 6:30 p.m.

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

Sherlock Holmes stories, and much more

The New Annotated Sherlock Holmes:

The Complete Short Stories

Edited by Leslie Klinger
Norton, 1,878 pages, \$110

EDWARD NAWOTKA
FORT WORTH STAR-TELEGRAM

Even now, nearly 75 years after the death of Arthur Conan Doyle, his creation Sherlock Holmes remains one of the most pervasive figures in literature. Holmes's pipe, magnifying glass and deerstalker cap have become iconic. This fictional character still commands legions of fans, and there are more than a hundred active Sherlockian societies throughout the world.

Now, Sherlockian scholar Leslie Klinger has distilled his nine-volume Sherlock Holmes Reference Library into a new, two-volume, slipcased edition of all 56 of Doyle's Holmes stories, superseding the last annotated edition published by William S. Baring-Gould in 1968. Though not Doyle's complete opus (the four Sherlock Holmes novels will be published together next year), it's still an impressive feat, coming in at more than 1,800 pages, with 700 vintage photos and drawings, and dozens of annotations explicating each story.

Like the best DVD commentaries, these annotations, running in the margins alongside the text, are more entertaining than distracting, even when they consume entire pages of the book. Very often, they explain historical references and context for modern readers. The sidebars offer edifying discussions on such topics as the invention of the typewriter, Victorian divorce laws and the history of the English police force, as well as hundreds of details about Holmes himself, from the colour of his dressing gowns to his habitual enjoyment of wine and cocaine.

Klinger appears to have synthesized nearly all existing Holmes scholarship, and he is able to offer competing viewpoints on more controversial issues, like the type of handguns the detectives might have carried and why two stories, *The Mazarin Stone* and *His Last Bow*, are not narrated by Watson but instead are written in the third person.

A word of warning to first-time readers of the stories: Klinger offers brief introductions to each, and these contain spoilers. Then again, Holmes stories are never really plot-heavy – a handful of the stories have no crime in them at all – and the pleasure in reading them is to be had in relishing Dr. Watson's charming, straightforward, old-time storytelling. Not just for Sherlockian enthusiasts, the *New Annotated* can be enjoyed by anyone who appreciates a good yarn.



GORDON BECK THE GAZETTE

Bimetallic Question members (left to right) recruiting sergeant Stanley Baker, president Paul Billette, co-founder Wilfrid de Freitas and writer Rachel Alkallay prepare for tonight's celebrations. Over the years, the group, which meets at Westmount library on the first Thursday of every second month, has had a diverse membership.

MONTREAL'S SHERLOCK HOLMES SOCIETY CELEBRATES A QUARTER-CENTURY OF REFINED CONVERSATION ABOUT THE FAMOUS FICTIONAL DETECTIVE

United by a common quest

RACHEL ALKALLAY
SPECIAL TO THE GAZETTE

It was a bitter, blustery night one February in 1981 when I wended my way up the icy slopes of Atwater Ave. to the armoury to attend a meeting of The Bimetallic Question, a society devoted to the world's most famous (and only) consulting detective, Sherlock Holmes, and his faithful chronicler, John H. Watson, MD.

Fortunately, I was not alone on my quest; I was the tag-along of Professor Graeme Decarie, who had been invited as a result of his Sherlockian-related comments in the newspaper. A lone fan of the Victorian detective since childhood, lost in a sea of Nancy Drew and Hardy Boys aficionados, I was looking forward, apprehensively, to meeting like-minded folk. Would they be a wizened group of doddering old men and women, dressed in 19th-century costume, querulously picking at

the 56 short stories and four novels that make up The Canon, the "bible" of Sherlockian scholars? Or a collection of ex-hippies living in fantasyland?

Neither, actually. Sherlock Holmes fans, Montreal-style, were, and are, book dealers and chemists, students and surgeons, philatelists, policemen and high-powered executives, teenagers to octogenarians, threaded together by a fascination for the Master and his adventures, and an affinity for Victorian sensibilities.

Tonight, the group celebrates its 25th anniversary – and Sherlock Holmes's 151st birthday earlier this month – with a special dinner.

Founded by Wilfrid de Freitas and David Dowse, The Bimetallic Question takes its name from a mention in *The Adventure of the Bruce-Partington Plans*, the only story in The Canon to mention Canada and "the bi-metallic question."

In its quarter-century of existence, nearly 200 members have

ventured through the society's doors – hard-core devotees who argue vociferously over quarter-points at the pre-determined quiz given every meeting, the merely curious who satisfy their fascination for the tenant of 221B Baker St. with a few meetings and then disappear, and a core group of the faithful who are found the

Meetings offer a trip back into a Victorian mindset, where courtly manners are observed.

first Thursday of every second month at the Westmount Public Library – our third home – with new bits of Sherlockian trivia and news in hand.

The current hot topic – sure to be debated at several meetings – is the mysterious death, in London, England, of Richard Lancelyn Green, the foremost

Sherlockian scholar, a mystery worthy of the best detecting abilities of Sherlock Holmes, who, as every devotee knows, is alive and well and tending his bees on the Sussex Downs. Which is why every world-wide Sherlockian society from London to Tokyo celebrates his Jan. 6 birthday sometime this month with festive dinners – Victorian costumes welcome.

Costumes also flourished at our two colloquia held in 1990 and 2000. Sherlockians worldwide flocked to Montreal for three days of scholarly discussions on the adventures, to buy Sherlockian paraphernalia, and to mingle with other gloved, gowned and properly hatted Holmes fans. We discussed Chinese editions of The Canon, the Sherlock Holmes book that I did not buy on a trip to Iceland (and am still berated about, 20 years later) and the discovery of a Sherlock Holmes decor shop in, of all places, Gibraltar.

To celebrate our 25 years of

existence, the society is publishing *Musings from an Overturned Beehive – Twenty-Five Years of The Bimetallic Question*, a collection of reminiscences by current and past Bimetallic members, including a Holmes (Tom) and a Baker (Stanley).

In an inconstant life, The Bimetallic Question is a welcome constant, a way of sinking back, for a few hours, into a Victorian mindset, where courtly manners are observed, glasses of sherry and port are shared as we toast The Master, Dr. Watson, The Woman (Irene Adler), Mrs. Hudson (the housekeeper), and The Society, and Sherlock Holmes continues to live on, larger than life.

For more information on the society, check out the Web site: www.bimetallicquestion.org or write to The Bimetallic Question, P.O. Box 883, Stock Exchange Tower, Montreal, H4Z 1K2.

