

THE BIMETALLIC QUESTION

Box 883 Stock Exchange Tower
Montreal, Canada H4Z 1K2

This is a

Good News and Bad News

Memo

The Good News is that our long-awaited

Musings from an Overturned Beehive: Twenty-five Years of The Bimetallic Question 1979-2004 is now ready and will be launched at our meeting on April 7.

These interesting and sometimes amusing recollections by members, former members, and friends, of our Society's first twenty-five years have been gathered under the editorship of one of our co-founders (or should that be confounders?), Wilfrid de Freitas. Our Sovereign Paul Billette has written a bilingual preface and contributors include members Patrick Campbell, Rachel Alkallay, David Dowse, Francis Lalumière, Stanley Baker, David Kellett and Tom Holmes. Former members Bruce Holmes and Kevin Chappell couldn't resist the opportunity to say a few words, and members-in-spirit Dr. Joe Schwarcz, Graeme Decarie and Susan Ravdin also felt moved to contribute. By way of a tribute, Charles Purdon's article on Arthur Conan Doyle and Marksmanship has also been included.

This is a strictly limited edition of sixty Canonical Copies, each one numbered and named for an adventure in the Holmes Canon. Hand-bound in brown cloth and appropriately stamped in guilt as well as gold with the Society's logo on the front cover, and with nine pages in full colour (some of it blood-red!), we hope you will agree that this attractive volume is a fitting tribute to our quarto-centennial.

Paid-up members for 2005 and contributors will automatically receive a copy, and anyone else may purchase one at the cost price of \$40. If you aren't sure of your membership status for 2005, or would like to purchase a copy, please contact our Florin (treasurer) Wilfrid de Freitas at 935 - 9581 or wilfrid@defreitasbooks.com

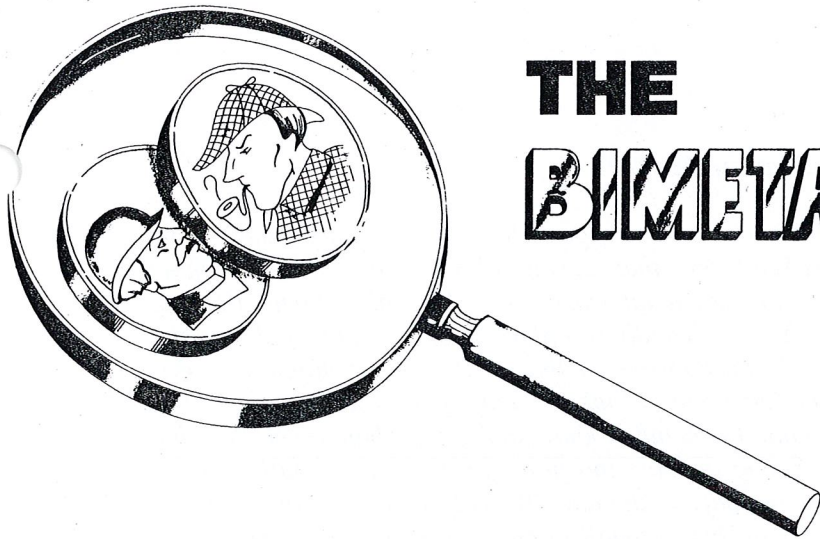
And ... if you haven't paid your dues yet, you may do so at our meeting on April 7.

Clue : By paying your dues, you will realize a substantial savings over maintaining your independence, and paying the still quite reasonable \$40 price tag for this fine collector's item.

The Bad News is that due to more Moriarties beyond our control, the minutes from our last meeting have disappeared into a black hole outside 221B Baker Street. We are scrambling to recover them from the arch-villain and get them to you a.s.a.p. In the meantime, please note that the April 7 quiz will be based on "The Adventure of the Engineer's Thumb."

FEB 3 2005

rec'd
27 Mar



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This is It!

This month's edition of The Bimetallic Question's Newsletter includes a special bonus – an original short story written by a fully paid-up member of The BmQ, interwoven among the threads of import from our last meeting. The story is presented in italicized Times New Roman font. Each installment is preceded by a ♀ and terminated with a ♂. Be sure to bring this copy of your minutes to our April 7 meeting and have it personally autographed by the author!

Date of next meeting

The next meeting will take place on:
Thursday, April 7th, at 6:30 p.m. at:
(Last tested April 1988)

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

(Still no requests for the postal
code. We are beginning to doubt
the interactivity of this newsletter.)

Minutes of the MEETING of the BIMETALLIC QUESTION held on Thursday, February 3rd, 2004 at the Westmount Library (Westmount Room), 4574 Sherbrooke Street West, Montreal, Quebec.

The Quiz at the next meeting

**"The Adventure of the Engineer's
Thumb"**

You will notice that we have changed the
format of how we announce the forthcoming
quiz. We did a market test and our re-
search indicates that highlighting the story
title in its own block will ensure that it is
more visible.

⌘ Reading Matter

They, whoever "they" are, outnumber me, so who am I to argue when "they" say existence is one big sleep punctuated by periods of wakefulness; that during those bouts of questionable wakefulness we do things which define our individual existences with little illuminations of activity? The definition of our identity in this brief candle is a function of the shape and intensity of the flame we are, the glow we cast, and the bustle we make that catches the attention of others. Where the light falls, so are we caught and identified. I look at flames and glows and noises and even the silences that individuals emanate and I conclude I know something about them. Not that anyone notices my private little game. Young animals too play games on their path to more serious pursuits, such as the business of living beyond the lair. We call it survival and it always involves death so that life can continue. I call this rationalization a distortion of the truth. The philosophers are somewhat evasive in this arena, for example. They have different schools for identifying this pursuit of the truth, the identification of the elements of life in the abstract, the behavioral, the realm of belief, and everything that branches off from there. You would have to get past Introductory Philosophy and perhaps even its intermediate successor to begin entertaining discussions about the morality of killing in support of survival. Do our die-hard liberals and vegans shriek blue murder when the stalk of wheat yields its throat to the harvester's blade and cries its silent supplications for mercy? Well? The koans of Zen know why the universe begins anew with every eye blink. They frame their certainty in the shape of a question which hardly satisfies most of us. Mystics see the ultimate Creator and Leviathan in the awakening bud of a dew-kissed flower at dawn. I myself see a potential for nasal irritation and chain sneezing. ✕

Present: Carole Abramson, Albert Aikman, Rachel Alkallya, Jack Anderson, Stanley Baker, Paul Billette, Richard Brown (visiting from Halifax), Patrick Campbell, Wilfrid deFreitas, David Dowse, David Kellett, Sidney Langdon, Elliott Newman, Joan O'Malley, Carolyn Rafman, Bernard Robaire, Carole S. Rocklin, Arlene Scher, Cheryl Surkes.

Regrets: Maureen Anderson.

CALL TO ORDER:

Our Sovereign Paul Billette called the meeting to order promptly at 6:30 p.m.

⌘ I was curious about Lance Martenssen from the beginning, maybe because his glow was a little off, his shine a trifle deceptive, and his bustle obviously self-conscious and measured. His lean six-three frame projected a contradictory message of wiry athleticism as well as admirable preservation and tone in a man in his 60s. I found his studied, impeccable carelessness just a trifle obvious. From his steely-grey, expensively coiffed hair, past his trimmed and tinted moustache, past the Italian lambs wool-and-mohair jacket that would have set me back a month's pay, and down to the Mephisto loafers, he projected an image that I found undefinable, a glow whose edges dissolved in the dusky twilight of uncertainty to re-emerge in the chiseled contours of a hard reality in another time, another place, another dream. It wasn't just that the original buttons on that Fort Knox of a lamb's wool-and-mohair jacket had been replaced with a heavy investment in the form of a nautical motif in gold of an intaglio-like anchor set into an onyx

background with small diamonds arranged tastefully in a three-quarter halo on each. Each button was heavy – damned heavy – and multiplied by twelve as they were sewn onto the garment in places that were intended to sport buttons for closing the front, and for ornamentation up the sleeve wrists. In surprising contrast against the health that Martenssen appeared to exude was his confidence to me that, “I am somewhat of an epileptic, old chap. Medication’s doing me wonders, you know, and I rarely if ever get an attack nowadays. If by chance I do, just clamp something between my teeth, lay me down, and find something soft to cushion my head, preferably on that young maiden’s warm thighs, ha-ha.”

I grinned weakly in response, then not at all at the prospect of maneuvering Zelda Hagen-Daas’s warm thighs beneath Martenssen’s head (face upward at least) when I myself had in my wildest fantasies entertained notions of the same geometric relationship for my own unworthy head and the fermented thoughts that live there. But perhaps – dare I? – contemplate the more humble, more basic posture of facing downward, heroically usurping less air from other living creatures in my descent into the private and muffled ecstasy of such statuesque yet yielding anatomy, perfect in my morality of devouring the stuff of flesh yet sparing life. ✂

ITEMS OF BUSINESS AND GENTLE TRANSACTION:

- 1) In our “It pays to advertise especially when it’s free” department, we noted at least one new (and most welcome!) face in our group as a result of the exciting article and photo in the January 22 edition of *The Gazette*. The article focused on our society, was entitled “United by a common quest” and appeared in the Book section. We hope Albert Aikman, who joined us as a result of seeing the article will continue to be with us! The photo featured the familiar faces of BmQ stalwarts Sergeant-at-Arms Stanley Baker, co-founder Wilfrid deFreitas, Sovereign Paul Billette, and World Traveler and Journalist Rachel Alkallay who also wrote the article. Impetus for the article may have been our 25th anniversary which is a significant cause for celebration. Since a full page of advertising in the newspaper goes for at least \$10,000 with color extra, we calculate that we have received a plum of no less than \$5,000. Thank you Rachel! Thank you, *Gazette*! Is there truth to the rumor that Rachel has been nominated for the Pullet Surprise for this article?
- 2) In the “Play and Tell” arena, Paul Billette treated us to audio replays of not one but two radio broadcasts focusing on Sherlock Holmes and our society. One was an interview with Sherlock Holmes, and the other was an overview of our society. The amazing talents of one of our members, Francis Lalumière, were instrumental in one or both of these efforts which could not have come about without input from our senior members who are very committed, or should be.
- 3) David Kellett asked that we consider posting the interview with Sherlock Holmes starring Francis Lalumière on our web site.

✂ To add to the conundrum of Mr. Lance Martenssen was the handsome Namiki fountain pen he ordinarily would keep clipped to the inside of his Versace shirt pocket like some stock clerk and his disposable Bic. The Namiki was easily a \$15,000 contemporary museum piece with its hand-painted royal courtyard scene and multiple layers of meticulously applied lacquer and striking

gold nib. He had already flourished it clumsily on several occasions whenever he would write with it into a 79-cent metal coil-bound pocket notepad. The pen looked particularly out of place now with its nib stuck at a thirty-eight-degree angle into the late Mr. Martenssen's neck as his head, shoulders, and chest slumped across the oak table in the reading room of the Westmount Public Library.

I do not digress, but perhaps I get ahead of myself.

We are the Bimetallic Question, as odd and interesting an assortment of individuals as you are ever likely to meet, all gathered on the first Thursday of every second month in the room I have just mentioned. We are devoted to the perusal, contemplation, and enjoyment of the exploits of Sherlock Holmes, his canon, his times, and his life which since no obituary in celebration of that life or acknowledgment of its demise has ever appeared in any newspaper, continues at full gallop more than a century-and-a-half after his birth. We manifest our interest by engorging ourselves on the ephemera of detective fiction, things literary, and an unlimited smorgasbord of trivia. We quiz each other on one of the canonical stories of his exploits at every meeting, hand out inventive prizes to winners of these quizzes who either keep them or give them away as Christmas presents to relatives in far-off places. We are a small but passionate group. We break out of the autism of our separate Sherlockian passions by luring new bodies and questing minds into our fold in the belief that fresh blood will swell our ranks and keep our collective flame burning bright. It has become the unofficial duty of Sir Stanislaus Koch, the genteel, debonair senior statesman of our group who has been dubbed our Sergeant-at-Arms, to muster up new attendees and potential members. It was in the course of this noble pursuit that Sir Stan stumbled over Mr. Martenssen's recently live body and introduced him to us on the evening in question.

Early in our meeting, we usually ask the guests to introduce themselves and explain their affiliation with things Sherlockian, if any. I suppose we do this to allow people who think they're attending a gathering of the Midwinter Floral Arrangement Society the option to withdraw gracefully and come back when that group actually does meet in the reading room of the Westmount Public Library. Our group has long ago acknowledged – however grudgingly – that there may be a handful of misguided individuals on the face of this planet who don't lose it over the World's Greatest Consulting Detective! And so, during this traditional introductory phase of the meeting, Mr. Lance Martenssen, in a drawl that was tinged with traces of Swedish, New Mexican, East London, Swahili, and most poignantly, Downsvie, explained that he was in Montreal briefly on business (undisclosed), that he lived abroad (area undisclosed), that he was on his way to a meeting (undisclosed) when he was pounced upon by Sir Stan, placed in a wrestler's hold (undisclosed) and genteelly invited to our BmQ meeting, failing his attendance of which certain dire consequences would ensue (undisclosed). Mr. Martenssen laughed as we all did, since we know Sir Stan prefers the switch blade to wrestling holds, and we all looked at our wine or port toasting glasses with warmth, camaraderie, and the anticipation of a salubrious evening together. ✕

- 4) Wilfrid deFreitas made the first toast of the evening to Doctor Watson. Here it was:

"I am grateful to have this opportunity of proposing the toast to our dear friend Doctor Watson. He has been much maligned, I fear, not only through clumsy portrayals on the screen over the years, but much more recently, dare I say it, right here in this room, at this table. I simply cannot understand why so many otherwise logical minds appear to have gone off

the rails when it comes to our good friend, Doctor Watson. Has it escaped their notice that if it were not for the good Doctor, we would not be sitting here this evening? Aspersions have been cast on his professional qualifications, or at least on his right to use the title Doctor, but the argument in favour of this point of view is flawed. He may not have been a successful doctor, but then neither was Arthur Conan Doyle – and look what that led to. But does anyone seriously question whether Conan Doyle was entitled to use the appellation of doctor? I think not. “Conan Doyle’s story “The Field Bazaar” has been cited as the ultimate proof that Watson was not entitled to use the appellation of doctor. But let us examine this story and its genesis, and allow me to quote the sentence which seems to confuse some people: ‘This I gathered from the use of the word ‘Doctor’ upon the address, to which, as a Bachelor of Medicine, you have no legal claim.’ The story goes on to put Watson as a graduate of Edinburgh University – which, incidentally, as everyone knows (or should know) was Conan Doyle’s alma mater.

“What, then, are we to make of Watson’s opening words of “A Study in Scarlet,” the very first published Sherlock Holmes adventure: ‘In the year 1878 I took my degree of Doctor of Medicine of the University of London (not Edinburgh) ...?’ Did Watson go through the course prescribed for surgeons in the army, with only a Bachelor’s degree in medicine? I think not. Did he forget which university he had attended? I don’t think so.

“No, clearly ‘The Field Bazaar’ was written as a fund-raiser for Conan Doyle’s alma mater, Edinburgh University, and is obviously a self-deprecating parody on the hugely successful published Sherlock Holmes adventures. He gives himself (as Watson) only a Bachelor’s degree solely for the purposes of the narrative, which it has to be said, is an entertaining one since it has distracted so many people from the truth that Watson was, indeed, a Doctor of Medicine and fully entitled to use ‘Doctor’ before his name.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I give you Doctor Watson.”

You will notice that in saluting the good doctor, Wilfrid queried: “If it were not for the good doctor, would we be sitting here tonight?” This added a new and impressive dimension to Doctor Watson, since none of us in attendance and seated comfortably on unpadded oak chairs had ever realized or even considered the inroads Doctor Watson had forged into the alleviation of piles.

⌘ Notwithstanding the body beside me on my immediate left stretched partway across the table which when you come to think of it, was so à propos, I must say we held it together pretty well, with nobody losing dinner or passing out.

I’m still just a tad ahead of myself but the gap is closing.

Our meeting room has two sets of double oak-framed glass doors which are never locked while we are there. These doors flank a large, screened and grated fireplace and open onto a hallway

on the other side of which are two wider openings to the library's sprawling periodicals, reference, and circulation area. Down the dividing hallway and to the left of our area, towards the north side of the building and at a distance of some thirty meters is the main entrance to the building. Beyond that, a walkway, a metered parking lot, the municipal sidewalk, and Sherbrooke Street, the main thoroughfare whose generally high traffic level belies the staid pace of life that the inhabitants of Westmount's greystones and mansions so ardently strive to believe typifies existence in that Montreal suburb.

Leonine-maned Velvel Lazarovitch had just finished his visceral and imagery-ridden toast to the Master, likening him to a Parnassus among writers plunging his hands into the fertile muck of inspiration, when the lights went out. Since I was seated facing the huge fireplace and therefore also facing the two sets of double glassed doors, I could see figures walking on the carpeted hallway outside, and nothing in the room. I was seated to the right of Martenssen when I felt something brush my shoulder around the same time I felt the table – not the earth – move.

“Did we just have a power failure?” a female voice said. I think it was Vera St. Onge, the pet store owner who reads detective fiction behind the counter when business is slow. When she forgets to take her medication she imagines that her Boston Bull Terrier is the reincarnation of Hercule Poirot and will one day be rid of its annoying flatulence.

“No. The lights are on in the hall,” observed Steve Ostropoler, the accountant with the soul of James Bond, the dreams of Walter Mitty, and a body that would make Stephen Hawking look like Arnold Schwarzenegger.

“Could someone please get the lights?” Gerry Kyries, our Sovereign and chief decision-maker announced.

Becky Sanroma, 32 years old and fighting a brave but losing battle against neurasthenia and a terminal martyrdom complex, hobbled noisily with her cane to get the lights. We let her do this because we knew she needed the exercise. She groped for awhile before finding the switch, and when she finally flicked it on, she flashed us a hugely triumphant smile, her forehead beaded in perspiration. ✕

5. David Kellett offered up the second toast of the evening to the Master – the man and his methodology.
6. Show and Tell.
 - a. Wilfrid deFreitas contributed an announcement having to do with Holmes memorabilia on the block at Christies in New York City.
 - b. Stanley Baker showed us an article in the *Westmount Examiner* on our annual dinner. It appeared in the Thursday Feb. 3 edition of the paper, and was written by Stanley. This was certainly it:

Holmes devotees celebrate sleuth's birthday

“The Westmount-based Sherlock Holmes society, the Bimetalloic Question, recently held a dinner for 50 Sherlockians in Old Montreal to celebrate the 151st birthday of the Master, Sherlock Holmes.

"It was pointed out that as there has never been a death notice in the London Times stating that Sherlock Holmes had died, it must be assumed that he is still in the land of the living.

"Though he was not physically at his birthday party, he was certainly there in spirit, as were the other main characters in the stories. Erudite toasts were made to them, including Dr. Watson and Mrs. Hudson, the sleuth's long-suffering Baker Street landlady.

The guest speaker was mystery writer Michael Blair, who spoke about how he became a writer and the comparisons between his writing and Conan Doyle's. Dr. Joe Schwartz spoke about the obscure references to Montreal in the Holmes stories., and Dick Irvin talked about being a retired colourman (title of one of the canonical stories) to Danny Gullivan during the hockey broadcasts.

"Former Westmount Mayor May Cutler presented a mysterious pendant she was wearing, which none of the pseudo-detectives present were able to identify. It was a 'coalpot,' which has a needle-like centre pin and holds mascara eye-shadow made from coal dust and is used by women in the Middle-East.

"Several of the others present gave witty monologues to entertain the guests. Many of the ladies and gentlemen wore elaborate Victorian or Edwardian costumes, which helped enhance the mood of the celebration.

"Colin Semel proposed a toast to the late Charles Purdon, who was active in the Society for many years.

The event was chaired by president Paul Billette and was organized by another Westmouter – Wilfrid deFreitas, who co-founded the Society 25 years ago.

The next meeting of the Society will be held in the Westmount Room of the Westmount Public Library on Feb. 3 at 6:30 p.m. All are welcome to attend."

(Not in Stan's article: We will raise the issue of inviting the WGCD to our next annual dinner and will let him know that he is more than welcome at any and all of our meetings. We understand, however, that since all royalties for the canon went to his biographer, Dr. Watson, who immediately plowed the bucks into a chateau overlooking Reichenbach Falls, Mr. Holmes is in Dire Straights and would have to be accompanied to this side of the pond by his compatriot and chief caregiver Mark Knofler.)

☛ We all saw the body more or less at the same time. This is not surprising, since the room is hardly the size of a football field, and there couldn't have been more than a dozen and a half of us in it, all clustered around the long golden oak table upon which the upper part of the body sprawled.

“Eek,” somebody said with remarkable composure.

A librarian, who had been listening outside our room with a stethoscope to the doorframe, burst in and recited the speech she had been taught to learn by heart at librarian school with some slight variation. “This is a library. You are making far too much noise. If you can’t chew your gum quietly ... I mean if you persist in this uncivilized behavior we will have to revoke your privileges at our next meeting of the library police. And for goodness’ sake, get that body out of here. Not only have you bored him to the point of committing suicide with a fountain pen in his carotid artery, but he’s bleeding all over our oak table and much of it has poured onto the floor which was just refinished last summer. It has already collected in a large, oleaginous pool that will soon begin to turn brown around the edges and unless you clean it up, it will get gooey and hard and crusty. And I can’t begin to tell you what an inconvenience that spatter pattern is going to cause our night cleaners.”

With that, she heaved a great sigh as though she knew every word had sailed right past us. She spun around and stomped out. A quick calculation told me that the floor had been refinished about six-to-eight months before, so I guess she had a right to be upset.

“Is this a joke?” somebody else asked.

“Oh, how delightful,” another voice chimed in. “Our very own whodunit.”

“Don’t touch the body,” a monotonic voice from the corner of the room commanded. It sounded as if it had been decaying in a sarcophagus for at least fifty years.

“Okay,” we all replied in unison.

And then, because we are such an intimate group, and so synchronized to each other’s ways, we adopted an identically quizzical expression and swiveled our heads towards the source of the voice, all in one motion.

The voice was attached to a body and the body was seated in a wing-back chair in the corner of the room. The right leg of this living, adult Caucasian male’s body was crossed over the left thigh just above the knee, so that the lower part of the right leg dangled downward nearly parallel to its partner and swayed ever so gently forward and backward. A battered grey Buckley fedora perched on his top knee and his shoes looked suspiciously like the Buster Brown black Oxfords I had seen advertised in comic books when I was a kid and had always wanted – at least before Nike Air Maxes became de rigeur. The body of the voice reached into his right-hand jacket hip pocket and pulled out a leather wallet, flipped it open, and caused a shield or badge or emblem or something in shiny brass to flip down. We assumed it was a police shield. ✕

- c. David Dowse, co-founder of the society and immediate-past Sovereign of longstanding, shared correspondence he had had with New York-based Chairman Emeritus of the world-renowned Cartier company, Ralph Destino on the subject of wristwatches and fountain pens. David’s inquiry stemmed from two issues. One was the conclusion our society had come to due to research arising from the study of a canonical story that Cartier was responsible for the invention of the wristwatch. Here is Mr. Destino’s comment on the matter:

“With respect to your question concerning Alberto Santos-Dumont, Louis Cartier, and the birth of the wrist watch, we maintain that M. Cartier’s creation of the original Santos “montre-bracelet” constituted the first viable instance of a timepiece fastened to the wrist. With its leather strap and buckle, it surely was history’s first commercially feasible design, and it led directly to the shift from pocket watches to wrist watches.

“I suppose it is possible that at certain times in the late 18th century a jeweler somewhere might have somehow attached a time piece to a bracelet (although no such definitive documentation exists to show it), but such an anecdote would not change the fact that authorship of the modern wrist watch belongs to Louis Cartier.”

In presenting a copy of the letter to our society, David playfully wondered allowed if he ought to send a similar query to Tiffany’s and if they would concur with Cartier’s claim to be the originator of the wristwatch.

Mr. Destino’s second piece of information was that Cartier’s parent company is Richemont. That company currently makes pens under these brands: Cartier, Dunhill, Mont Blanc, and Montegrappa. Pen aficionados will bow in awe to the solemn fact. David is awaiting the return of a beautiful and valuable coffee table book entitled *Cartier: Creative Writing* which Mr. Destino has promised to autograph.

⌘ “Who are you?” Mara Novotny asked.

“Freitag. Yoshka Freitag,” the voice answered while effortlessly launching its body from the wingback chair and advancing said body towards us. The voice continued to be surprisingly bland and monotonic. Almost menacing, certainly irritating, never modulating. One was tempted to offer it singing lessons on the spot. The man was about average in height, slender, with dark, piercing eyes, and a slightly hooked nose. His jet-black hair was short and brushed back, as much as possible which was difficult considering its short length. Individual hairs were trying to stand up and peek around in different directions. This was only one of the reasons it was hard to take this man seriously. His most outstanding features were his attire and the fact that as much as I tried, I could not see him in anything but black, white and shades of grey. It was as if I had been the transplant recipient of the monochromatic eyes of a dog who when his master commands him in front of guests to fetch the purple slippers with yellow polka dots regards the room with utter befuddlement and remembers it is time to sanitize his erogenous zone before leaving for other parts. With the eyes of a dog I saw his black hair, black eyes, black shoes. Grey tie, checkered grey jacket, grey slacks. The man was as monotonic in his appearance as he was with his voice – a perfectly balanced human being and two-dimensional memory image all rolled into one. I wanted to scratch myself.

“That checked jacket,” Randall Wong cried, “I’m going to be ill.” Randall is the fashion designer of our group. He wears a couple of diamond studs in one of his ear lobes and I have seen him downtown sporting a flowery print dress and high-heeled shoes. They actually looked good on him. His most recent project has been a remake of Sherlock Holmes’s wardrobe, substituting satin for tweed and adding frilled cuffs and lace appliqués wherever possible. We’re very proud of our Randall.

Some of us obviously had serious issues with Freitag's jacket. It was a plaid motif in black, white, and shades of grey from no known Scottish clan. A passing fly took one look at it and spiraled downward in an anemic-sounding buzz into the nest of Mara's elaborate butterscotch coiffure highlighted with spray glow and sparkles. Landing on its back, it fluttered its wings once or twice and then expired before sailing off metaphorically to the Valhalla of all library flies.

I found my left hand being inexplicably drawn to the valuable Namiki pen sticking out of Mr. Martenssen's neck.

"You heard the man," a nasally voice from an identical wingback chair emanated from the opposite end of the library. "Leave the body alone."

I also left my hand poised for an instant before withdrawing it. ✕

- d. Elliott Newman talked about US mystery writer Lawrence Sanders' use of characters' names in Mr. Sanders' thick anthology of 84 short stories entitled *Enough Rope*. Elliott recognized that several of the names were distortions of real-life names in and around The Mysterious Bookshop, owned by Otto Penzler in New York, which Elliott has referred to at our meetings. In addition one of the stories described the bookshop itself, from façade through to spiral steel staircase and into Mr. Penzler's private office. Elliott also pointed out that a minor character in another story, Lotte Benzer, a literary agent, obviously owed her name to Mr. Penzler who aside from operating a landmark in the retail world of mystery fiction, co-authored an Edgar-winning encyclopedia of mystery fiction, and is editor of a crime series division of a large publishing house.

✂ *"There are more of them?" Sir Stan said.*

"So it would seem," responded our Sovereign.

"This is so exciting," several people said at once.

"Look at Mr. Martenssen. He's holding that murder victim position for such a long time. He's really very good. Where did Sir Stan dig him up?"

"I think the correct question is: Where will they bury him?" I corrected. "He's really quite dead."

"Oh, come on, Izzie, you're always kidding," Randall said.

"Who are you?" someone asked the nasally voice.

"Morgan Harrison," it said. "I'm Yoshka Freitag's partner."

"Oh," we all said together, nodding as though we had unanimously made an implicit connection. We are a close-knit group. So who needs language?

"Could we see some I.D.?" our Sovereign said. We have learned to trust in our fearless leader, that he will keep us safe from bogus cops and murderers alike.

Harrison flashed us the same kind of leather and brass that Freitag had shown us a moment before. You can tell they had gone to the same cop school or acted on the same TV show because it flipped and dangled in exactly the same way as his partner's. He was wearing a grey serge suit. All thirty-eight of his grey and white hairs were combed straight back across an unremarkable dome and he looked at us with the same black birdlike eyes as his partner. Comforting, like the cold command of Ozymandias minus the poetry. Or a snake. He replaced his badge and moved behind me from my right toward the body to my left. The remarkable thing about Harrison was not his fashion statement, but his walk. He walked as though his torso were welded to his hips, his upper arms were screwed to his shoulders, and his ulnae were crazy-glued to his upper arms in a straight line. Both hands were positioned as though they had been caught in some kind of crushing machine forcing fingers and thumbs straight back, palms upward, giving the impression of a duck's fan tail. I expected to hear barnyard music. Or elegies from a country bone yard.

Freitag got to the body first and adroitly hipped Harrison aside.

"He's been stabbed in the neck," Freitag observed.

"Tremendous, almost savage force," Harrison added, as though speaking into a camera and microphone.

"I could take the pen out and rinse it off," I said. "I know someone who would derive great enjoyment from it."

"Can't let you do that," Freitag replied. "It's the murder weapon. Our lab boys will have to classify it and put it aside for the trial."

I am a collector of fountain pens, you see. It seems like a terrible shame to lock away an exquisite instrument like that Namiki just to help send some poor murdering slob to death row. I mean, let's maintain a realistic balance here. ✕

- e. In the "Sir Arthur Conan Doyle is not Quite God" department of "Show and Tell," David Dowse offered an interesting and insightful observation into a moral aspect of the canonical story "The Man with the Twisted Lip." David pointed out that the protagonist was actually a "rich" beggar who put himself in a despicable place. David does not look favorably upon this story because it reflected an unfair way of treating indigents and beggars at the time. He believes the character is despicable because of his fraudulent deception of those who threw him money. At the same time he deceived his wife and family about how he made his living. The story reminds David a recent news items involving a woman from Hamilton, Ontario. Known as "the sticker lady," she begged on the streets of our city while living in a nice house in Hamilton. This item prompted Rachel Alkallay to offer that people can be the authors of their own misfortune while Stanley Baker concluded, "We have a welfare state."

☠ *"Did anybody see anything?" Harrison asked.*

"I thought I heard a door open just before the lights went out," Mara volunteered.

"The facts, ma'am. Just the facts," Freitag snapped.

Mara the lightning rod withdrew into the dark, warm cocoon she had built when she was six and the bogeyman was outside her door. Her eyes widened and her lids fluttered in some kind of near out-of-body psychotic experience.

It began to dawn on our group that Mr. Martenssen was quite, quite dead and growing colder by the minute.

Harrison went from one of us to the other, taking down our names. This was a lot like substitute teacher day in a Grade Three classroom, except how do you call a dead student? You don't. You call his mother.

"Isn't anybody here anglo-saxon? Harrison asked, looking over the list of names.

"We're a melting pot," Sir Stanislas Koch said. "And some of us are cooks." He looked around to acknowledge general approval of his subtle humor. ✕

- f. Dr. Richard E. Brown showed himself. Dr. Brown was visiting from Halifax and is an active member of the Sherlock Holmes society there. They meet infrequently and on Sundays since many of their members have to drive a considerable distance to get to the city. Dr. Brown is a professor in the Department of Psychology, Institute for Neuroscience at Dalhousie University. He was in Montreal on a research trip, and was very pleased to learn that one of the attendees at our meeting had been a student of Dr. Hebb, an influential contributor to the field at McGill University.

☠ *Always eager to help solve a crime, our worthy society members began throwing helpful hints like lettuce leaves at rampaging rabbits far too thickly for me to remember who threw what.*

"I saw the whole thing. They used a gat."

"How could you see? It was dark."

"Well I didn't hear a gat."

"I could smell the cordite. I think. Besides, they had a silencer."

"That would explain the absence of bullet wounds."

"Ahh."

"Izzie's sitting next to the body. Maybe you should ask him. Know what I mean?"

"Who was this guy?"

"Why did he try to eat a pink highlighter?"

"Why would anyone want to kill him?"

"This is a six-pipe problem."

"I heard even pipe-smoking is bad for you. Here, try this."

"How could anyone kill him? We were all here watching."

"In the dark?"

"Your mother."

"I beg your pardon?"

"Excuse me," Freitag called out. "Nobody but Lance Martenssen killed Lance Martenssen."

"How did you know his name?" Gerry demanded.

"It's in his wallet," Harrison chimed in, eager for air time.

Freitag held up his right hand as though stopping traffic. We assumed he wanted to speak. "Apparently, Mr. Martenssen who suffered from epilepsy, according to this medical card in his wallet, felt an attack coming on. He grabbed for something reasonably malleable to put between his teeth. Ergo the pink highlighter. Unfortunately, as the attack took hold he could not control his hand that held the pen. In a wild paroxysm of mindless flailing, he stabbed himself with his own Namiki," Freitag concluded to thunderous applause.

We all looked at each other and nodded in admiration of such insightful deductive reasoning. We were sorry to have lost a potential member, especially before he paid his dues. But it was more than a treat to witness a demonstration of such adroit sleuthing, even from one who dressed so badly. ✂

7. Paul Billette had us play Kim's Game which was originally introduced to the club by David Dowse. Paul placed 35 items on the table, including a pink highlighter. We were allowed to look at the items for several minutes. We were then allowed a few more minutes to write down what we had remembered seeing. The winners were: Carole Abramson with 28; Patrick Campbell and Rachel Alkallay with 21 each; and David Kellett with 20.

✂ "My partner and I will leave you for a moment," Freitag announced. We need to go to the office and call in a few people to go over the scene and take your statements. I must ask you to wait in your seats for them to arrive."

With that, he wrapped his partially clean grey checkered pocket handkerchief around the barrel of the suicide weapon and quickly jerked the instrument out of the neck of the late Mr.

Martenssen. The body did not appear to object to this. Freitag wiped the pen clean and looked at me. In perfect Laurel and Hardy emulation but with some difficulty, Harrison pried the pink highlighter from Martenssen's clenched teeth. Harrison then slid ahead in a kind of moonwalk and held the door open as they left.

We spent ten or so amusing and heartwarming minutes as Sir Stan read to us from collections of jokes and anecdotes he had gleaned from the internet. We then heard the piercing wail of police sirens and the chaotic clattering cacophony of constables' cobbled clodhoppers caroming down the carpeted corridor. The bodies attached to those boots burst into our meeting room filling it with pandemonium. Their guns were drawn. We felt quite stifled. Suddenly silence reigned.

"Where'd they go?" a newly-arrived man in a uniform with stripes on his upper sleeve demanded.

"Who?" Mara fluttered.

"The two men who were here," he barked.

Mara and her dead fly immediately embarked on a fourteen-week mental pilgrimage to some kind of rehab farm in Vermont. She sat stone-faced and mute, a model for a neo-cubist masterpiece of a fragmented psyche entitled "Homage to Catatonia."

"You idiots," he bellowed at everybody.

The librarian scuttled in, wagging her famous finger.

"Especially you," he roared at her.

She scuttled out, this time taking her finger with her.

"The men who passed themselves off as police sergeants Yoshka Freitag and Morgan Harrison are two of the world's most dangerous criminal masterminds. They are known to the FBI, CIA, Scotland Yard, and every post office in the world as Lucky and Lupa. They are brokers in terror. They make Osama look like Snow White. Battleships have sunk into watery graves because Lucky twitched the tip of one finger. On account of them, the earth has swallowed villages whole, without a trace. They have been known to trigger a tsunami just to wipe out a single seaside family tried to stand in their way. Through their manipulation monetary systems have gone haywire leaving entire countries penniless. There is no end to their treachery because they are the personification of raw evil that feeds upon itself insatiably and eternally. And you let them slip right through your fingers ..."

His tirade continued for another few minutes, but we knew the more he ranted, the farther away Freitag and Harrison were getting. ✂

8. Arlene Scher proposed the toast to the Woman, a lovely three-stanza poem borrowed from the www:

Good Night, Irene

A humbled Holmes would read her laugh,

Surprised by such a mind,
Admiring through her photograph
The finest of her kind.

The pocket Petrarch that he reads
While traveling afar,
Reminds him, as his fancy leads,
Of an operatic star.

Imagined Irene Adler sings
In realms that fancy owns,
Accompanied by vibrating strings
In sympathetic tones.

☞ *It turned out according to the officer who had delivered the big speech that those two perps, for all their bad taste in dressing, had managed to carry out the murder in our presence of an Interpol agent, namely one Captain Rick Williams, alias Ladislav Crimea, alias Lance Martenssen, and whole lot of other aliases. This sergeant didn't know how they did it, but he knew they did it, all right, and he reminded us of it frequently. The Queen's own Royal Canadian Mounted Police had been working on a theory that Freitag and Harrison would be meeting up with an important contact at the Westmount Public Library that night. Posing as a world-traveling businessman with a feigned interest in Sherlock Holmes (a cover I could see through in a flash: he did not know that Holmes was living in comfortable retirement raising bees in Eastbourne), Williams, alias Martenssen maneuvered himself into being invited to a meeting of the Bimetallic Question by our own beloved, unsuspecting Sir Stan.*

I am much less trusting than Sir Stan which is why I arranged to take an interest in our guest and to plant myself beside him at our meeting table. My suspicions were confirmed even more resoundingly when I deftly lifted the seventy-nine-cent notepad from the man's pocket and realized that he had anticipated my meeting with Freitag and Harrison. When I saw Freitag approaching, I signaled him to kill the lights while I did Williams in with his own Namiki. In the darkness, I also jammed the pink highlighter into his mouth to retro-fit an anticipated epileptic attack. You can imagine how my heart swelled with pride when my protégé Freitag removed the murder weapon, wiping it clean of my fingerprints – or as clean as can be expected when the wiping medium is a soiled handkerchief. I had all but given up on Harrison, but he redeemed himself by prying the pink highlighter from Williams' stiffening jaws and leaving the room with it. After all, the highlighter also carried my fingerprints and I would have been hard-pressed to explain how they got there. All in all, a most satisfactory evening. I had confirmation that Interpol, the CIA, the FBI, Scotland Yard, and our own Royal doltish constabulary believed Frick and Frack – I mean Lucky and Lupa – to be the diabolical masterminds behind the undertakings in question. I do so love it when the hounds are thrown off my scent. ✕

9. Jack Anderson presented his Quiz on "The Blanched Soldier."

Out of a possible 117 points, the winners tallied:

First:	David Kellett and Carol Abramson	81½ each
Third:	Patrick Campbell	65
Fourth:	Stanley Baker	48

David Kellett won the coin toss for the official first-prize position. This is required since the society offers a trophy each year for the top quiz prize winner.

10. Paul Billette toasted Mrs. Hudson.

☒ I would kill for a Nimiki fountain pen. And I have. I'll be seeing Freitag and Harrison soon, at which time the exquisite gem will find its way bloodlessly into my hands and from there into my growing collection. I will burn the pink highlighter even though I think it is criminal to waste any writing instrument. Until then, I have Williams' little notepad which I expect will offer up some excellent reading matter. ✂

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, 2005, at 6:30 p.m.

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