



# THE BIMETALLIC QUESTION

Box 883 Stock Exchange Tower  
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MINUTES  
of the meeting  
of the  
BIMETALLIC QUESTION  
August 5, 2005

**Date of next meeting**

The next meeting will take place on:  
Thursday, October 4, at 6:30 p.m. at:

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

**The Quiz at the next meeting**

**“The Adventure of the Gloria Scott”**

**Minutes** of the MEETING of the BIMETALLIC QUESTION held on Thursday, August 4<sup>th</sup>, 2005 at the Westmount Library (Westmount Room), 4574 Sherbrooke Street West, Westmount, Quebec.

**Present:** Rachel Alkallay, Jack Anderson, Maureen Anderson, Stanley Baker, Mac Belfer, Shigeko Betts, Paul Billette, Patrick Campbell, Wilfrid de Freitas, David Dowse, Ingrid Heese, David Kellett, Ethel Kesler, Joan O'Malley, Anita Miller, Elliott Newman, Muriel Gold Poole, Kathryn Radford, Erin Ramsay, Peter Sanderson, Arlene Scher, Cheryl Surkes.

**Special thanks:** It's a long night on the moors before twenty-two devotees of the Master show up for a scheduled meeting of the Bimetallic Question. But come they did by trap, by tram, by automobile, and on foot to partake in the festivities that challenged, rewarded, prodded, and assuaged the enquiring minds and questing spirits of friends old and new to our forum of tumult and shushing. Thanks to all of you who turned out.

And another special thanks to Stanley Baker, our Sergeant-at-Arms who once again mustered new breathing bodies into the fold.

**Regrets:** Erica Penner, who prepared the quiz well ahead of time.

**CALL TO ORDER:**

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

**ITEMS OF BUSINESS AND GENTLE TRANSACTION:**

- 1) Paul Billette announced that our club has just passed its 25<sup>th</sup> year of operation. He summarized our activities for the benefit of the many new faces around the table: bi-monthly meetings in the Westmount library; annual banquet; the least expensive *high quality* port or sherry in town at a dollar a glass (the better to toast you with, my dears); the option to *byoc* (bring your own Coke); a quiz based on a story from the canon; show and tell; dramatic readings from short plays and various works of fiction, sometimes written by our club members; additional activities at our meetings as well as special unscheduled outings and activities; a web site ([www.bimetallicquestion.org](http://www.bimetallicquestion.org)). All this for the amazingly low price of \$18.00 per year in membership dues which pays the cost of printing and mailing our minutes/newsletter. (Tragically, when Scribe's finger sticks on a key or his brain runs to neutral, the minutes/newsletter becomes quite long and although this cannot be helped, it does challenge our budget with an ailment known as the Coffin Cough. To remedy this, Scribe is learning to type with his toes so he can appreciate the full value and merit of each individual keystroke and not waste them. Ever. Not one. Nope. Uh-uh.)
- 2) Paul then asked us all to introduce ourselves and explain something about our motives, defenses, and alibis related to our association with the BmQ. Some of these explanations were more credible than others. We have taken notes and will be watching closely.
- 3) Stanley Baker has been doing double time this month on our behalf. Not only did he bring along Muriel Gold Poole (who won third prize on our quiz on "The Sussex Vampire,") and Ethel Kesler, but he submitted an article about our society and our meeting to *The Westmount Examiner* which that estimable journal printed to the tune of twelve lines. When one considers the resonance that three simple words, "In the beginning ..." have generated for thousands of years, we stand in awe of those twelve lines. Well done, Stanley. Thank you.

- 4) The first toast of the meeting, To the Master, was rendered by Mac Belfer:

In these troubled times  
The need for the Master was never greater  
With his superior intellect and remarkable  
Deductive powers. The Master would soon  
Penetrate Bin Laden's elusive hiding  
Places and render him harmless.  
This to be followed by reducing  
Al Queida's terrorist activities  
To a mere nuisance value and no  
Longer of any consequence.  
Herewith a Toast to the Master!

(Mac, Scribe thinks you have something here. We recall some of the SH propaganda films starring Basel Rathbone and Nigel Bruce, following WW II. Once again, as always, the world needs TWGCD!)

- 5) SHOW AND TELL

- a. *Scribe had a dream. He was alone in the upstairs corridor of the Westmount Public Library in the wee small hours. The thousands of books, as usual, were talking to him all at once. He was not yet at a state where he could separate the cacophony into elements of logic and comprehensibility, so he was understandably confused. Dim lights cast little spots of glow onto the carpeted floor, the oak tables, and the check-out counter where over the years a succession of talkative librarians and their assistants had signed out at least fifty-three books and sneezed, blew and honked their way through thousands of Kleenex boxes in this, the quietest of all quiet libraries. Having taken too long to assemble his notes from the recent BmQ meeting, and recapping his Sheaffer fountain pen, the Scribe was locked in for the night. Already, he was not feeling too good about his predicament. He desperately craved a Big Mac. He couldn't find any books on comedy in the stacks, but he came across the murder-mystery sections, in regular and large print. More than ever, he felt the vulnerability of his own throat as little formless fears flitted flightily in the shadows. His sense of uneasiness grew. He thought he heard movement on the lower level of the building. Okay, books were talking at him. But could they physically squeeze themselves down off the shelves, swivel and wobble across the floor, and walk, hop, hobble, or flip themselves upstairs? Of course not! THEN WHAT WAS THAT T-H-I-N-G SLIDING UP THE STAIRS? He blanched and grew light-headed with terror. That T-H-I-N-G was nearing the top of the stairs, balancing on the landing, and sliding ever closer. NO! NO! It was a recurrence of his worst nightmare, dreamed a thousand times before, after eating lox at midnight. On the carpet in the middle of the hallway at three in the morning, emitting impulses of terror sat David Dowse's Sherlockian teapot, back a second time under the Show and Tell spotlight with its giant if rather gaunt and improbable phosphorescent Beagle*

*baying at a yellow gumdrop moon! There imprinted on one side of the teapot were Holmes and Watson, impossibly paired on the moor in a scene more reminiscent of "The Gold Bug" by EAP than anything portrayed by SACD. David's teapot, more sinister than ever, glowed so ominously, so portentously that the Scribe knew – just knew – that one sip of tea or anything else from that diabolical creation would be his last, binding his throat in the stricture of ten thousand cutting threads, sending emissaries of the god of Poison through his bloodstream at a speed faster than light, deadlier than doom. The Scribe ran out of words to describe that thing, so naturally he passed out on the floor beside it, taking great care not to damage it.*

This was the effect on the Scribe, of the second delightful viewing of David's four-book teapot.

If he shows it again, we do not doubt that Sherlock Holmes, TWGCD, will himself take to the skies in an Armageddon that will rend the heavens in twain and bring to cataclysmic fruition the ultimate triumph of light over darkness.

This, of course, is what we are hoping for, so we do expect to see that teapot again. As it becomes more familiar with our surroundings, perhaps we could have a "Name that Teapot" contest?

- b. Paul Billette again shared photos of Tom Holmes' induction into the Toronto Bootmakers' Club, that city's equivalent to our BmQ. This had taken place in a quaint pub on Montreal's Lakeshore, in a surprise event.
- c. Paul described an article from the *National Post* entitled "Why Sherlock Died." It dealt with suppositions and inferences about why SACD had decided to kill off his cash cow. It would be simplistic to say that SACD was bored with his idiosyncratic protagonist; rather the challenge is to enumerate *why* he might have been bored with him. Some of the answers, whether serving the notion of boredom or dredging diverging channels may include: his wife had died; his father had died; his great grandfather had died; his grand-aunt in Sussex was not expected to recover from falling 300 feet off the Dover cliffs onto the jagged rocks below; SACD had enough money and his curious mind (take that any way you like) might be in need of fresh diversion and new challenges; he may have been having emotional problems stemming from his childhood during which time his much-loved father, himself a talented illustrator, was committed to an asylum for parents of future literary figures; and an uncle (father's brother?) came to live with the family, and may have in fact supplanted the father lo unto Artie's mum's bed. There are other possible explanations, but none as satisfying as the Dover dive, cited above.
- d. David Kellett showed us a cubed box about 25 cm. on each side. How many sides were there? (If you answered 6, you may flatter yourself for thinking outside the box, but you'd be wrong. What's the other correct answer?)

David announced that there was an object inside the box and he wanted us to guess what it was. We pretended to be really excited about this which was difficult because he never once promised to give us a prize if we guessed. So, feigning enthusiasm and in a few cases animation, we did the rounds of the table until the ninth questioner, Ingrid Heese, a new visitor to the group, correctly guessed it to be an ashtray. A few short questions later, and it was identified as a skull ashtray. David showed it to us and pointed out that he had embedded half of one of his own teeth in the skull's mouth. Scribe had visions of symbiotic liplock which rendered images verging on necrophilia and Scribe didn't want his pen to hear any more, so he put the cap on and waited for a reasonable explanation. It came, and although not an everyday occurrence, there had been a complex tooth extraction from the mouth of David Kellett, and David had decided to stick the tooth into the skull's mouth. He then proceeded to describe this as a craps (gambling) skull. He told us that he had named the skull, and asked us to guess what the name was. Twenty-one skulls around the table sat as one: silent, obedient, waiting. A clue: "sans teeth, sans eyes ...". If any of us knew this was Hamlet reminiscing over his childhood on the lap of Yorick, the court jester of his youth, we insisted on keeping David in suspense. Finally, David told us the name he had given to the skull. And it was \_\_\_\_\_.

- e. Carole Abramson showed us a new book she picked up recently, entitled *The New Sherlock Holmes Stories*. These are updated rewrites of old SH stories.
- f. Cheryl Surkes pointed to reviews of newly-written SH novels.
- g. Rachel Alkallay whom we know to have the highest standards of literary sensibility, along with an impeccable sense of artistic correctness, a profound *je ne sais quoi* regarding *je ne sais rien et autres choses*, said she enjoys reading our minutes and that they made her want to attend the meeting. Scribe was particularly pleased to hear this and deferred to his associate Maureen Anderson who does all of the work in choosing just the right recipe for Mrs. Hudson's Corner, and then formats the minutes and mails them out, all quite a time-consuming feat. In fact, it was Maureen who had provided the model for the minutes which Scribe enjoys inflating every second month. In fact again, Maureen had produced the minutes for years, and shines as a beacon whenever Scribe stares at a blank screen and hopelessly disorganized notes.
- h. Patrick Campbell is doing a treatise on SACD's treatment of punctuation in two SH stories. As one who has many question marks in his life, Scribe is sensitive to punctuation and to this day is careful about sitting down. Patrick, an accomplished novelist and playwright, intends to have this work published in *Canadian Holmes*.
- i. Wilfrid deFreitas referred to an introduction by L.B. Greenwood to a new SH book.

- j. Wilfrid showed a collection of authentic Victorian coins he had bought on his recent trip to England and explained how we assigned the titles of the society officers to each coin. For example:

sovereign	=	president
shilling	=	vice president
florin	=	treasurer

He also showed us a Roman "tribute" coin from 14 A.D. It is square in shape, and is probably silver, although it may have some tin in it. This coin has rich Biblical significance, since it was the one referred to when Christ was quoted as saying, "Render unto Caesar that which is Caesar's." On one side was Augustus Caesar's head, and on the other was that of Livia, his mother. (See additional note on this coin below, #14.)

- k. News about Colin Semel:  
Wilfrid provided us with a bit of news about Colin, our much-loved true Brit, vaudevillian and thespian, and brought a card for all to sign.

Patrick mentioned that he had written Colin a letter.

Maureen Anderson has been devoting herself to Colin's welfare, first having ensconced him in a residence, and then providing vigilance and visits to him in the hospital. For those who would like to visit Colin, he is at the Jewish General Hospital at Cote Ste. Catherine and Cote des Neiges. Call first. He is being moved around a bit.

- i. Wilfrid had information sheets-cum-membership forms for people to use to become members of the society.

6. David Dowse proposed the toast to Dr. Watson, a repeat of the toast he had given at the colloquium in 2000:

Dr. Watson told the story,  
Told it nice and told it gory,  
Told us tales of blood and  
thunder,  
But one must sometimes stop  
and wonder,  
If he ever found it funny,  
That Holmes would pocket all  
the money.

7. Paul Billette hosted a "mind" or "memory" game, with 25 objects under a small cover on the table. We were given two minutes in which to memorize these objects, then several minutes to write them down. Rachel Alkallay won with 21/25. Her prize was a non-circulated 1987 loony with a certificate of authentication.

8. Third toast of the evening to Irene Adler was by Stanley Baker:

Irene Adler could be described as the Adventuress of Sherlock Holmes, not to be confused with *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*.

Despite Holmes' supposed misogyny, he had said, "Women are never to be trusted – not the best of them," but he came through with an awe and respect for Irene Adler. Not only was she the only person who ever got the better of him as in "A Scandal in Bohemia," but it is said that Irene and Holmes had an affair in 1892. They may have even produced a son, who became Nero Wolfe, Rex Stout's New York Detective.

Watson was portrayed as a ladies' man, but in the canon, there is a definitive absence of any hint of romance for Holmes.

Irene, who was said to have been born into a Jewish family in New Jersey in 1858 was described by Holmes as "The daintiest thing under a bonnet on this planet."

She has been the heroine of many books, including *Good Morning Irene* (not *Good Night Irene*), by Carole Nelson Douglas. She was more than just beautiful, she was a talented actress and singer, skilled in disguise, with an excellent mind that could outwit the world's greatest detective. "In his eyes she eclipses and predominates the whole of her sex ..." She became the icon of female independence, style, and resourcefulness in the Victorian era and in Holmes's eyes she was always "The Woman." In Sherlock Holmes Societies throughout the world, from Dubai to Tierra del Fuego, there is always a toast to the woman. The Bi-Metallic Question adheres to this protocol.

Please raise your glasses and toast "The Woman."

9. We then had our quiz, "The Sussex Vampire," prepared by Erica Penner, and administered by Elliott Newman in Erica's absence.
10. Fourth toast was to Mrs. Hudson, delivered by Rachel Alkallay:  
(Scribe apologizes for any misreading or otherwise imperfect interpretation of Rachel's handwriting and will refrain from embellishing or conveying impressions of her flawless scrawl and the hallucinations they induced.)

A woman's work is never done.

And so it is with Mrs. Hudson:

Providing tea and crumpets to The Master and Dr. Watson.

Putting up with a V-shaped bullet formation in her house.

Letting enter all manner of visitors, from street urchins to coppers (coffee? comely? copen?), to the King of Bohemia (and their mistresses too), to criminals of the most evil fibre.

Listening to the knocking at the door at all hours of the day and night –

when proper English people are sound asleep! (Scribe is particularly pleased at navigating through this last sentence. The BmQ will vote on whether it should be presented to The Royal Society.)

No, a woman's work is never done.

Best if it be done with good spirit and grace,

Cheerfully, and with a kind heart.

Then one knows that it is done in the spirit of Mrs. Hudson, of 221B Baker Street.

To Mrs. Hudson!

11. Winners of the quiz were:

<u>Rank</u>	<u>Name</u>	<u>Score</u>
1	Carole Abramson	60
2	David Kellett	57
3	Muriel Gold	52½

Prizes to these winners will be distributed at our next meeting.

Carole will prepare "The Adventure of the Gloria Scott" as the quiz subject for our next meeting.

12. In 1985, David Dowse prepared a quiz on this evening's story. He read some of the questions from that quiz.

13. David Kellett suggest that we should post our quizzes on our web site. A general discussion ensued with the decision to discuss this at our next meeting.

14. The BmQ was treated to our very own Whodunnit in the final moments of our meeting.

His face ashen, Wilfrid announced that his valuable and very old "tribute" coin was missing! This might quite possibly have been the very coin Jesus had referred to in his quotation, "Render unto Caesar that which is Caesar's." It is unlikely he said it in English, but Scribe has endeavored to the best of his ability to carry off the gist of this famous quotation.

Even though we were all as innocent as the fresh-driven snow which is soon to fall, not a man or woman around the table escaped the prickling sensation of culpability for past misdeeds. As one, we squirmed under Wilfrid's horrified glance. First we squirmed this way. Then that way, sharing a common guilt in this closed-room crime!

Then, with a dramatic sigh of relief and a mischievous glint, Wilfrid said, "Ah, here it is. It's been in front of me all the time!"

Well done, Wilfrid! What a brilliant way to end a meeting of the BmQ, and certainly, a tough act to follow!

Thank you!



15. Wilfrid closed the animated meeting with his toast to the Society.

It's always a pleasure to be asked to propose the toast to our Society.

As we enter our second quarter century, I'm personally grateful for the people with whom it's brought me into contact, and the friends I've made as a result. Almost by definition, my interests and preferences seem to match those of my fellow members and I wonder if the same holds true for anyone else here this evening.

Certainly it's the common interest in things Sherlockian and/or Victorian which brings us together initially. But then we discover other facets of one another's personality, background, or profession which are, dare I say it, even stronger than things Sherlockian, and these only serve to enhance the relationship.

Members come and go, and Stanley Baker continues drawing in the curious and interested, but the Society has a life of its own – not to mention its own website.

So if, in your daily travels and contacts you come across others who want to know more about us, point them to [www.bimetallicquestions.org](http://www.bimetallicquestions.org)!

In the meantime, I propose this toast to the Society and to all who sail in her!

#### ADDENDUM

It is with deep concern that we share with you the deteriorating condition of Colin Semel, a longstanding and entertaining member of our society. Colin is in the Jewish General Hospital, and is without family. We are his family. We are pitching in to make sure he has a visit from one of us every day. We will give you a status update at our next meeting.

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**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, August 4<sup>th</sup>, 2005, at 6:30 p.m.

For the latest society news or updates on our history, please go to [www.bimetallicquestion.org](http://www.bimetallicquestion.org)

