

THE BIMETALLIC QUESTION

Box 883 Stock Exchange Tower
Montreal, Canada H4Z 1K2

March 2004

Welcome

once again to the place where printed word,
days gone by, clattering hooves on fog-enshrouded
cobblestone streets, and the internet, meet
six times yearly at the Westmount Library.

696-2603

Date of next meeting

The next meeting will take place on Thursday, April 1st, at 6:30 p.m. at:

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

A Further Word About Your Membership

In case you've been holding off sending in your \$18 for your annual membership to one of the highlights of Montreal's cultural geography, remember this:

- It's all about you!
- It ensures that you will receive a literary gem, a *raison d'être* by mail, every two months.
- You will be kept informed of exciting, new, social, literary, and cultural activities.
- It exposes you to stimulating brain teasers and Victorian cooking recipes that you would otherwise never find out about.
- Somebody, somewhere will learn to spell your name correctly.

- It's your opportunity to reach out to someone on this planet at least once a year and let them know you are alive!
- **If you haven't sent us your cheque for 2004 yet, this will be the last Bimetallic newsletter you will receive until you do send us a cheque.**
- When you do send us your cheque within two days of receiving this reminder, please make it payable to: The Bimetallic Question.
Mail to: 369 Kitchener Avenue
Westmount, Montreal
Quebec H3Z 2G1

The Next Quiz: The Musgrave Ritual by Paul Billette.

(*Déjà vu?* Possibly. Due to a confusion of disguises and because we were simply having too darned much fun at the last meeting, we never held the quiz. The author of the quiz, who cannot remain anonymous, will have the sufficient copies for us all when next we meet.)

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

Present: A suitably hair-raising number attended (13), including: Stanley Baker, Mac Belfer, Paul Billette, David Kellett, Anita Miller, Elliott Newman, Colin Semel

Regrets:

Rachel Alkallay, Wilfrid de Freitas

CALL TO ORDER: Paul Billette, our new Sovereign, expertly opened the meeting at approximately 6:30 p.m. and welcomed those present.

- 1) First toast of the year to the Master was by Paul Billette.
- 2) In Show and Tell, Stanley Baker read "The Case of the Musical Murder" and assorted horrific motifs of dastardly do-do. The brief description of a crime scene, read with passion and gusto by Stanley was punctuated by a pregnant pause by Stanley (so pregnant, we're all still waiting) during which void we were expected to drop in the title of an old song that best describes the scene. (Could we have put it any better than that, Stanley?) So here goes:

"Now, then," said Holmes, eyeing the dining room table,
"The victim obviously entertained her visitor before the crime took place. You see, she had ... (this is that pregnant pause cited in the preceding paragraph, remember?)"

Answer: Tea for Two

Well may you go, "Huh?" which is what I did. But once you got used to it after five or six other bloody scenarios and more unexplained pregnancies from Stanley, it was possible actually to come up with one or two titles that made sense, such as: "The Quality of Mercy is not strained, my grandmother's chicken soup was nothing like that," or the immortal, "Beat me, daddy, eight to the bar, as long as you beat me."

Thank you Stanley. It was fun. Bring more.

- 3) David Kellett stumped us with this one. I'm not kidding. We really didn't get it.

"Arrange the following letters to make one word:

NEW DOOR"

Answer: one word

Is there any wonder why he was disgusted with us?

Thank you David. It was fun. Bring more.

- 4) David continued to astonish us with more of his repertoire of unexplained fun things. This one was from a party game for geniuses, named "Mind Trap," a variant of Trivial Pursuit. Here goes:

"Dee Septor, the famous magician, is standing on a concrete floor holding a raw egg in his outstretched hand. Without the aid of any objects he is able to drop the egg two meters without breaking its shell. How does he accomplish this seemingly impossible feat?"

We had many intelligent answers, including:

- He dropped it onto cotton.
- It wasn't a real egg.
- Aha! You didn't specify which planet. Obviously, this was carried out where there is a very low gravitational pull!
- It was an uncooked, petrified pterodactyl egg. (No points for spelling "pterodactyl" properly.)

The correct answer is: Dee Septor simply holds the egg higher than two meters from the floor before he releases it. The first two meters it falls, it won't break."

Paul Billette from a book, *The Final Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* in which Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's 12 favorite SH stories are listed, in descending order:

1. The Speckled Band
2. The Red-Headed League
3. The Dancing Men
4. The Final Problem
5. A Scandal in Bohemia
6. The Empty House
7. Five Orange Pips
8. Second Stain (anyone know why we can't find Ajax on the shelves any more?)
9. Devil's Foot
10. Priory School
11. Musgrave Ritual
12. Reigate Squires

Quizzical: How many of the above titles are correctly expressed? Come to the next meeting to find out!

- 5) Moving away from Show and Tell, one of the Magnificent Seven at the meeting voiced general approval of our annual banquet. Although we would probably want to clear the entrance to the dining room to allow more of us to dive headlong into the *hors d'oeuvres*, the consensus was that the room was adequate for the well-controlled crowd. What had begun as badly-controlled panic when we did not have a big-name speaker or entertainer (one of the Doves in the Wanda and Her Dancing Doves act got laryngitis and Wanda double her fee), we were thrown onto our own resources, and came up smiling. Every single act was entertaining, amusing, and stimulating. We amused ourselves and each other, and for many, this was the best banquet yet. Congratulations to everyone, and thank you. With success like that, we'd love to see all of you more often!
- 6) Toasts were celebrated to the various personages throughout the meeting. Yours truly, suffering as usual from ADHD, wasn't taking notes. Keep those alpha rhythms thumping!
- 7) Elliott Newman read an introductory essay by mystery writer John D. McDonald on the subject of keeping one's reader engaged. It appeared in *The Arbor House Mystery Anthology*, compiled in the early 1970s.
- 8) Stanley Baker alerted us to another regular literary happening. WARM the acronym for Writers' Association of Resourceful Minds meets every month in our meeting room. We are fairly certain they don't meet there the first Thursday evening of alternate months beginning with February. We would have seen them. If you would like to sleuth them out, ask Stanley.
- 10) Stanley asked if the BQ has any plans to hold an activity this winter. David Kellett suggested a private poolroom. Other events in the past included billiards at McGill, through the auspices of our late and beloved Charles Purdon, who was an alumni member. Other visits were to the RCMP headquarters and McAuslan's brewery. Somebody said something about getting an activity organized.

- 11) A get well card was circulated for signature, to be sent to immediate past Sovereign, David Dowse, recovering from his second hip replacement in eight months. With both hips now replaced, David, we hope and pray, will be more mobile and will be spared further discomfort. We look forward to his good humor, sagacity, and passion for SH and pen collecting!

MRS. HUDSON'S CORNER:

Due to a bizarre string of circumstances, Mrs. Hudson couldn't be with us this month. She assures us that she is hard at work on a new, mouth-watering recipe that she will share with us in the spring. To assuage our disappointment, we offer the following.

SOLVE THIS ONE

"Odd Billy" and the Backpack

Sharnell Yates made an elaborate fuss of pulling down the sun visor and adjusting it to keep the early morning sun out of her eyes. She fiddled even longer with the little portable radio taped onto the dash of Schomberg's sole police car. When the dial finally hit on the local weather report, she listened with head cocked to one side, as though it was the most important communication of her dy.

What Sharnell was doing - and she freely admitted it to herself - was anything that would keep her from having to make small talk with "Odd Billy" Sniderman in the passenger seat beside her. Not that Billy was a chatterbox but he was unpredictable - and explosive. After two tours in Vietnam, "Odd Billy" Sniderman had come home to Schomberg with invisible wound deep in his soul.

"The sun we've got this morning is going to stay right up there all by itself. No clouds, you lucky people," the radio host was saying. "Pretty much a repeat of yesterday. Good still breeze out of the we-southwest again, and that'll keep the humidity down, so you can really enjoy the day. High of 76 degrees, or if you're one of our listeners just over the border, that's about 23 Celsius and ..."

"S'nother mile. Keep straight." Billy spoke for the first time since they'd left eh town limits. He was sitting rigidly in the seat, eyes fixed on some vague point ahead of the car. Sharnell nodded. "Kay," she said, grateful for what appeared to be his calm. She wasn't really afraid, but there was no denying her uneasiness, and it made her miss the rest of the weather report. Billy had never actually harmed anyone, to her knowledge, or done anything blatantly illegal, at least by Schomberg standards. A larger community might have charged him with vagrancy, or perhaps found reason by now to force him into a treatment program, but small towns can be quite accepting of strange behavior, especially from one of their own. That was pretty much the case with Billy.

There was no question he'd earned his nickname. "Odd Billy" was often seen holding animated conversations with unseen companions. The look in his eyes was, well, scary, a feature that somehow seemed a bit more frightening because of his tendency to suddenly appear behind people without making a sound. No one, it seemed, ever heard him coming. Then there was his persistent habit of going into the stores on Main Street through the back door; in Schomberg, where nobody used locks in the daytime, that was easy to do. Perhaps the oddest thing about "Odd Billy" was the expression on his face. Sharnell had known him more than thirty years and had never once seen it change.

He spoke once more, again without moving. "Loggin' road runs off to the right after those trees up there. 'At's where you turn."

Sharnell could see the road he was referring to, and turned onto it a few seconds later.

"What were you doing way up here yesterday, Billy?" she asked.

"Walkin'."

She was going to ask shy, but thought better of it. He'd already agreed to show her the camping spot where he'd found the backpack, so for now she felt it best not to push. Just before dusk the evening before, Billy had come in the back door of the Blue Spot Café with the pack over one shoulder. Visiting the café was pretty much part of his routine: he often came in after the supper crowd had gone, to cadge leftover fries, and the owner usually obliged. Normally, the backpack would not have raised eyebrows, except that Sharnell had been asking questions on Main Street much of the day yesterday. The police down in Missoula had asked her to look around for a couple who'd beencamping in the Schomberg area and were overdue on their return. Sharnell had talked to the town's eateries and outfitters, as well as several other likely stores.

They were three minutes or so along the logging road now. It ran straight, but the surface was rough, and Billy had a hard time maintaining his rigid pose.

"Up there," he said, suddenly pushing his hand in front of Sharnell's face to point out her side window. "Smelled smoke down here 'n' went up t'see. 'S'about a coupla hunnert yards or so. Fools!"

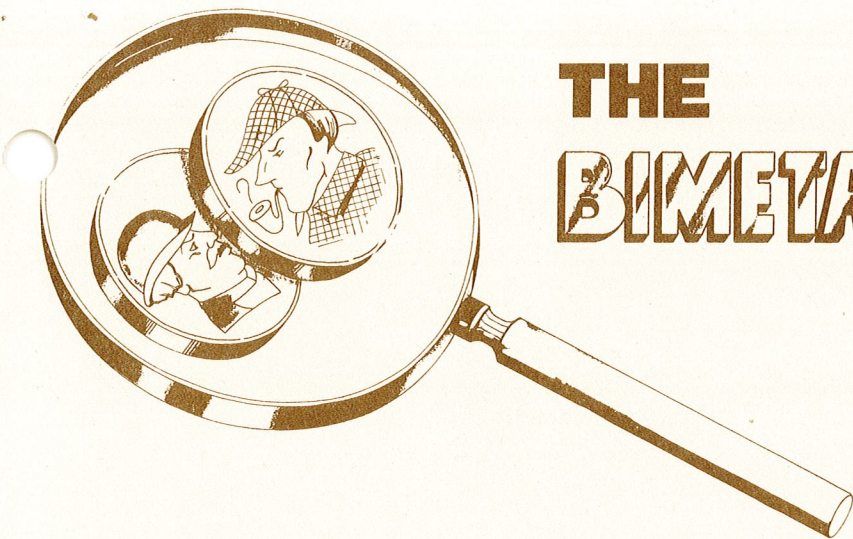
Before he got into the car, Billy had told Sharnell he'd found the pack left behind at a campsite. During the telling he'd become quite upset over the fact that the campers had left the site without putting out their fire completely. When the two of them reached the camping spot, it appeared much as Billy had said. The remains of a campfire were strewn in front of flattened grass where a tent had been pitched. Sharnell had to get to her knees to see them, but it didn't take her long to find the holes the tent pegs had made. She focused the camera she'd brought with her, and began to shoot the scene from various angles. Just like fiddling with the sun visor and the radio, taking pictures gave her something to do while she worked out her strategy. Clearly, she was going to have to challenge Billy with the flaw in his explanation of how he found the backpack. As well, she was going to have to have the campsite examined more thoroughly, and then she'd have to organize a search party. All that had to be arranged from town, however. For now, she felt it best to take Billy back to Schomberg before confronting him.

Q: What is the flaw in Billy's explanation of how he found the backpack?

Answer will be provided at the next meeting of the BQ and in our next newsletter.

Source: *Five Minute Mysteries*, by Ken Weber. Toronto, ON: Firefly Books, 2003

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 1st, 2004, at 6:30 p.m.



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Our Society's Twenty-Fifth Anniversary

Not only is 2004 Sherlock Holmes's 150th birthday, but it's our Society's 25th anniversary as well: our first meeting was in May 1979.

With this in mind we would like to publish a slim volume of reminiscences and anecdotes by present and past members, for which we are seeking contributions. Please consider this an invitation to submit an article on whatever aspect of Sherlock Holmes, A. Conan Doyle or our Society takes your fancy. It may be short or long, humorous, serious or satirical: it matters not. The only pre-requisite is that it should be entertaining or informative (or, better still, both!) and should touch on some aspect of our Society: how you first heard about it; your first impressions; the dreaded quizzes; the annual birthday dinner; people you met who have influenced or affected your outlook; events you attended; our 1991 and 2001 colloquia and trips to other societies' events; fund raising at Vermont ETV...that sort of thing.

Of course there can be no guarantee that all submissions will be included and we reserve the right of editorship. The tentative plan would be to issue sixty copies of the book (one for each of the adventures in the Canon) with each member receiving one copy as part of his/her membership, and the extras being offered for sale to help defray costs. We'd like to publish in September 2004, and to this end would ask that your contribution be received by April 30, 2004. You may send it in hard copy to the address on our letterhead, or by e-mail to: wilfrid@defreitasbooks.com.

Go on, put pen to paper or fingers to keyboard now, and see what you come up with!

