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**An Aesthetic of Companionship:  
The Champlain Myth in  
Early Canadian Literature**  
Andre John Narbonne

In a letter to William Douw Lighthall on November 18, 1888, Charles G.D. Roberts describes the activities at the Haliburton Society at King's College in Windsor, Nova Scotia. "I talk *Canadianism* all the time to the members," he writes. "We have a literary programme, of Canadian color each night, & we smoke, & drink lime juice & raspberry vinegar, all thro[ugh] the meeting. I am sort of permanent Pres[iden]t, as it were" (*Collected Letters* 96; italics in original). In the letter's postscript, Roberts asks Lighthall if he would like to join the society and names Bliss Carman as one of its members. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary* the word "Canadianism" first entered into the English language in 1875, and Roberts' letter to Lighthall indicates that by 1888 it was already the byword of a new literary project—a project that was openly and idealistically nationalistic,<sup>1</sup> and, clearly, important both to the acknowledged leader of the Confederation group of poets and to the most important anthologist of Canadian literature in the post-Confederation period. Until the ascension of modernism in Canada and the rise of professionalism, anthologists/literary historians such as Lighthall were enormously influential in determining critical trends, and a nationalistic preoccupation with identifying and promulgating a literary tradition is a salient feature of Canadian literary criticism after Confederation. Roberts' use of the word "Canadianism" here and again in his next letter to Lighthall where he informs him that at the next meeting of the Haliburton Club (where Lighthall was in fact inducted into the society) he "read a lot from [Lighthall's] *The Young Seigneur*—pure Canadianism, & it took hold beautifully" (*Collected Letters* 98), indicates the importance that both Roberts and Lighthall placed on establishing a Canadian literary tradition immediately after Confederation.

The choice of the Haliburton Club as a setting for Roberts' and Lighthall's nationalistic project was fortunate since it was capable of both housing their meetings and symbolizing their tradition. Roberts, an accomplished historian, explains in his prefatory note to the first paper published by the society, F. Blake Crofton's "Haliburton: The Man and the Writer" (1889), that "[t]he Haliburton was established in February, 1884, the outcome of a desire, on the part of certain leading graduates and undergraduates, to further in some degree the development of a distinctive literature in Canada" (n.pag.). Although Thomas Chandler Haliburton was mostly known as a humorist, not a poet, it was entirely appropriate that Roberts' "distinctive" Canadian literature should be associated with his name. Haliburton gave Canada its most influential literary export of the nineteenth century: Sam Slick, the wise-cracking Yankee clock peddler whose wise saws were part of a humorous tradition in Canadian literature. At society meetings, Haliburton's humour was by no means relegated to the sidelines. In his prefatory note to Crofton's work, Roberts also describes how "[a]t these meetings, which are very informal, the time is occupied chiefly with papers bearing on Canadian history and literature, with the discussion arising out of these papers, and with readings from Haliburton and other Canadian authors" (n.pag.). Roberts' choice of a society named for a Canadian humorist to use as a base for his nationalistic project underscores the fact that, during the early post-Confederation period, Canadian humour was central to the emerging Canadian canon. Discussion of humorists was included without apology in sober debate. In speeches, manifestos and assessments of Canadian literature written from 1867 to 1927, authors of humorous literature are habitually elevated above the status of their contemporaries (their contemporaries throughout the world) or they are dismissed as mere colonials, but in neither case is it argued or even suggested that humour is itself a lesser form of literature.

A tradition of humour that includes pre-Confederation authors such as Haliburton achieves canonical status in vital works by Sara Jeannette Duncan, Lucy Maud Montgomery, and Stephen Leacock and is symbolically represented in historical accounts in English written around Confederation, of Samuel de Champlain's "Order of Good Cheer." The

Champlain Society was itself the product of nationalist aspirations in the Edwardian period, being founded in 1905 by Sir Edmund Walker. Between 1907 and 1914 the society translated Marc Lescarbot's *The History of New France* into three volumes, and between 1922 and 1936 it translated and collated Champlain's journals into five volumes. Their *The Works of Samuel De Champlain* includes a telling description of the conditions at Port Royal during the winter of 1607. "We spent this winter very pleasantly," writes the father of New France, "and had good fare by means of the Order of Good Cheer which I established, and which everybody found beneficial to his health, and more profitable than all sorts of medicine we might have used" (447-48). Whether or not historical accounts of the settlement at Port Royal played some part in the circulation of the idea that humour is the best medicine is unknowable, but Canadian critics and writers such as Roberts and Lawrence J. Burpee who were searching for a literary myth of origins immediately after Confederation celebrated Champlain's social order and its chief wit, Lescarbot.<sup>2</sup> For example, Roberts describes The Order of Good Cheer in a speech delivered in the Canada Club in New York in the 1880s, and he includes an account of it in his *A History of Canada* (1902). Roberts' interest in the legendary fellowship may have had its seeds in a criticism of his own writing that appeared in *The Capital* (Fredericton) on October 5, 1880. In a review of his first major work, *Orion and Other Poems* (1880)—a text bereft of Canadianisms—Roberts was urged to

"read men, nature, his country and his own heart" because "Canada has no Canadian poet. It has a score or more of men and women, who, keeping into the old grooves, give us verses upon verses; but no one, no English speaking one, at any rate, seems to have drawn any inspiration from the legends, the history of Canada, or the unutterable grandeur of its scenery." ("Review" 2)

Roberts would of course come to be regarded as one of English Canada's leading writers, and his later interest in the history of Canada would include publicizing an event that had already entered into Canadian legend: Champlain's Order of Good Cheer. A preoccupation with

Champlain's fellowship was by no means limited to Roberts. Burpee, a key post-Confederation anthologist and historian, cites Champlain's social order as a first example of Canadian humour in his *A Little Book of Canadian Essays* (1909). Burpee's anthology, *Humour of the North* (1912), includes numerous works that participate in the sociability of Champlain's fellowship. Champlain's journals did not offer a theory of humour to English Canadian writers after Confederation, but accounts of his settlement provided those writers with a symbol of geniality as well as with a social purpose that was explicitly conservative and that seemingly provided evidence for racial arguments about northern progressiveness. Post-Confederation historians such as William H. Withrow couched their depictions of Champlain's order in distinctively Carlylean terms as an especially genial manifestation of an organic social order. The genial spirit of the Order of Good Cheer, a humorous affirmation of the community in the teeth of a sometimes-hostile environment, was the first basis of a British North American humorous tradition. The concept that humour could bond communities, not simply critique them, was tremendously important to Canadian authors writing around Confederation because it served a patriotic literary agenda.

The persistence of the Champlain "myth" in Canadian history and in the writing of authors and anthologists both before and during the Confederation period of Canadian humour can hardly be overstated, and a consideration of published accounts of the settlement at Port Royal should illustrate the prominence of the "myth" in early Canadian literature and thought. Outside of the creative and nonfiction work of historians such as Haliburton, Francis Parkman, Withrow, Roberts and Burpee, other sources important to a full analysis of penetration of the "myth" into social theory and practice include poems and souvenirs celebrating the Quebec Winter Carnival in Montreal. These occasional verses and mementos indicate how what was held to be the spirit of the Order of Good Cheer entered into social practice and reaffirmed ideas of northern progressiveness. Although no direct connection is made between the dining hall of Poutrincourt (the governor of Port Royal) and the Ice Palace at the Winter Carnival, one exists rhetorically in the shared language of northern vigour and in expressions of genial humour

found in histories of Acadia and in late nineteenth-century carnival memorabilia.

Haliburton was well acquainted with Lescarbot's journals. He refers to them in a letter to George Renny Young on September 1, 1827, mentioning "a passage in the Journal of Lescarbot, a French lawyer, who visited the colony that year, 1606; and to whom we are indebted for a very minute and authentic account of the expedition. He was an eye witness of what he relates, and his narrative is always mentioned with great respect by French historians" (40-41). Haliburton includes a description of the order of "*Le Bon Temps*" in his 1829 promotional *History of Nova Scotia*, noting that "[t]he manner in which they spent the winter was social and pleasant" (25). Haliburton's *History* would remain a staple of Nova Scotian education for the next one hundred years. G. Mercer Adam writes in his *Outline History of Canadian Literature* (1887) that "[t]hrough Haliburton's fame rests mainly on the raciness and humour of 'Sam Slick,' he is no less worthy to be read as an historian and moralist" (222), and, in his seminal Confederation-period biography, *Thomas Chandler Haliburton: A Study in Provincial Toryism* (1924), V.L.O. Chittick puts the case more strongly. He describes how

[t]o this day, teachers in the public schools of Nova Scotia, whether they know it or not, in "oral history" lessons instruct their pupils to repeat phrases from their country's story just as Haliburton wrote them nearly a century ago. Practically every historical or descriptive account of the province written since Haliburton's time has been based in part, either directly or indirectly upon his work. (136)

Through Haliburton's *History* generations of Canadians grew up cognizant of the history of Champlain's settlement—in some cases having learned it by rote.

The social humour of Lescarbot's table finds its way into Haliburton's fiction in the five-chapter "The Keeping-Room of an Inn" narratives at the heart of *The Old Judge* (1848), a work that R.E. Watters, in his introduction to the Clarke and Irwin edition suggests will one day provide "Haliburton his rightful title of 'father of Canadian Humour'" (viii).

Here the unnamed narrator and a lawyer friend, Barclay, are caught in a heavy snowfall that Barclay calls “the worst tempest I have known for twenty years” (96). Forced to retire to the shelter of the Mount Hope Inn, the narrator and Barclay maintain their spirits by meeting with other stranded travellers in the keeping-room of the inn where they share stories. Haliburton’s narrator proposes no theory of humour; rather, humour is the glue that holds the keeping-room society together. Indeed, one of the guests at the inn, Stephen Richardson, is praised by Barclay specifically because he has “some drollery about him, inexhaustible good humour, and, amid all the nonsense he talks, more quickness of perception and shrewdness than you would at first give him credit for” (99). It requires no stretch of the imagination to see the “social and pleasant” Port Royal fellowship that Haliburton had described in his *History* in the geniality of his “Keeping-Room” section of *The Old Judge*. In fact Chittick asserts that “[t]he entire material worked into *The Old Judge* is, in accordance with its author’s plan, purely provincial, encountered mostly, it would seem, in the years when he lived at Annapolis Royal and was engaged upon his *History*” (488). Praising Haliburton’s work for its attention to local detail, Chittick claims that “[o]utside of the volumes of Charles G.D. Roberts, no collection of Nova Scotian legend or settlers’ tales has been written with more power to move and interest, and in none other of Haliburton’s own books has his delineation of local character and his recital of local incident been achieved with greater skill” (488).

Along with seventeenth-century French journals and Haliburton’s history, a third significant pre-Confederation source for the Order of Good Cheer exists in the Romantic histories of Francis Parkman. Despite being an American scholar, Parkman wrote at length on Canadian history, and Alfred G. Bailey notes in “Literature and Nationalism” that “Canadians were challenged most, if not influenced in equal measure by Longfellow and Parkman, to seek in their own historic past, or more particularly in that of their French-Canadian compatriots, for themes that would lend themselves to treatment in a congenially romantic vein” (418). In *Pioneers of France in the New World* (1865), Parkman focuses sharply on the settlement at Port Royal and the Order of Good Cheer:

The principal persons of the colony sat, fifteen in number, at Poutrincourt's table, which, by an ingenious device of Champlain, was always well furnished. He formed the fifteen into a new order, christened "L'Ordre du Bon-Temps." . . . Thus did Poutrincourt's table groan beneath all the luxuries of the winter forest: flesh of moose, caribou, and deer, beaver, otter, and hare, bears, and wild-cats; with ducks, geese, grouse, and plover; sturgeon, too, and trout, and fish innumerable, speared through the ice of the Equille, or drawn from the depths of the neighboring sea. "And," says Lescarbot, in closing his bill of fare, "whatever our gourmands at home may think, we found as good cheer at Port Royal as they at their Rue aux Ours in Paris, and that, too, at a cheaper rate." (243–44)

The rich, sensual detail of Parkman's account is, as he indicates, strictly true to Lescarbot's journals (Lescarbot, it should be mentioned, wrote to convince colonists to come to the New World). But what is especially interesting in Parkman's description of the Order of Good Cheer is how malleable Poutrincourt's and Lescarbot's politics are. If Canadian historians will later view them as essentially Tory (more on this later), in the eyes of an American historian, they have decidedly democratic tendencies:

The leaders of the colony set a contagious example of activity. Poutrincourt [who, it will be recalled, financed the expedition and served as the governor of Port Royal] *forgot the prejudices of his noble birth*, and went himself into the woods to gather turpentine from the pines, which he converted into tar by a process of his own invention; while Lescarbot, eager to test the qualities of the soil, was again, hoe in hand, at work all day in his garden. (245; emphasis added)

In Canadian histories from Haliburton's own and onward, there is neither mention of aristocratic "prejudices" nor of the desire to discard them. However, in its depth of detail and romanticization of the French-Canadian experience in the New World, Parkman's history would prove

an important source for future accounts of the Order of Good Cheer. Recognizing Parkman's Canadian achievement in 1927, *The Bookman* claimed that "[a]lthough Parkman was an American, the centenary of his birth, which falls in this month of September, is perhaps a more significant occasion to Canada than to his own country, for Parkman, though he was not a Canadian, was the greatest historian of early Canada" ("Canada's Tribute" 247).

During this period, what was perceived to be the spirit of Champlain's Order could still be said to be a living force. The Montreal Winter Carnival (now the Quebec Winter Carnival) connected French and English communities in the icy melting pot of northern nationalism. "There is warmth, love and melody under Italian skies, pomp and pageantry in Louisiana; but we Canadians have them all," claims the 1884 Bishop's *Winter Carnival Illustrated* (Montreal):

They roll comfortably up into one word, Poetry, with us, and this, like the snowball that gathers as it is rolled along, fills the mountains, lake and the valleys until it is heard in the song of the snowshoer, the wild halloo of the skater, the roar of the curling stones, the shout of the toboggan party, and is echoed in the music of the bells, the pealing laughter of the sleighing party, as the lovers dash along toward the rendezvous [sic] where the poetic frenzy takes motion to the music of the gentle waltz of unpretending cotillion. (2)

The first page of Bishop's *Winter Carnival Illustrated* shows a picture that has especial meaning to a discussion about the Young Canada movement and post-Confederation interest in Champlain's settlement. The sketch shows a Quebecois in winter dress and snowshoes looking down on a young boy who, while dressed like the older man, has no clear national or racial characteristics. Notably, between the two figures, almost as a mediating presence, stands a Scottish terrier, a dog instantly recognizable as a symbol of British domesticity. Indeed the dog looks strikingly out of place in its winter surroundings. A telling description of the picture reads:

The first page shows a capital sketch of Old Canada and *Young Canada*. The figures are those of hale old age, and he stands looking down at the younger Canada as if wondering what he will be twenty years hence. The youngster stands with both hands in his sash, as though in trowser pockets, and he looks at his senior as if he were impatient to be as big, as sturdy, and as capital a snowshoer. There seems to be a spring about the young fellow from his moccasin to his jaunty toque that speaks volumes for him.

*May he be all that he promises and may we have a nation like him.* (12; emphasis added)

With the subtlety of a recruitment poster, the text ends with a call to action that is placed in an emphatic position as a separate paragraph. Above it, the outlook and racial identifications of the Young Canada movement—the group’s association with the “masculine” north—are tidily summed up in the brief space of this single-page sketch and its five-sentence write-up.

Writing in the *Halifax Herald* January 1, 1886, in an article entitled “The Outlook for Literature: Acadia’s Field for Poetry,” Roberts explains that “[i]n our landscape, earth and sea and sky conspire to make an imaginative people. . . . If environment is anything, our work can hardly prove tame” (261). He adds: “Every dike and ancient rampart, and surviving Acadian name, and little rock rimmed haven, from the wind-rippled shifting sepulchre of Sable Island to the sunny levels of Chignecto, should be breeding ground for poem, and history, and romance” (263). In a speech delivered to the Canadian Club in New York perhaps that same month, January 1886,<sup>3</sup> entitled “Echoes from Old Acadia,” Roberts indicates the location where a tradition for Canadian humour can be found in the “breeding ground” of Acadian history. Roberts describes the Order of Good Cheer as a “hilarious brotherhood” (156) and notes that from the time of Champlain’s settlement at Port Royal it

has been overlooked, I think, by no historian since. . . . The effect of such an institution was to keep hearts and hands cheerful, and to speed the winter finely; and though some of

the colonists died before spring, Lescarbot set this down to the fact that these were of a sluggish disposition and not susceptible to the curative powers of mirth. (157–58)

The freshness of Roberts' discovery of a source for a tradition of geniality is possibly indicated by the fact that he refers to Marc Lescarbot as "Max Lescarbot" (157). In his speech, Roberts emphasizes the northern quality to life in Port Royal through his use of a *Beowulf*ean epithet: "The temple of the Order was *Poutrincourt's dark-ceiling dining-hall*, his ample dining-table the shrine of its most sacred mysteries" (157; emphasis added). Mingling the sacred with the sensual in a dark-ceilinged hall (there is no stained-glass in this temple), Roberts poetically draws an image of Heorot, the Scyldings' hall. Later he continues in the same vein, pitting companionship against the encircling and uncertain but, for the moment, not unkindly dark: "When dinner was announced, the steward in his decorations led the way, bearing the staff and napkin of his office, and all followed in set order and solemn dignity, till the laden table was revealed in the glow of the heaped-up hearth, and the low-ceiling, with its shifting shadows, seemed to draw closer down about the cosy revel" (157–58). The shifting shadows suggest the potential for a Grendel in the darkness, but as projected by the glow from the "heaped-up hearth," those shadows blanket cozily, rather than oppress.

Roberts' assertion that historians had not overlooked Champlain's "hilarious brotherhood" is borne out by the facts. References to and accounts of The Order of Good Cheer (some even illustrated) appear throughout histories written after Confederation. Withrow's 1884 text, *A Popular History of the Dominion of Canada: From the Discovery of America to the Present Time, Including a History of the Provinces of Ontario, Quebec, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, British Columbia and Manitoba; of the North-West Territory, and of the Island of Newfoundland* opens to a picture of Queen Victoria (dated 1877) and includes a description of Lescarbot's staging of his *Masque of Neptune*. In Withrow's depiction, Port Royal is transformed in one winter, through Lescarbot's geniality, from a frozen deathtrap to a near paradise that is sadly lost:

While Champlain explored the Atlantic Seaboard for a milder place of settlement, Lescarbot remained in charge of the fort. He infused his own energy into his subordinates, and spent the summer in busy industry; planting, tilling, building, and, with all, finding time to write rhymes. Champlain's return was welcomed by a theatrical masque, Neptune and Triton greeted them in verses composed for the occasion by the ingenious poet. The dreary winter was enlivened by the establishment of the "Order of a Good Time," the duties of which were, with the aid of Indian allies, to prepare good cheer for the daily banquet. In the spring came a vessel from France, bearing the tidings of the revocation of the charter, and orders to abandon the settlement. With heavy hearts these pioneers of empire in the New World, forsook the little fort and clearing, the pleasant bay, and engirdling hills of Port Royal; and took leave of the friendly Indians, from whom they had received no small kindness. (53–54)

What Withrow includes in his portrayal of Port Royal life is a resonantly Carlylean portrait of an organic community. "Society [in the past] was what we can call whole, in both senses of the word," Carlyle argues in *Past and Present* (1843). "The individual man was in himself a whole or complete union; and could combine with his fellows as the living member of a greater whole" (15). This idea of wholeness is not democratic but hierarchical. The same idea of communal wholeness is presented by Withrow—Lescarbot infuses energy into "his subordinates"—and Withrow extends the notion of community to include the land itself—the "engirdling hills" that hold the settlement—and the aboriginal population—the "friendly Indians, from whom they had received no small kindness." In fact, in their friendship with the Mi'kmaq chief, Membertou, the colonists could claim a link to their own history since Membertou, who was believed to be about one hundred years old, was said to have befriended Jacques Cartier seventy years earlier. It is therefore significant that references to Membertou are common to many post-Confederation accounts of Champlain's Order, accounts

that, as a whole, tend to describe the Port Royal settlement in terms reminiscent of a Carlylean organic community.

The sense that an inherited tradition embodying French and English Canadian ambitions could be found in the spirit of winter amusements, just as it was present in the spirit of Port Royal society, is further evidenced by poems celebrating the winter carnival. Lighthall's *Songs of the Great Dominion: Voices from the Forests and Waters, the Settlements and Cities of Canada* (1889) includes "The Spirit of the Carnival" by "Fleurange" (L.A. Lefevre) and shows by inclusion that seasons and nature in Canada and in Canadian anthologies were not necessarily held to be the cause of Burkean terror:

Then guard it well, fair Canada,  
Thy festival of snow,  
Proving old winter, stern and grim,  
Thy friend and not thy foe. (207)

Lighthall further invokes the geniality of the Montreal winter carnival when he writes in his introduction that "[t]he delight of a clear atmosphere runs through it [the writing in his anthology] too, which is only possible in the most athletic country in the world; with the glint of that heavenly Palace of illumined pearl, which is the February pilgrimage of North America" (xxi). According to Lighthall, the Canadian winter "does not strike the inhabitants as intolerably severe. It is the season of most of their enjoyments" (xxxvi).<sup>4</sup> Lighthall's statement is in line with a long tradition that views Canadian winters as a time of sport, not despair. Anna Brownell Jameson had written fifty-one years early in *Winter Studies and Summer Rambles in Canada* (1838) that "[i]t should seem that this wintry season, which appears to me so dismal, is for the Canadians the season of festivity, and if I were not sick and a stranger,—if I had friends near me, I should really enjoy it" (25). While Lighthall in his introduction expresses long-held views on winter sociability, this is not to say that depictions of winter after Confederation were unproblematic. The Canadian winters could also be a time of great melancholy for writers such as Lampman. In the stillness described in Lampman's "Snow" (1895) the Canadian could find himself truly alone: hence the

need for geniality. But Lighthall's inclusion of a poem commemorating the Montreal winter carnival in the first major Canadian anthology is indicative of the extent to which the humour of winter, a humour that partakes in the geniality of Champlain's Order of Good Cheer, informed Confederation humour.

There is no reason to believe that Roberts' interest in Champlain's fellowship had waned by the end of the 1880s, but if it had, Agnes Maule Machar's *Stories of New France* (1890) would have kept him in mind of it. Machar's book is dedicated to Roberts and to George Monro Grant. In it she includes a chapter on "The Story of Port Royal." Machar, like numerous other writers from this period, places the French and English side by side—"Order of a Good Time (*Ordre du Bon Temps*)"—thus rhetorically uniting the two races under one title from the legendary past (66). Machar also calls the order "famous" as many other historians had and would do (66). Her "story" derives, almost verbatim, from Parkman's with two memorable additions. She, like Roberts in his Canada Club speech, poetically refers to "Poutrincourt's great *dark-ceilinged* dining-hall" (66; emphasis added). And she allows herself access into the thoughts of the colonists when she writes that "[a]fter the evening meal the knights assembled round the great blazing log-fire in the dining-hall, making the evening merry with talk and song and stories of past adventures *till they forgot the falling snow, the keen cold, the wind that howled without*" (66; emphasis added). Since the winter of 1606–1607 was remarkably mild ("We had fair weather almost during all the winter," writes Lescarbot [120]), this is an attempt on Machar's part to stress the power of companionship as a safeguard against "nature the monster."

The imaginative license authors allowed themselves when reconstructing life in Champlain's settlement is manifest in the sketches included in two histories from the 1890s that offer pictures of Port Royal that are worlds apart. John Bourinot mentions "*l' Ordre de Bon Temps*" in his 1896 text *Canada: The Story of the Nations*, and he includes a picture of "Champlain's Plan of Port Royal in Acadia in 1605" that suggests an outpost, not a city (57). Four long wooden buildings are arranged in a square with an open courtyard in the middle. In the same work Bourinot, like Collins before him, discusses the "Intellectual Development" of the

nation and enthuses about Haliburton. He appeals obliquely to the notion that Canadian literature will be “racy of the soil” when he writes that “on the whole, if great works are wanting nowadays, the intellectual movement is in the right direction, and according as the intellectual soil of Canada becomes enriched with the progress of culture, we may eventually look for a more generous fruition” (419). Beckles Willson’s *Canada: With Twelve Reproductions from Original Coloured Drawings by Henry Sandham* (ca. 1899) includes a colour print titled “‘The Order of a Good Time.’ 1606.” In Sandham’s drawing, Port Royal is an Oz-like city with bright cobblestone streets and flags. Frenchmen and aboriginals parade in joyous harmony past stone buildings. The accompanying text seems to be based on its own rather fanciful illustration, not on Haliburton’s or Parkman’s histories. Again the now familiar themes of an organic community at peace with the natural landscape and the indigenous population are stressed:

At the right hand of the Grand Master sat the guest of honour, the wrinkled sagamore, Membertou, nearly one hundred years old, his eyes gleaming with amusement as *toast, song, and tale* followed one another. On the floor squatted other Indians who joined in the gay revels. As a final item on the programme, the pipe of peace, with its huge lobster-like bowl, went round, and all smoked it in turn until the tobacco in its fiery oven was exhausted. Then, and not till then, the long winter evening was over.

What Jolly times those were! If only they could have lasted! Port Royal might have become a great city and Acadia a populous province. (22; emphasis added)

“Toast,” “song,” and “tale”—while Wilson’s account is fanciful it includes the three bywords used by Confederation authors attempting to rekindle the spirit of 1606–1607.<sup>5</sup> Repeatedly in genial works written after Confederation, that spirit is invoked through descriptions of toasting (or through toasts), of singing and through the telling of tales.

Roberts had told the Canadian Club that no historian had overlooked the Order of Good Cheer, and as an historian, he would not overlook

the society either. Of Lescarbot, Roberts writes in his *History of Canada* (1897), “This lawyer of Paris, with his scholarship, his shrewdness, his merry humour, and his courage, is one of the pleasantest figures on the page of Canadian history” (26). He adds that 1606–1607 was “the memorable winter when Champlain’s ‘Order of Good Cheer’ held its beneficent sway” (26) and continues to describe the manner in which colonists were able to survive the winter on the strength of their conviviality. In his history Roberts again refers to “Poutrincourt’s *dark-ceilinged dining-hall*” (62; emphasis added).<sup>6</sup>

Numerous other accounts of The Order of Good Cheer appear in histories of Canada in the late Victorian/Edwardian period<sup>7</sup>; perhaps the most significant reference to Champlain from the Confederation period of Canadian humour belongs to Lawrence J. Burpee (1873–1946). Although for the most part unremembered by scholars today, Burpee holds a significant position in Canadian literature. A prolific author of Canadian history and of the history of Canadian literature, an anthologist and a member of the Canadian Authors Association, Burpee was an indefatigable champion of Roberts’ proud Canadianisms. More than ten of his published works include either the word *Canada* or *Canadian* in their titles.<sup>8</sup> During a period when the standards by which Canadian literature would be judged were determined as much by anthologists as reviewers, Burpee edited four anthologies between 1909–1912 of which the last, his *Humour of the North*, appears to have been the first published anthology of Canadian humour. (If a volume of humour predates it, that volume is lost to history.) Although Burpee did not theorize on comedy, his history of Canadian humour begins with Lescarbot. Three years before the publication of *Humour of the North*, in his 1909 text, *A Little Book of Canadian Essays*, Burpee does not distinguish between a French and English inheritance when he catalogues the great Canadian humorists. “Despite her preoccupation with such serious things as mark the path of a new country,” Burpee writes, “Canada has not lacked genuine humorists at any stage of her history. In the days of the Old Regime, the brilliant and versatile Lescarbot delighted the little colony at Port Royal with his merry witticisms” (43). Burpee traces a line of humour that begins with Lescarbot

and Champlain's Order of Good Cheer to William Dunlop in Upper Canada and Haliburton in the Maritimes.

Burpee's Introductory Note in *Humour of the North* is brief and apologetic. Using a metaphor that again obliquely suggests "racy of the soil," Burpee writes that "[s]ome day an enterprising editor may find time to *glean from the whole field* of Canadian literature a representative collection of wit and humor" (v; emphasis added), adding: "The present little collection obviously makes no such ambitious claim. It embraces, however, what are believed to be representative examples of the work of some of our better-known writers, many of which will no doubt be quite familiar to Canadian readers, but perhaps none the less welcome on that account" (v-vi). Burpee's notion of what Canadian humour should look like is best illustrated by example. His anthology opens with Joseph Howe's poem "The Blue Nose," a patriotic "toast" (1) to "the land where the bracing Northwester prevails / And where jolly Blue Noses abound" (2) and with a humour reminiscent of Champlain's Order of Good Cheer.<sup>9</sup> Burpee's choice of Howe's poetry is indicative of assumptions about humour that defy modern definitions.<sup>10</sup> Burpee paints a similar portrait of the genial spirit when, in *The Discovery of Canada* (1929), he yet again describes what seems to have been for him a favourite subject, the founding of Champlain's fellowship: "They were all together again, Lescarbot with his imagination and enthusiasm had put new life into the settlement, and they were much more comfortable. Champlain and Lescarbot even invented a new order, the first in the New World, *L'Order de Bon-Temps*, which must have given them a good deal of entertainment" (37). It is precisely this idealization of companionship that informs the choice of Howe's toasts for inclusion in Burpee's text.

The outcome of the Confederation group's literary nationalism and of their marriage of French and English (or Scottish) values in their endorsement of the symbol of the Order of Good Cheer can be seen in the editorial decisions of anthologists during the Confederation period into the first quarter of the twentieth century. The *Standard Canadian Reciter: A Book of the Best Reading and Recitations from Canadian Literature* (1921) is divided into sections that include two sections on humour (poetical

and prose) along with “Patriotic”; “Imperialistic”; “Nature”; “Dialect (*French Canadian*)”; “Dialect (*Irish*).” It opens with Leacock’s “My Financial Career,” which suggests not only the acceptance of Canadian humour but also a decided preference for it. Writing in the “Preface” of *The Voice of Canada: A Selection of Prose and Verse* (1926), A.M. Stephen describes the purpose of his book as being to instill a form of Romantic patriotism in the hearts of school children: “This book is . . . designed to develop in Canadian children a patriotism based upon noble ideals of life and conduct and upon a just appreciation of beauty and truth” (v). Accordingly, Stephen’s text is divided into sections with titles such as “Love of Country”; “Canadian Life”; “Seasons”; “Nature”; “Truth and Beauty.” The serious purpose of Stephen’s text does not preclude him from offering prose by Haliburton and Montgomery. As a result of the centrality of humorous writing with critics and anthologists, comic literature was preeminent in the Canadian literary marketplace for the first sixty years after Confederation. 1897 to 1920 in particular was “an era of best sellers,” notes Desmond Pacey in *Creative Writing in Canada: A Short History of English-Canadian Literature* (1952). Humorists “Ralph Connor, L.M. Montgomery and Stephen Leacock in prose, and W.H. Drummond [and] Robert Service . . . in poetry, all established popular reputations throughout the English-speaking world” (89).

Looking back on the persistence of the Champlain “myth” in Canadian history and in the writing of authors and anthologists from the colonial period to what I am calling the Confederation period of Canadian humour (1867–1927) leads me to argue that an ethos of geniality must be acknowledged in any consideration of the humorous vision of authors who achieved international fame during this time. In historical accounts—sometimes laden with purple prose—Champlain’s social order is revisited and reconstructed almost as a matter of course. These reconstructions tend to contextualize Port Royal society in terms of Tory myth—as the product of a no longer achievable society that is hierarchical, humanistic and heroic. The organic community of the past that Carlyle held as a standard by which to judge present-day values in *Past and Present* is articulated in numerous historical accounts of Port Royal. In the winter humour, too, nationalist writers find a melting

pot for French and English traditions. Haliburton's "Keeping-Room" chapters are about sociability and geniality, and the kind of companionship represented by Barclay and Richardson is similar to the company Roberts describes in an address in which he discusses Lescarbot's and Champlain's journals while trying to assert that a Canadian historical and literary tradition does exist in a country that is itself new. In the *Montreal Winter Carnival Souvenir, 1889* (the same year as the publication of Lighthall's *Songs of the Great Dominion*), J.E. Nelson Ratte gives full expression to the patriotic agenda that kindles the soft fires of northern geniality when he writes: "Our people display the true philosophical spirit when they make the best of the conditions by which they are environed, and the Winter Carnival, with its Ice Palace and concomitant pastimes, proves to the world that climatic conditions which at first appear to be harsh and inhospitable, can be made subservient to the purposes of a progressive people" (1).

## Notes

- 1 Bentley describes how Roberts developed both politically and artistically from being a "republican and a nationalist" (48) as late as 1886 into a Federationist "[b]y August 1887 [when] Roberts . . . began to align himself with a political movement that provided a convenient aegis for both his nationalism and his cosmopolitanism: Imperial Federation" (60). According to Bentley, "The 'new light within our borders' would begin to shine brightly for Roberts in November 1888 when he started to use the term 'Canadianism' to describe a 'love of Canada' that accepted Imperial Federation as the best available bulwark against Annexation and conceived Canadian literature as a potent means of fostering 'Canadian possibilities and aspirations'" (67).
- 2 Lescarbot's *The Masque of Neptune* was performed in Port Royal on November 14, 1606, and was the first theatrical presentation in North America.
- 3 The speech is collected in *Canadian Leaves: History, Art, Science, Literature, Commerce: A Series of New Papers Read before the Canadian Club of New York* (1887). The speech must therefore predate 1887. At the same time, the club was not founded until 1885, and the readings were intended as winter's entertainment—something that is of course typically Canadian—so the best date for its composition is the winter of 1885–1886. Given the fact that the *Halifax Herald* article with its subtitle, "Acadia's Field for Poetry," is general about the contents of the history it conjures whereas the Canadian Club Speech, "Echoes from Old Acadia," reads like a detailed response to it, I suspect that the Halifax article pre-

dates the speech, although not by much. As well as what is nearly a shared title there is shared language. For instance, Sable Island is referred to as a “sepulchre” in both the *Herald* (263) and also in the Canadian Club speech (151).

- 4 There is a palpable echo of R.G. Haliburton’s *The Men of the North and Their Place in History* (1869). In a speech delivered before the Montreal Literary Club, Haliburton explained that the Canadian climate fostered a progressive spirit. Numerous patriotic writers agreed with Haliburton and wrote, as Lighthall does, that Canadian winters were ideally suited to the Canadian people. For instance, Dewar explains that

[t]his attachment to our country, is not the result of its superiority to other lands. It does not depend on fertility of soil, or salubrity of climate. Countries of stern climate and unproductive soil have given some of the highest examples of unselfish patriotism. It is like a mother’s love, instinctive and spontaneous. (149)

Likewise, in an appreciation of William Drummond published in 1926, Munro could still describe how the “very cold of Canada in winter helped to render her familiar—were our happiest hours not those when the North wind whistled and our lakes were ice? We knew that, with the frost, to men came grandeurs of endurance and reserves of zest incommunicable to the offspring of the south” (vi).

- 5 Bishop’s *Winter Carnival Illustrated* includes the following description of snowshoe clubs that invokes the spirit of Good Cheer while connecting it to song:

Men are gregarious, especially young men, and the habit of crossing the country on snowshoes led to the formation of little coteries, until the latter grew to the dignity of clubs, and soon the spirit of emulation sprang up. Races of all distances were run, and at length the habit of meeting for races grew to be the annual custom. One club’s success as a social institution induced the formation of other clubs. The fashion was to tramp across the virgin snow to some outlying hamlet or village. There the table is spread for the hungry, healthy, boisterous crew, and afterwards the smoke curls gracefully from a score of pipes, as the snowshoe yarn is spun or the last racing record discussed. The piano and the comic song, or still more comic dance, follows. But here I may explain that they dance without snowshoes. (10)

- 6 Like Haliburton, Roberts both wrote about Champlain’s settlement at Port Royal in his non-fiction and embodied the spirit of it in his creative literature. His poetic foreword to *Northland Lyrics* (1899) enacts the spirit of northern fellowship just as does the “Keeping-Room” section of *The Old Judge*:

Sister and brothers, not by blood alone  
Kinship inalienably dear we own,  
Nor hearts close-knit in common joys and tears  
And memories of sweet, familiar years  
That pledge the deep endurance of our love;

But also by the fellowship of song,—  
One art, one aim, one impulse,—we belong  
Each to the others! Therefore let this word,  
Though poor, amid your Northland notes be heard

For craft and kin and the loyal warmth thereof. (vii)

Roberts' foreword gives voice to a genial, Northland poetry. His theme is similar to the idea in back of Champlain's fellowship—that a powerful sense of kinship is achieved through an act performed in leisure. In Roberts' poem, kinship is arrived at "not by blood alone" but by combining voices and singing a song.

7 It would not be fit to enumerate all the references to the Order of Good Cheer during the early twentieth century, but they include Weaver who refers to Champlain's society as the "Order of Good Times" (16). Hopkins' work opens, as Withrow's history does, to a picture of the monarch, this time King George V. A portrait of Victoria does feature prominently in the work—it is rather curiously placed without explanation between a discussion of DeMots and an introduction to Champlain. Withrow, unlike other historians, views the humour of Lescarbot as Parisian: "The winter of 1606–7 was the famous occasion of Champlain's 'Order of a Good Time,' when the fifteen leading men of the colony met in Poutrincourt's dining-hall and reveled each day for some hours in good fellowship and good fare which was Parisian in its character and cleverness" (85). I read the stress here as being on the sophistication of the humour, on its cosmopolitan nature. Notably, Withrow's history, like Collins' and Bourinot's, includes a section on literature. In it Withrow names important humorists, historians and poets without prejudice. His canon of significant Canadian authors includes Haliburton, Collins, Roberts, Lampman, William Wilfred Campbell, Duncan, Service and Montgomery (652–53). "Enough," he writes, "have been mentioned to indicate that Canada in this, as in other respects, has grown out of the colonial stage and taken its place in the stream of the world's contribution to published thought and fancy, expression and fact" (653). Wetherell dedicates an entire chapter to "The Order of Good Cheer." Wetherell's preface includes this acknowledgement: "In the multitude of authorities and documents consulted three great works must receive particular mention,—the Publications of the Champlain Society, Kingsford's 'History of Canada,' and the rich chronicles of Francis Parkman" (vii–viii).

8 Burpee's titles include: *A Bibliography of Canadian Fiction* (1904); *By Canadian Streams* (1909); *Flowers From a Canadian Garden* (1909); *A Little Book of Canadian Essays* (1909); *A Century of Canadian Sonnets* (1910); *Index and Dictionary of Canadian History* (1911); *Among the Canadian Alps* (1914); *The Oxford Encyclopaedia of Canadian History* (1926); *An Historical Atlas of Canada* (1927); *The Discovery of Canada* (1929); *Canadian Eloquence* (1940).

9 Burpee's collection houses the work of seven authors: Howe, Haliburton, Drummond, Mrs. Everard Cotes (Duncan), James McCarroll, George Thomas

## The Champlain Myth in Early Canadian Literature

Lanigan and James DeMille. Only one of his authors, the Confederation Humourist Duncan, was still living when his text was published.

10 Another of Howe's poems included in the anthology, "A Toast," is addressed to Haliburton. The first three stanzas capture the spirit of the poem:

Here's a health to thee, Tom: a bright bumper we drain  
To the friend that our bosoms hold dear,  
As the bottle goes round, and again and again  
We whisper, "We wish *he* were here."

Here's a health to thee, Tom: may the mists of this earth  
Never shadow the light of that soul  
Which so often has lent the mild lashes of mirth  
To illumine the depths of the bowl.

With the world full of beauty and fun for a theme,  
And a glass of good wine to inspire,  
E'en without thee we sometimes are bless'd with a gleam  
That resembles thy spirit's own fire. (5; italics in original)

What Burpee implicitly asserts by including Howe's toasts to "Bluenosers" and to Haliburton in his anthology of humour is that geniality and humour are all but indistinguishable.

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