

Studies in Canadian Literature Études en littérature canadienne

Scottishness, Humour, and the Aesthetics of Settler Colonialism in Thomas Chandler Haliburton's *The Clockmaker*

Kirsten Sandrock

Volume 47, Number 1, 2022

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1095245ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1095245ar>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

University of New Brunswick, Dept. of English

ISSN

0380-6995 (print)

1718-7850 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this article

Sandrock, K. (2022). Scottishness, Humour, and the Aesthetics of Settler Colonialism in Thomas Chandler Haliburton's *The Clockmaker*. *Studies in Canadian Literature / Études en littérature canadienne*, 47(1), 235–253.
<https://doi.org/10.7202/1095245ar>

Scottishness, Humour, and the Aesthetics of Settler Colonialism in Thomas Chandler Haliburton's *The Clockmaker*

KIRSTEN SANDROCK

TODAY, THOMAS CHANDLER HALIBURTON (1796-1865) is no longer viewed without controversy as “the ‘father of American humour’” (Cogswell). Whereas earlier scholarship praises the author’s “compassionate humour” and reads Sam Slick’s witticisms as part of the “free exchange of ideas between men and women” (Harding 224), recent approaches to *The Clockmaker* have flagged the political nature of Slick’s humour. Ruth Panofsky (“Breaking”) and George Elliot Clarke (“Must”; “White”) have demonstrated how Slick’s jokes target female characters and Black characters especially often. As Panofsky claims, “Women and Blacks represent two disenfranchised groups whose vulnerable positions in an all-white patriarchy make them easy targets for his often-times vicious humour” (“Breaking” 42). For Clarke, Slick’s gibes align with the “English-Canadian conservatism” of Haliburton, who was “bourgeois in his blood, Tory to the bone, and Gothic in spirit” (“Must” 4). Following up on these inquiries into the ideological nature of Slick’s jokes, this article suggests that *The Clockmaker*’s humour is part of a nineteenth-century settler colonial tradition that creates an illusion of a harmonious British Atlantic Canada. While laughter has been recognized as a veritable tradition in postcolonial and transcultural literatures (Balce; Dunphy and Emig; Reichl and Stein), the following discussion links the forms and functions of humour in Haliburton’s works to discussions of settler colonial aesthetics (Bryant; Gould; Rudy; Veracini; Wolfe). Haliburton’s humour idealizes settler colonial relations in Atlantic Canada and turns conflict into comedy. This pertains to differences not only between British and non-British characters but also within the English-speaking community. Settlers from different parts of the British Isles are satirized, though with the overall function of imagining them as a diverse, agreeable body of like-minded settler colonists. Discourses of Scottishness in *The Clockmaker* and its sequels

illustrate this naturalizing and idealizing function of humour in settler colonial fiction.

Humour and Settler Colonial Aesthetics

Different kinds of humour feature in *The Clockmaker*. Like Barbara Korte and Doris Lechner, I use the term humour as “an umbrella term for all occasions that give rise to the bodily phenomenon of laughter or the mental state of amusement” (11). Verbal irony, satire, slapstick, hyperbole, malapropism, cynical insults, and self-mockery are part of the humoresque tradition of Haliburton’s series. Marta Dvořák has identified satire or “Menippean satire,” which merges “devices of caricature, parody, and burlesque,” as the prevalent type of humour in *The Clockmaker* (63). In satire, individual characters or entire groups of people are ridiculed for their alleged follies, deficiencies, or vices. Whether or not satire works depends largely on readers. As Linda Hutcheon has shown with regard to irony, there needs to be a certain consensus among audience members as to what counts as funny and what does not (89–115). Only if the “discursive communities” agree on the comic effect of a given utterance does the mocking or incongruous nature of comedy work (91). This is one reason why Haliburton’s humour does not travel well in time. Consent over whether the ridiculing of groups that were marginalized in the processes of settler colonialism has changed radically since the nineteenth century, and so has the reception of a settler colonial figure on whose authority the narrative situation and the humour of the series depends.

The Clockmaker uses a narrative situation that lends itself to dialogic narration. The narrator of the series is the Squire, a Nova Scotian landholder. He is an idealized figure who embodies one the central tenets of settler colonialism: land ownership (Wolfe 163). On his travels through Nova Scotia, the Squire meets a New England peddler named Sam Slick, who sells clocks for a living and gives the series its name. Slick is frequently considered to be the protagonist of *The Clockmaker* because most episodes focus on his talk and his actions. At the same time, Slick’s figure is itself satirized over the course of the series. Apart from the slapstick humour of the individual episodes, a greater source of laughter emerges from the meta-dialogue that the Squire enters with readers. He does so by commenting on the figure of Slick, whom he

presents as an unreliable character whose language and laughter are in themselves sources of satire:

With all his shrewdness to discover, and his humours to ridicule the foibles of others, Mr. Slick was blind to the many defects of his own character; and, while prescribing "a cure for conceit," exhibited in all he said, and all he did, the most overweening conceit himself. He never spoke of his own countrymen, without calling them "the most free and enlightened citizens on the face of the airth," or as "takin the shine off of all creation." His country he boasted to be the "best atween the poles," "the greatest glory under heaven." . . . In short, he entertained no doubt that Slickville was the finest place in the greatest nation in the world, and the Slick family the wisest family in it. (105-06)

As such passages demonstrate, Slick features as the central satirical figure in the text. He is a type, which allows the Squire (and readers with him) to laugh at Slick while also laughing with him.

The Clockmaker's humour is inherently ambivalent. Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of double-voiced discourse allows for a reading of *The Clockmaker* as a text in which humour "is also directed at those who laugh" (Bakhtin, *Rabelais* 12). Using different voices and setting them in relation to each other, as the passage above does when the Squire refers to Slick's Yankee dialect, *The Clockmaker* creates a parodic literary sphere that "is oriented toward the object — but toward another's word as well, a parodied word *about* the object that in the process becomes *itself* an image" (Bakhtin, *Dialogic* 61). It is this double-voiced nature of parody that Bakhtin considered a characteristic of the "English comic novel" of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (*Dialogic* 301). Bakhtin singles out Charles Dickens, Tobias Smollett, Laurence Sterne, Henry Fielding, and others as formative for the English comic-parodic tradition from the eighteenth century onward (*Dialogic* 301). Contemporary criticism emphasizes how the satiric tradition of that time often pursued "a moral impulse or served to stimulate moral thinking" and how authors "turned satire into an explicitly didactic art" (Griffin 25, 26). In Haliburton's settler colonial satire, the moral element is also visible and becomes part of the normative nature of his writing. Like other works written in the English satirical tradition, *The Clockmaker's* humour is designed for "grosser didactic theories" that seek to establish models of "virtue and vice" (Griffin 27, 26). What is

particular about Haliburton's use of satire is that the didacticism stands in the service of settler colonial thinking. Humour is used to naturalize and reinforce existing hierarchies in the colonial sphere, which is where satire becomes an ideological tool.

The dialogue between the Squire and readers materializes as a form of dramatic irony, where the protagonist is excluded from the humour that the narrator and the audience share. Beverley Rasporich notes that R.E. Watters has identified the "Canadian love-hate attitude towards the American" as one underlying trajectory of *The Clockmaker* (232). Another common ground on which the humour of the meta-dialogue between the Squire and readers is based consists of the epistemic privileges of settler colonial ideologies. *The Clockmaker's* satirical "derision often rests on the use of social types of the period, such as the Black servant, for comedic purposes" (Dvořák 64). As Panofsky has shown, these types are further classified to create internal hierarchies. The series' overall loyalties lie with the white, English-speaking settler community, as a comparison between the humour used for women and Black characters illustrates: "despite their inferior social standing, the white women who are vilified in the text remain apart from and, in every respect, superior to the Black characters" ("Breaking" 42-43). Humour works to distinguish between characters and to emphasize loyalties between white settlers. This emphasis on the unity of the white settler community offers new ways of thinking about the relationship between humour and the aesthetics of settler colonialism in nineteenth-century Nova Scotia.

Settler colonialism has been described as a "structurally distinct" mode of colonialism in which settlers "move across space," usually "with the aim of permanently securing their hold on specific locales" (Veracini 3). This aim is achieved by different means, including possessing land, taking control of political structures, displacing Indigenous people and practices, and assuming supremacy over cultural and aesthetic discourses. Rebecca Ruth Gould coined the term "settler colonial aesthetics" to describe how authors turn a given settler colonial context "into an object of aesthetic reflection" (48, 49). Gould reasons that in order to understand better the intersections of art and ideology in settler colonial processes, it is necessary to look at the literary devices authors use to write about settler colonies: "Just as the imperial encounter has its own specific forms of representation, and a repertoire of genres and discourses specific to its logic of power, so too is the settler colonial encounter characterized by . . . distinctive aesthetic forms" (55). Gould

does not argue for a single formula that unites settler colonial literatures from places as different as Australia, Canada, or New Zealand. Instead, she suggests that different locations and temporal settings can give rise to noticeable patterns that turn a settler colonial context into artistic formulas. Humour belongs to the underexamined strategies of the settler colonial arena with which authors have tried to take not only intellectual but also aesthetic possession of settler colonies.

In early to mid-nineteenth-century Nova Scotia, “ironic voices” emerged as part of an anglophone literary tradition (Dvořák 52). Thomas McCulloch, Joseph Howe, and Thomas Chandler Haliburton are proponents of this tradition, which was intent on “satirizing the provincialism of the Canadian middle class” at the same time as it “strain[ed] towards didactic, political ends” (Dvořák 52, 55). Some of these political ends have been identified with regard to the racial and gender dynamics of Slick’s humour (Clarke, “Must”; Clarke, “White”; Panofsky, “Breaking”). Far from being a “corrective” device (Harding 225), Haliburton’s humour is part of an aesthetic tradition that helped with the creation of “iconoclastic barriers” in the settler colonial sphere (Bryant 88). Like other forms of British empire writing, humour works as a discursive practice that authorizes and disseminates imperial ideologies. Other genres or tropes may be more readily associated with imperial writing today, such as adventure stories, travel writing, or the “hero cults” in anglophone literature and culture (Boehmer 32). In nineteenth-century Nova Scotia, the comic tradition was a key stage in the development of settler colonial aesthetics, where it helped to create one of the long-term structures of settler colonialism, namely the fiction of a peaceful, harmonious home away from home for British settlers.

The Clockmaker portrays the white settler community as an internally differentiated and yet affably united population in early to mid-nineteenth-century Nova Scotia. Slick frequently teases the characters he meets and plays jokes on those he deems inferior. The Irish, for instance, are said to “never carry a puss, for they never have a cent to put into it,” and Slick claims that they “are always in love or in liquor, or else in a row” (66). The humour of such passages derives from well-known stereotypes that associate the Irish with “an intellectually primitive but loyal subject” (Salisbury 158). The Irish emerge as inferior insofar as Slick’s jibes code them “as other to the rational subject” (Salisbury 158). Importantly, though, white settlers from the British Isles still emerge as superior to all other characters featured in the series. Non-British inhab-

itants of nineteenth-century Nova Scotia — including the Mi'kmaq, Acadians, and Africadians — are relegated to the margins throughout the episodes. The Mi'kmaq population, for instance, hardly features in *The Clockmaker*. Such a practice of disavowal has been identified as a process of rewriting the landscapes and cultural traditions of settler colonies. Veracini states that “indigenous peoples are disavowed in a variety of ways and their actual presence” is often strategically denied in settler representations of colonial life (37). This is one way of disowning or actively ignoring the “foundational violence” against Indigenous populations in settler societies (Veracini 75). By narratively emptying the Atlantic provinces of Indigenous inhabitants, *The Clockmaker* partakes in this imaginative transfer of people from one space to another because it portrays the land as free for European settlers to take. It is a means to take control over the settler colony as a new “home place,” where settler colonial authors have “articulated, revised, and ultimately controlled their relationships to the places they inhabit, effectively and continuously claiming and imagining this region, to which they are relative newcomers, as their own intellectual property” (Bryant 4).

Other characters in the Slick series mostly serve as foils for Slick to establish white, middle class identities as superior (Clarke, “Must”; Clarke, “White”; Ferguson). This also pertains to the representation in *The Clockmaker* of Acadians, who are repeatedly “pictured as people almost without flaw” (Griffiths 186). This idealization of Acadians is possible in the fictional sphere because, in the non-fictional sphere, they were no longer deemed threats to anglophone settlers in Nova Scotia ever since the “Grand Dérangement,” the expulsion of Acadians that occurred as part of the French and Indian War (1754–63), in which British and French forces fought over colonial dominance in North America, especially in the Atlantic provinces. The British military campaign against French Acadian settlers was brutal, as were the actions taken by the British against the Mi'kmaq. Haliburton was intensely aware of this conflict-ridden history of European settlement in Nova Scotia and Atlantic Canada. The struggle over land between different settler colonial groups was part of his own family history. His father, William Haliburton, was a New England planter who settled in the Annapolis Valley on “seized Acadian lands” (Clarke, “White” 15). In his non-fictional writing, Haliburton reflected critically on the Grand Dérangement and showed, as Gordon Haliburton writes, “sympathy to the Acadians, calling the deportation ‘cruel’ and ‘unnecessary’”

(G.M. Haliburton, *Family* 28). In his fictional writing, especially in *The Clockmaker*, Haliburton largely leaves out the more violent aspects of Nova Scotia's settler colonial history and chooses instead to turn Acadian figures into good-humoured types. The representation of Scottish settlers in nineteenth-century Nova Scotia, too, is fictionalized insofar as the settlement history is portrayed as less conflict ridden than it was.

Types and Stereotypes of Scottishness

Haliburton's fiction fuses different stereotypes of Scottishness to create satirical types. Like most other characters in Haliburton's works, Scottish characters in *The Clockmaker* are "steeped in the social biases of their time and place" (Dvořák 63). These images draw mostly on two coexisting stereotypes. On the one side are narratives that ridicule Scottish characters and use them as targets of Slick's humour. On the other side are narratives that value Scottish settlers and paint them as the epitome of hard work and ancient traditions. This split in Haliburton's literary representations of Scottish settlers in Nova Scotia can be seen in the episode "Mr. Slick's Opinion of the British" from the first series of *The Clockmaker*. Slick travels through Nova Scotia with the Squire in a way that resembles the "surveying" of land practice, which "is a crucial ceremony of settler possession" (Veracini 83). In the course of their travels, Slick satirizes Scottish settlers in the "eastern part" of Nova Scotia for their stinginess (*Clockmaker* 65). At the same time, he praises them for their economically sensible nature, which stands in contrast to the reckless spending of other settlers in Nova Scotia. Asked by the Squire whether he is able to sell his "Clocks among the Scotch in the eastern part of the Province," Slick responds,

No, a Yankee has as little chance among them as a Jew has in England: the sooner he clears out, the better. You can no more put a leake into them, than you can send a chisel into Teake-wood—it turns the edge of the tool the first drive. If the blue-noses knew the value of money as well as they do, they'd have more cash, and fewer Clocks and tin reflectors, I reckon. (66)

The humour underlying this passage is clearly geared at "Bluenoses," a term that refers here to English rather than Scottish settlers but that has since come into use as referring to people from Nova Scotia more generally. First, the comedy of the scene is built on a comparison between

Scottishness and Jewishness. The rest of Slick's answer to the Squire gives free rein to ridiculing the "Scotchmen" for their tightfistedness and casts them as "Oatmeal"-eating "skin-flints" (*Clockmaker* 66). Seen in a settler colonial context, the humour of the passage is based, like other colonial literature, on "formal structures and emotional effects that would have been familiar to English-speaking readers around the world" (Rudy 64), in this case, the links between Scottishness and parsimony. Second, the humour arises from the implication that Scottish settlers are superior to English settlers in Nova Scotia because they do not fall as easily into the trap of superfluous consumption on which Slick's career is built. Comic relief aestheticizes the differences among the fictional settler community of nineteenth-century Nova Scotia, which was known for its stark divisions between various kinds of British, Gaelic, and anglophone settlers.

The Clockmaker was published at a time when British settler identities were deeply contested in Atlantic Canada. Scottish settlers were at the centre of shifting power dynamics in certain parts of the province, especially in Cape Breton and along the eastern shore (Kehoe 1-15). The first half of the nineteenth century saw a rapid increase in settlers from Scotland, with "more than ten thousand Scots arriv[ing] in Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island" between 1773 and 1815 and a further "twenty-four thousand Scots arriving in Nova Scotia alone" between 1815 and 1838 (Rudy 76-77). One of the consequences of this settlement history were sharp divisions between various kinds of British, Gaelic, and anglophone settlers. In Nova Scotia and Cape Breton, tensions existed between Catholics and Protestants but also between English- and Gaelic-speaking settlers. Irish and Scottish settlers frequently inhabited an ambivalent space in these power dynamics. As S. Karly Kehoe reports, Scottish and Irish settlers in nineteenth-century Nova Scotia triggered long-term shifts in Nova Scotia and Cape Breton, especially concerning land ownership but also concerning identity politics in the settler colony:

In Nova Scotia and Cape Breton, colonies that were united in 1763, separated in 1784 and then united again in 1820, the existing Acadian (French) and Mi'kmaq (First Nation) peoples were joined by rapidly expanding numbers of Irish and Scottish Highland Catholics from the last quarter of the eighteenth century. The demands that the newly arriving Scottish Highlanders and loyalist refugees made for land, though, means that the Mi'kmaq were

constantly on the defensive as they struggled against dislocation and dispossession. (5)

Haliburton addresses these tensions not from the perspective of those who were marginalized but from the viewpoint of those who belonged to the by-then dominant anglophone settler community. His allegiance is with Britishness, which for him comprises Irish and Scottish settlers, who are all part of the diverse cast of figures in Slick's literary universe. Not unlike Bakhtin's conception of carnival, which habitually parodies people because it "revives and renews at the same time" (*Rabelais* 11), Slick's self-ironic renunciation of English superiority evokes the potential of a new, united British body in the settler colony. Satire works as an aesthetic mode that turns real-life conflicts into temporary comic relief for anglophone readers, thus helping to create a fiction of settler colonial understanding in the new home places. In light of Linda Colley's argument that imperial pursuits frequently helped to "forge" a more common albeit not always united British identity from 1707 onward (56-71), *The Clockmaker* can be read as participating in attempts to idealize unity among settlers from the British Isles despite actual differences among them. Hierarchies are partly upturned, as in the parodic portrayal of Scottish characters, but this upturning of hierarchies is only temporary. The potential of "becoming, change, and renewal" (Bakhtin, *Rabelais* 10) that is characteristic of carnival relations exists in the fictional sphere only. In reality, the hierarchies in the settler communities continued to exist, as other episodes from the Slick series illustrate.

In *Nature and Human Nature* (1855), a follow-up to *The Clockmaker*, there is an episode entitled "A New Way to Learn Gaelic" (122-53). The episode relates how Slick learns Gaelic from a young girl named Flora while she learns English from him. They do so by touching each other's body parts and saying the respective words for the body parts in both English and Gaelic (147). Bakhtin's conception of the grotesque as focusing on the body and "turn[ing] their subject into flesh" (*Rabelais* 20) chimes in with Panofsky's gender-critical reading of *The Clockmaker*, in which "youth is the most valuable female asset" ("Breaking" 44). Considering the larger cultural dynamics of nineteenth-century Nova Scotia, the sexual connotation of the jokes played on Gaelic speakers can be read as euphemizing the processes of linguistic transformation that took place in nineteenth-century Nova Scotia. Gaelic-speaking settlers increasingly used English to assimilate to political and economic demands in Nova Scotia and Cape Breton (Kehoe 8). These processes

of language assimilation were full of conflicts, but Slick's voice transforms the conflicts, almost cathartically, into comedy. Like medieval carnival, *The Clockmaker* offers what Bakhtin would call a "temporary liberation from the prevailing truth and from the established order" (Bakhtin, *Rabelais* 10), which is in this case the order of white, anglophone, Protestant, male settlers.

The two stereotypes of Scottishness in *The Clockmaker* — the stingy versus the prudent Scot — were part of a larger narrative in nineteenth-century Nova Scotia. On the one hand, there was the idea that Scots are "backward castoffs of civilization" who were less progressive, less affluent, and less risk-taking than their fellow British settlers, but on the other hand, Scottish settlers figured as "improvers who brought with them enlightened ideas about education and business" (McKay and Bates 261). According to McKay and Bates, Haliburton mostly catered to the first of these narratives and in his writings derided Scottish settlers in Nova Scotia. McKay and Bates refer mostly to *An Historical and Statistical Account*, which they read as a work that marked Scottish settlers in Nova Scotia as marginalized:

Thomas Chandler Haliburton, the province's most renowned man of letters, regretted that most Cape Bretoners were "indigent and ignorant Scotch islanders," of whom the province could count on receiving one or two thousand more each year, "equally poor and illiterate, and almost all of the Roman Catholic persuasion." (262; see also Haliburton, *Historical* 248)

The focus of this passage is on settlers from the Highlands and the Islands, rather than on Lowland Scottish settlers. As McKay and Bates claim, Highlanders in Haliburton's body of work were "weighed, and often found wanting, on universal scales of progress and civilization" (262). In many ways, the distinction between Highland and Lowland Scots reflects on the larger narratives of Protestant versus Catholic settlers in nineteenth-century settler colonial writing. As Dvořák has shown, Haliburton and his contemporaries Joseph Howe and Thomas McCulloch linked the ideals of progress to a Protestant tradition that is characterized by "a certain work ethic, individualism, and equation of prosperity and virtue" (50). This is only part of the picture, however. Cynthia Sugars notes that Haliburton's representation of Nova Scotia's folk culture is more complex than Ian McKay has given him credit for in *The Quest of the Folk* (228; see McKay 154). A similar argument can be

made with regard to the representation of Scottishness in Haliburton's work, which is more complex than scornfulness alone. The following quotation, which he has taken from *An Historical and Statistical Account of Nova Scotia*, shows how Haliburton's non-fictional work negotiates the multiple narratives of Scottishness:

The Highlanders are not so advantageous a class of settlers as their lowland neighbours. Their wants are comparatively few, and their ambition is chiefly limited to the acquirement of the mere necessities of life. If in some instances they extend their clearings they derive not so much advantage from them as others. Their previous habits have fitted them better for the management of stock, than the cultivation of the soil, and they are consequently more attached to it. From this cause they sometimes indulge their inclination so much, that they have more stock than their means will permit them to keep in good condition. As their hay land becomes exhausted, from age or repeated croppings, they are obliged to appropriate a greater extent to that purpose, and have in consequence too little pasture, and no scope for improving the soil and trying the ameliorating influence of the Plough. The Lowlanders, on the contrary, to the frugality and industry of the Highlanders, add a spirit of persevering diligence, a constant desire of improvement, and a superior system of agriculture, which renders them a valuable acquisition to the Province. (279)

Whereas *An Historical and Statistical Account of Nova Scotia* delves into such differences between Highland and Lowland and between Protestant and Catholic Scots, *The Clockmaker* uses humour mostly to mask these and other fissures running through the English- and Gaelic-speaking settler society. Slick and the Squire hardly comment on the two narratives of Scottishness that are otherwise so prominent in nineteenth-century Atlantic Canada. Instead, they create an illusion of settler colonial life in which the Protestant work ethic is at the top of the social ladder but other types are still portrayed humorously as peaceful participants in the settler colonial ideal. In this way, Haliburton becomes part of a settler collective that “invariably represents itself as virtuous” (Veracini 21). Satire and parody may seem to destabilize hierarchies on the surface, but beneath the surface, the generic structures of settler colonial comedy reinforce the boundaries that separate Britishness from non-British settlers and Indigenous populations.

Another passage from “Mr. Slick’s Opinion of the British” offers further evidence for this point.

Slick repeatedly ridicules Scottish characters for their paucity. At the same time, he praises them for their judiciousness. Slick admits that he sells luxury items to people knowing they do not need them. “We can do without any article of luxury we have never had, but when once obtained, it isn’t in ‘human natur’ to surrender it voluntarily” (*Clockmaker* 8). Scottish settlers, as portrayed in *The Clockmaker*, are exempt from this flaw of “human natur.” They are, in a sense, superior to other settlers in Nova Scotia, even if this superiority is ridiculed because it is said to arise from parsimony. The following passage presents Scots as coarse and thick-skinned but also as singularly determined and strong-minded. The Squire asks Slick how he is conducting business with Scots in the colony, to which Slick answers as follows:

Did you ever see an English Stage Driver make a bow? because if you hante obsarved it, I have, and a queer one it is, I swan. He brings his right arm up, jist across his face, and passes on, with a knowin nod o’ his head, as much as to say, How do you do? but keep clear o’ my wheels, or I’ll fetch your horses a lick in the mouth, as sure as you’re born; just as a bear puts up his paw to fend off the blow of a stick from his nose. Well, that’s the way I pass them are bare breeched Scotchmen. (65-66)

The alliteration “bare breeched” is usually associated with sheep and their naked rear end. The humour of this passage derives partly from this malapropism, which caters to a well-known stereotype by linking Scottishness to sheep. Other stereotypes include the strong-willed Scottish character who would rather kill a man, or so Slick thinks, than be disturbed from his work. The “English Stage Driver” serves as an allegory for Scottish characters, who are linked through their common, presumably Protestant work ethic. Tensions that might otherwise exist among the settlers are lightened through comic catharsis. Scottish settlers, as portrayed in *The Clockmaker*, are prudent inhabitants of Atlantic Canada whose differences are mocked more than criticized. Laughter creates a sense of unanimity among the settlers insofar as it is based on shared cultural knowledge of regional differences among the British. Hutcheon’s theory of irony emphasizes that literature is a mode of communication that “combin[es] said and unsaid meanings” (89). In *The Clockmaker*, one of the unsaid meanings of laughter is that settlers

from Great Britain and Ireland may be diverse in their backgrounds and practices but they are nevertheless united in claiming the land in the settler sphere. Scots may be ridiculed, but they are part of a governing settler community that erases non-British spaces and forms of knowledge from the settler narratives of nineteenth-century Nova Scotia.

In the sequel to *The Clockmaker*, entitled *The Attaché, or, Sam Slick in England* (1843), the dualistic nature of settler colonialism comes full circle. As Veracini states, settler colonialists frequently develop “diasporic identities” because they relate to “the ‘old’ and the ‘new’ place” alike (21). *The Attaché* taps into this dual identification of settlers when relating how Slick and the Squire travel the British Isles and are set to visit Scotland. The episodes may be based partly on Haliburton’s experiences. The author travelled England and Scotland in the late 1830s to conduct genealogical research (Davies, *Inventing* 71-73). One result of this research is an elaborate, handwritten family tree that is now held in the Nova Scotia Archives and that tracks the Haliburton family lines back to the seventeenth century, including to ancestors in Scotland. Such search for ancestral roots also figures in *The Attaché*. The penultimate episode of the second volume is called “Crossing the Border.” It functions as the volume’s climax because the Squire sets out to travel to the land of his ancestors — Scotland. Slick initially proclaims that “Scotland is over-rated” and that “there is a good deal of romance about their old times” (268-69). The comment associates Scotland with romance and the past but also with the search for roots that is typical of settler colonialism (Veracini 21). Slick eventually acknowledges the values of Scotland and the Squire’s ancestors: “Able men the Scotch, a little too radical in politics, and a little too liberal, as it is called, in a matter of much greater consequence; but a superior people, on the whole” (*Attaché* 281). With such statements, readers are ascertained of the alleged superiority not only of the Squire’s ancestors but also of settler colonial communities in the Atlantic provinces, many of which derived from Scotland by the mid-nineteenth century. “Nostalgia for Scotland thrived in nineteenth-century Canada, with particular force in the Maritime Provinces” (Rudy 95). *The Attaché* contributes to such nostalgia. The Squire confirms that Scots are “a frugal, industrious, moral and intellectual people” (274). A little later, Slick parts from the Squire with the following words: “They will give you a warm reception, will the Scotch. Your name will insure that; and they are clannish” (281-82). The use of the word “clannish” links Scottishness to kinship,

but instead of the Highland clan system, the kinship imagined here is one of settler colonial relations. Highlanders were among the settlers whose presence contributed to shifts in nineteenth-century Nova Scotia settler community (Kehoe 5-8). In *The Attaché*, clan imagery epitomizes ancestral roots and a kinship system that would connect settlers in Nova Scotia to Scotland. The Squire's envisaged family homecoming shifts the focus from kinship in Scotland toward kinship in the Atlantic. Not coincidentally, Atlantic alliances were also part the publishing strategy of *The Clockmaker*.

Laughter across the Atlantic

The Clockmaker became a significant success on the nineteenth-century Anglo-American book market. Panofsky's work on the publication history of *The Clockmaker* offers evidence for a reading of Haliburton's work as aimed, with increasing determination, at a transatlantic audience ("Publication"). While the first series of *The Clockmaker* was initially published as instalments in the Halifax-based newspaper *Novascotian* and, in 1837, in book form by the newspaper's publisher, Joseph Howe, the second and third series of *The Clockmaker* (1838, 1840) were already "written for a British audience" (Panofsky, "Publication" 21). This shift in publication strategies is closely linked to London publisher Richard Bentley. In 1838, Bentley printed a pirated edition of the first series of *The Clockmaker* and later became the chief publisher of Haliburton's works. As early as March 1838, Haliburton wrote in a letter to Robert Parker that he believed the second series of *The Clockmaker* was "better suited for English readers" because it "is not so local as the other" (qtd. in Panofsky, "Publication" 22). In the following years, a hype developed around *The Clockmaker* that spanned both sides of the Atlantic and that can be linked to the literary strategies of settler colonialism.

The *Clockmaker* series was published in the UK, France, the United States, and British North America (Panofsky, "Publication" 21-34). As Dvořák states, Haliburton was all but "rivalling Dickens in popularity" in "Great Britain and the United States" in the early to mid-nineteenth century (65). This comparison not only speaks to the powerful publishing industry behind both authors but also gestures to two of the great interests of Anglo-American readers in the Victorian period: the condition-of-England novel, for which Dickens established himself as the main proponent, and what might be called the condition-of-empire

narrative that Haliburton helped to establish. Humour was a key literary strategy for the success of this genre. Not unlike Dickens, whose novels negotiate the political and social tensions in Victorian Britain by participating in the “comic-parodic” tradition (Bakhtin, *Dialogic* 301), Haliburton’s satire addresses the conflicts in the settler colonial arena but does so in a lighthearted manner. *The Clockmaker’s* publication history suggests that this kind of buoyant portrayal of settler colonialism and particularly the humour of the series was appreciated across the Atlantic:

This sort of humour — difficult as it is to tolerate today — was publicly sanctioned during the first half of the nineteenth century, when *The Clockmaker* series was written and first published. No doubt, Haliburton understood that the contempt Sam Slick expressed would be generally accepted — perhaps even by those Slick ridiculed — for he continued to mine the same material in each of the three series of *The Clockmaker*. (Panofsky, “Breaking” 42)

If we recall Hutcheon’s concept of “discursive communities” (91), it would appear that the success of *The Clockmaker’s* humour among readers in Europe and North America rested on the shared knowledge and understanding of the books’ reading communities. Yet, where Hutcheon emphasizes that comic consensus is based on “the particularities of time and place, of immediate social situation and of general culture” (91), humour as a settler colonial device travels between different places. *The Clockmaker’s* satire may be based on settlers in nineteenth-century Nova Scotia, but the underlying types that are satirized in the episodes rest largely on labels known to people throughout the British Isles and not specific to that province. Examples are the typecasting of Scots as parsimonious, of Lowland Scots as industrious, and of Irish people as poor and passionate. As in other settler literature, this kind of humour is “dependent on the circulation of feelings understood as shared and familiar” (Rudy 110) by readers in the British colonial sphere. Haliburton’s choice to aim at a British publishing market from the second series onward indicates that his humour targeted European and North American readers alike. It also endorses a point Gould makes about settler colonial literature that is poised between two geographical and cultural contexts: “Settler colonies, and settler colonial literature, maintain close contact with imperial colonial audiences. Such readerly

dynamics are relevant for the study of settler colonial literature insofar as it means that, even if settler colonial aesthetics diverge from the aesthetics of imperial colonial representation, the two audiences often converge" (54). If *The Clockmaker*'s publication history attests to the convergence of audiences in settler colonial literature, then its humour points to the affirmative strategies settler writing often resorts to. Other Atlantic settler authors similarly used their work "to reattract the interest of European readers" (Bryant 67). *The Clockmaker* endows settler colonial images of Nova Scotia with positive emotions, including those of laughter, kinship, and peaceful relations. Conflicts in nineteenth-century Nova Scotia either disappear from the stories or they are meliorated into a type of laughter that reassures readers of the tranquil nature of settler colonialism. In some ways, anglophone readers encountered a quaint version of home when reading about nineteenth-century Nova Scotia in *The Clockmaker*. Or, rather, they encountered the quaint version of home that Haliburton aestheticized for his audiences in order to make it appeal to readers both in North America and in Britain.

There is, unfortunately, no surviving evidence of Scottish reader reactions to *The Clockmaker*. Instead, it may be useful to consider a response from a nineteenth-century Anglo-Irish reader to illustrate how Slick's humour created discursive communities across the Atlantic. The Anglo-Irish author Maria Edgeworth (1768-1849) was an admirer of Sam Slick. In a letter to Susanna Weldon dated 18 September 1840, Edgeworth expressed her delight in the "humour and depth of thought" in *The Clockmaker*, and she ended her letter by exclaiming, "I wish there were an Irish Slick!" Considering that Irish settlers are ridiculed repeatedly in *The Clockmaker*, together with the English and the Scottish, and that Edgeworth was a lifelong advocate for the Anglo-Irish cause, one may well pause over the effects Sam Slick's humour had on readers in the British Isles. Even allowing for the possibility that Edgeworth's comments were overly flattering because Susanna Weldon (1817-1899) was Haliburton's daughter and that the letter was likely meant to reach out to Haliburton himself via her (McConnell 9), the clash of Slick's Irish jokes with Edgeworth's advocacy for Anglo-Irish settlers in Ireland opens up a window to investigate how settler colonial ideologies connected readers of diverse geographical backgrounds. Slick's humour may particularly appeal to those readers who are implicated in the processes of settler colonialism in one way or another. The local historical conditions may be different, but the overall ideal of an expanding British

Empire that is set on peace, progress, and Protestantism spanned large parts of the settler population in the British Isles, Ireland, and North America. It is an imaginary world of settler colonialism that travelled pervasively in the nineteenth-century Atlantic.

In conclusion, *The Clockmaker*'s humour works as a systematic stabilization of anglophone settler colonial discourses in nineteenth-century Nova Scotia. Non-British figures are marginalized or written out of the series, thus establishing Britishness as a mobile and superior force. In the larger context of the British Empire, Haliburton's use of humour helped to spread an ideal of settler colonialism as a peaceful, harmonious process while downplaying conflicts. Discourses of Scottishness are part of this aesthetic display of settler colonial power mechanisms. Slick's laughter claims Atlantic Canada as a home away from home for British and settler colonial readers because previously existing types and stereotypes of Britishness are recreated here. Humour assures readers that the British Empire "is not a site of struggle and conquest but a place in which Britain is successfully reconstituted, in miniaturized form" (Trumpener 254; see also Rudy 33). In his historical writings, Haliburton is clear about the conflicts in the settler colonial sphere. In *The Clockmaker* and its sequels, though, such conflicts are turned purposefully into comedy to create a "fantasy" (Veracini 21) of settler colonialism that readers on both sides of the Atlantic enjoyed. Like other works written in a settler colonial context, Haliburton's series helped to establish some of the long-term structures of settler colonialism, and the humorous tradition was one means of shaping them aesthetically and emotionally.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

This article was researched and written during a stay at the Gorsebrook Research Institute at Saint Mary's University, Halifax, which is in Mi'kma'ki, the ancestral and unceded *territory* of the Mi'kmaq People. The stay was funded by a research grant of the DFG, German Research Foundation (SA 1805/4-1), with further support from Karly Kehoe, Canada Research Chair in Atlantic Canada Communities. I am indebted to Karly Kehoe, John Reid, Alexander MacLeod, Jackie Logan, David Creelman, Gwendolyn Davies, Richard Davies, and Gordon Haliburton for their intellectual stimulation and support. Thank you also to the staff of the Nova Scotia Archives (Halifax) and of the Esther Clark Wright Archives at Acadia University (Wolfville). Finally, I am grateful to the *SCL/ÉLC* anonymous readers for their excellent comments as well as to the *SCL/ÉLC* editorial board members for their assistance.

WORKS CITED

- Bakhtin, Mikhail Mikhailovich. *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*. Edited by Michael Holquist, translated by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist, U of Texas P, 1981.
- . *Rabelais and His World*. Translated by Hélène Iswolsky, Indiana UP, 1984.
- Balce, Nerissa S. "Laughter against the State: On Humor, Postcolonial Satire, and Asian American Short Fiction." *Journal of Asian American Studies*, vol. 19, no. 1, 2016, pp. 47-73.
- Boehmer, Elleke. *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature: Migrant Metaphors*. Oxford UP, 1995.
- Bryant, Rachel. *The Homing Place: Indigenous and Settler Literary Legacies of the Atlantic*. Wilfrid Laurier UP, 2017.
- Clarke, George Elliott. "Must We Burn Haliburton?" Davies, *Haliburton*, pp. 1-40.
- . "White Niggers, Black Slaves: Slavery, Race and Class in T.C. Haliburton's *The Clockmaker*." *Nova Scotia Historical Review*, vol. 14, no. 1, 1994, pp. 13-40.
- Cogswell, Fred. "Haliburton, Thomas Chandler." *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, vol. 9, U of Toronto/U Laval, 1976, www.biographi.ca/en/bio/haliburton_thomas_chandler_9E.html.
- Colley, Linda. *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707-1837*. Yale UP, 1992.
- Davies, Richard A., editor. *The Haliburton Bi-centenary Chaplet*. Gaspereau Press, 1997.
- . *Inventing Sam Slick: A Biography of Thomas Chandler Haliburton*. U of Toronto P, 2005.
- Dunphy, Graeme, and Rainer Emig, editors. *Hybrid Humour: Comedy in Transcultural Perspectives*. Rodopi, 2010.
- Dvořák, Marta. "Migrations, Multiple Allegiances, and Satirical Traditions: From Frances Brooke to Thomas Chandler Haliburton." *The Cambridge History of Canadian Literature*, edited by Coral Ann Howells and Eva-Marie Kröller, Cambridge UP, 2009, pp. 47-66.
- Edgeworth, Maria. Letter to Susanna Weldon. 18 Sept. 1840. Esther Clark Wright Archives, Acadia University, Wolfville, section 1, series 3, subseries A, 1991.001-HAL/46.
- Ferguson, Jade. "Discounting Slavery: The Currency Wars, Minstrelsy, and 'The White Nigger' in Thomas Chandler Haliburton's *The Clockmaker*." *Parallel Encounters: Culture at the Canada-US Border*, edited by Gillian Roberts and David Stirrup, Wilfrid Laurier UP, 2013, pp. 243-59.
- Gould, Rebecca Ruth. "The Aesthetic Terrain of Settler Colonialism: Katherine Mansfield and Anton Chekhov's Natives." *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, vol. 55, no. 1, 2019, pp. 48-65.
- Griffin, Dustin H. *Satire: A Critical Reintroduction*. UP of Kentucky, 1994.
- Griffiths, Naomi. "'... A Mild, Frugal and Pious People': A Comment on Haliburton's Account of Acadian History in *An Historical and Statistical Account of Nova Scotia*." Davies, *Haliburton*, pp. 177-93.
- Haliburton, Gordon M. *Family Ties: The Ancestral and Familial Connections of Thomas Chandler Haliburton*. Stoney Hill Publishing, 1996.
- Haliburton, Thomas Chandler. *The Attaché, or Sam Slick in England*. Vol. 2, Richard Bentley, 1843.
- . *The Clockmaker; Or, the Sayings and Doings of Samuel Slick, of Slickville*. New ed., Richard Bentley, 1852.
- . Haliburton family tree. Haliburton Family Papers, Nova Scotia Archives, Halifax, MG 1, vol. 2950A.
- . *An Historical and Statistical Account of Nova Scotia*. Vol. 2, Joseph Howe, 1829. *Canadiana*, canadiana.ca/view/oocihm.35691/.
- . *Nature and Human Nature*. Vol. 1, Hurst and Blackett, 1855.

- Harding, L.A.A. "Compassionate Humour in Haliburton." *The Dalhousie Review*, vol. 49, no. 2, Summer 1969, pp. 224-28.
- Hutcheon, Linda. *Irony's Edge: The Theory and Politics of Irony*. Routledge, 1994.
- Kehoe, S. Karly. "Catholic Relief and the Political Awakening of Irish Catholics in Nova Scotia, 1780-1830." *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, vol. 46, no. 1, 2018, pp. 1-20.
- Korte, Barbara, and Doris Lechner. "History and Humour: Charting the Field." *History and Humour: British and American Perspectives*, edited by Barbara Korte and Doris Lechner, transcript, 2013, pp. 7-20.
- McConnell, David A., compiler. *Thomas Chandler Haliburton Family Fonds from the Wilson Family Collection: Accession 1991.001-HAL*. Revised by Wendy Robicheau and Corey Liu, Esther Clark Wright Archives, Acadia U, 2010.
- McKay, Ian. *The Quest of the Folk: Antimodernism and Cultural Selection in Twentieth-Century Nova Scotia*. McGill-Queen's UP, 1994.
- McKay, Ian, and Robin Bates. *In the Province of History: The Making of the Public Past in Twentieth-Century Nova Scotia*. McGill-Queen's UP, 2010.
- Panofsky, Ruth. "Breaking the Silence: *The Clockmaker* on Women." Davies, *Haliburton*, pp. 41-53.
- . "*The Publication of Thomas Chandler Haliburton's The Clockmaker, 2nd Series*." *Papers of the Bibliographical Society of Canada / Cahiers de la Société bibliographique du Canada*, vol. 30, no. 2, 1992, pp. 21-37.
- Rasporich, Beverley. "The New Eden Dream: The Source of Canadian Humour: McCulloch, Haliburton, and Leacock." *Studies in Canadian Literature / Études en littérature canadienne*, vol. 7, no. 2, 1982, pp. 227-40.
- Reichl, Susanne, and Mark Stein, editors. *Cheeky Fictions: Laughter and the Postcolonial*. Rodopi, 2005.
- Rudy, Jason R. *Imagined Homelands: British Poetry in the Colonies*. Johns Hopkins UP, 2017.
- Salisbury, Laura. "Laughing Matters: The Comic Timing of Irish Joking." *Comedy, Fantasy and Colonialism*, edited by Graeme Harper, Continuum, 2002, pp. 158-74.
- Sugars, Cynthia. "Judging by Appearances: Thomas Chandler Haliburton and the Ontology of Early Canadian Spirits." *Home Ground and Foreign Territory: Essays on Early Canadian Literature*, edited by Janice Fiamengo, U of Ottawa P, 2014, pp. 217-36.
- Trumpener, Katie. *Bardic Nationalism: The Romantic Novel and the British Empire*. Princeton UP, 1997.
- Veracini, Lorenzo. *Settler Colonialism: A Theoretical Overview*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2010.
- Wolfe, Patrick. *Settler Colonialism and the Transformation of Anthropology: The Politics and Poetics of an Ethnographic Event*. Cassell, 1999.