THE NEW EDEN DREAM: THE SOURCE OF CANADIAN HUMOUR: MCCULLOCH, HALIBURTON, AND LEACOCK

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The female student and critic of Canadian literary humour writes doubly from the underground. Not only do some members of the largely male-directed Can. Lit. Club dismiss her subject matter as trivial, but the contents and face of Canadian humour are remarkably masculine. Its profile—composed of the likes of McCulloch's Mephibosheth Stepsure, Haliburton's Sam Slick, Leacock's "little man" in the bank, Davies' Samuel Marchbanks, Richler's Boy Wonder, Mitchell's Jake and the kid, and Kroetsch's studhorse man—is adequate proof of modern psychology's conclusion that traditionally women have not been allowed, or have not chosen to be, purveyors of humour. As I see it, the female critic has two choices. She can, like Thomas Haliburton's "white niggers," the Bluenoses, lazily acquiesce to the status quo, adopt the established literary aesthetic of humour which from Socrates to Freud to Wayne C. Booth's *A Rhetoric of Irony* has had a masculine vocabulary and bias and assist in her own continuing literary colonization, but prove the place of a Canadian humorous tradition; or she can take the imperial bull by the horns, look him squarely in the eye, and insist on his co-operation in liberating humour into a brave new world. Although my feminist friends might scoff at the first choice, on the one hand, as a good natured female critic, my inclination is to nurture the nation's infant laughter, regardless of its sex. On the other hand, the second choice has to be considered; not only because I am a woman, but because I am a Canadian, and the utopian New Eden dream which is the very heart of the Canadian Psyche and His masculine humour belongs equally to me.

In assessing the early comic tradition in English Canada, it is fair to say that it flourished suddenly in nineteenth century Nova Scotia with Thomas McCulloch and Thomas Haliburton, died, and was

revived some hundred years later by the internationally celebrated Stephen Leacock. The first phase of literary humour in Canada has obviously been lean but in several ways continuous from McCulloch to Leacock; its common basis is even predicted in the sentiments expressed in McCulloch's own neat and steady hand in a letter in the Nova Scotian archives written on July 10, 1816. Writing home to Scotland in response to a fellow cleric's request for assistance in bringing his son to New Scotland, McCulloch demonstrates values and a pattern of emotions which are fundamental to Canadian humour: that is, a Christian and scholarly idealism which has been punctured by the realities of life in a hard land but which is revived again by faith in the country's cultural potential. McCulloch begins by describing his initial despair in the new world:

> I am averse to encourage any young person to emigrate to America. Young people go abroad with ideas which can never be realized and almost uniformly feel the pangs of disappointed expectations. I speak from experience. It was several years ago before I could persuade myself that my situation was preferable to that of my brethren at home. Now except to see my acquaintances I have no wish to return. There are difficulties to be endured of which a person in Britain can have no conception . . . Learning is in its infancy and although considerable exertions are used to cherish it it is still in a very low state.[1]

Notably, McCulloch, who was in the process of establishing higher education institutions in Nova Scotia, makes learning a first priority and while he goes on to give practical information about teaching salaries, such is not his main concern; rather, as he deplores the commercial ethic which dominates education in the States where a "teacher in order to succeed must advertise like a mountebank" and where the people are a "showy race," he articulates a bias against the crass and immoral republic which will surface in later humorists. In contrast to the States where "Drunkenness is the reigning vice in towns amoung young & old," Nova Scotia offers the possibility of a better, decent, intellectual society, and McCulloch concludes his letter with hope, invitation, and the claim that "We never had better [educational] prospects nor greater need of preachers."

[1]Thomas McCulloch, Letter to Rev. McCulbertson of Serth dated at Pictou, 10 July 1816, The McCulloch Papers, The Nova Scotia Public Archives.

Not only will McCulloch's paternal voice of conservative morality and intellectual idealism become traditional, springing up again in the literary and literate gentlemanly comic personas adopted by Stephen Leacock and by Robertson Davies as Samuel Marchbanks, but the transit of McCulloch's emotions as he meets the New World is tied to a psychology of religious questing which would seem to be the very metaphoric base of Canadian humour. While the emotional transit of "disappointed expectations" turning bright again is not in McCulloch's letter expressed in biblical terms, that is, as paradise lost to be regained, the Reverend's thought is obviously rooted in Christian culture and attached to the central biblical metaphor of the garden and its pastoral dream; in fact, McCulloch in a theological work, *Calvinism*, argued that Calvinism is the only true doctrine because it alone provides a scriptural account of the *ruin* and *recovery* [my italics] of Fallen Man.[2] The death of the New Eden dream, then, in a frozen, formidable and heathen country becomes a primary mythos in a nation whose founding fathers were devoutly Christian and Edenic-minded; and their disappointment in "The New Eden Swindle" as Jack Hodgins calls it in his modern, comic picaresque *The Invention of the World* (or *The Garden of Folly* as Leacock satirically titles a volume) is one which is constantly met and often optimistically reinstated through Canadian humour.

Certainly, in his major contributions to comic letters in Canada, the satiric *The Stepsure Letters*, McCulloch writes out of this pastoral Christian mythology of ruin and recovery. Embedded in his satire of the fallen society of Nova Scotia is a small vignette which expresses, through one of his ideal characters, the wise Scotsman Scantocreesh, his authorial motivation and genesis promise: "He [Scantocreesh] says that the calamities of the ne'er-do-well villains, are the dawning of a bright day for Nova Scotia, when every huckstering, swapping, cheating, running-about vagabond will be driven into the woods, and a race of decent, industrious folk, like Mephibosheth Stepsure, will inherit the land" (p. 86).

At a time when Nova Scotia was undergoing an economic recession (1821-22), McCulloch looked forward to "the dawning of a bright day" by creating a series of letters in *The Acadian Recorder* in which he used their fictional author, Mephibosheth Stepsure, as a satiric mask and potent voice for reform and recovery. As an ideal-

[2]John A. Irving in Thomas McCulloch, *The Stepsure Letters* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1960), p. 155.

minded man of the cloth, McCulloch put human nature first, placing the blame on man's immorality, rather than economic or political circumstances for static and declining social conditions. In the *Letters*, the solution is a simple, arcadian one. Paradise regained is to be accomplished by a utopian retreat into the garden plot, by ploughing and tilling the land and leading the virtuous and productive life exemplified by the farmer "Boshy" and his sturdy wife Dorothy, who stand a good contrast to the gallery of self-indulgent, fallen comic figures living on credit, gambling, drinking, playing at cards and get rich quick schemes.

The values of the Stepsures—industry, frugality, economy and cleanliness—are much the same as those espoused by Benjamin Franklin in his *Autobiography* and *Poor Richard's Almanack*. These are developed by McCulloch in antipathy to the socially parasitic attitudes of a luxury minded gentility of Halifax ladies and gentlemen whose manners the author cites as being unfortunately aped by country folk. The particular pastoral convention which McCulloch employs as an ideal and antidote to this situation is identified by Northrop Frye as that of the "industrious apprentice," a longstanding one in literature, but in its Horatio Alger capacity particularly appropriate in a North American context where the European feudal class system begins to break down and an articulate middle class, like Franklin and McCulloch,[3] gains authority. "Even yet," claims Frye, this pastoral myth is revived: . . . "whenever some people get to the point of emotional confusion at which the feeling 'things are not as good as they ought to be' turns into 'things are not as good as they used to be,' back comes this fictional image of thrift, hard work, simple living, manly independence, and the like, as the real values of democracy that we have lost and must recapture."[4] Realistically appropriate in McCulloch's environment in which a countryside first offers rich natural resources and farming potential, the pastoral image of the happy, industrious farmer will become a predictable image and standard in Canadian humour, revived, for example, by the now little-known Ontario humorist Peter McArthur and by Stephen Lea-

[3]Ben Franklin was the son of a tradesman and much of his humour, such as the proverbial saying, appealed to a rising middle class. McCulloch, too, used this form of humour and was probably of a working class background. In his letter to Rev. McCulbertson, he comments, "I undergo considerable fatigue but upon the whole enjoy a degree of worldly comfort and also of respectability to which I could never have aspired in Britain."

[4]Northrop Frye, Introduction, *The Stepsure Letters*, iv.

cock in his sketch of the ideal man, the potato farmer Tomlinson of Tomlinson's Creek, in Leacock's satire against a commercial plutocracy *Arcadian Adventures with the Idle Rich* (predictably set in the United States).

Although Mephibosheth Stepsure as a voice of colonial puritanism and a rising middle class has much in common with Franklin's Poor Richard, there are at least the following differences in ideals, which, if only in emphasis, are worth mentioning because they suggest the special character of the Nova Scotian's and Canadian humour. While Poor Richard unabashedly expounded such virtues as industry, frugality and prudence as *The Way to Wealth*,[5] Mephibosheth is interested in money in so far as it provides modest comforts and peaceful "snug living." Wealth is actually less important than the good life of domestic bliss where the wife is the *keeper* and *guider* of the home (p. 97) and the husband is made content through her care, and when his work is done, by the leisurely pursuit of reading. Ignorance is for Mephibosheth and his author at the top of the catalogue of sins in Nova Scotia, a miserable contrast to Scotland where "Everybody reads . . . except ne'er do well vagabonds" (p. 66). And while Poor Richard's Bridget is a clacking wife of ill temper when she is without new shoes, shifts and petticoat, Dorothy is content with small comforts, and her quiet voice is a neat illustration of Stepsure's aphorism: "my wife makes the trousers and I wear them" (p. 99).

In his introduction to *The Stepsure Letters* Northrop Frye says that the "attitude of encouraging a farming population to stay at home . . . is the traditional attitude of clerical paternalism in both Protestant and Catholic parts of Canada" (p. vi). It would seem in Protestant Canada that the puritan fathers have also been an extremely conservative patriarchy, who in their insistence on the role of woman as the demure angel in the kitchen and Adam's rib, have fostered a native humour in which women play serious or little original part. Stephen Leacock will continue this tradition by either sentimentally idealizing woman on her Victorian pedestal or comically attacking the rising authority of the female as a member of the vulgar *nouveau riche* in twentieth-century America; and Robertson Davies' Canadian comic persona, Samuel Marchbanks, will misogynistically retreat from women entirely into his Canadian attic and Attic wit. McCulloch's

[5]Several of Poor Richard's saying were gathered together in a volume of this title.

substitution of books for booty is also typical of Leacock and Davies, suggesting the academic character of these humorists and perhaps, in part, Ronald Sutherland's observation that Calvinism in Canada never quite went the mercenary way of Ben Franklin, who took the "principles of industry, self-organization, self-reliance and success as signal of God's grace" then dropped "God from the scheme" in the interest of materialism and the new deity of the dollar sign.[6]

Some critics might argue that Canadian humour more dramatically began with the Nova Scotian Thomas Haliburton, a nineteenth-century Tory judge and friend of McCulloch, whose fictional character Sam Slick, an audacious, peddling, comic Yankee, was in his time extremely popular, earning his author the rather paradoxical title of the "Father of American Humour." Although the raw, republican character and humour of Sam Slick, duping the Nova Scotia locals as a southern peddler in *The Clockmaker* (1836) and upsetting old world decorum in *The Attaché* (1843), was a portrait of early American frontier fun, at least one critic, R. E. Watters, has begun to see in Haliburton's fiction the beginning of a native Canadian position. In Haliburton's ambivalent treatment of the fast-talking, fast-selling "cipherin" Sam as both satiric object and a vigorous standard of comparison to the lazy bluenosers, Watters identifies the characteristic Canadian love-hate attitude towards the American;[7] and in his perceptive analysis of the alternate voice in Haliburton's humour, the character of Squire Poker, who was introduced as a British traveller but in later revisions became the native Nova Scotian, Watters uncovers the quiet, double-edged ironic mode of humour which is typical of the Canadian as "fifth business," of Haliburton and later, of Stephen Leacock,[8] as he stands *in media res* between two aggressive parent cultures, Uncle Sam and John Bull. For Haliburton, Squire Poker expressed the Canadian's final ironic self-knowledge of being caught between two parent cultures and of not so easily shaking off the influence of aggressive America. As Watters comments:

> Yet consider the opening sketch depicting the first meeting of the Squire and Sam. Entitled "The Trotting Horse," this sketch reveals more about the Squire's inner nature than we are ever

[6]Ronald Sutherland, *Second Image* (Toronto: New Press, 1971), p. 66.

[7]R. E. Watters, Introduction, *The Sam Slick Anthology* (Toronto: Clarke, Irwin & Co., 1969), xi.

[8]Watters sees the double ironic perspective as characteristic of both Squire Poker and Stephen Leacock. See R. E. Watters, "A Special Tang: Stephen Leacock's Canadian Humour," *Canadian Literature* 5 (Summer 1960), pp. 21-32.

> allowed to witness again. The sketch is a brilliant comic self-portrait, drawn in what might be called "double perspective." The Squire, who admits having made "no great progress in the world," balances this view of himself as the world sees him by his inner pride in "having the fastest trotter in the province," which enables him to outpace fools and coxcombs whenever he wishes to assert his horse's superiority to theirs. Yet, at the same time, he is aware that others "may laugh at such childish weakness." This alternation between inner and outer perspectives continues throughout the sketch and creates a quietly ironic humour. . . . Throughout the entire episode, in short, the Squire is clearly shown as one who can view himself from both within and without . . . His final conclusion is a humorous compromise, a mixture of resignation and resolution: "as I could not quit my companion and he did not feel disposed to leave me, I MADE UP MY MIND to travel with him [Sam Slick]![9]

Recognizing the Canadian's intermediary position is important because it is the very condition of the humour of such Anglo-Canadian nationally-minded writers as Haliburton and Leacock. And while they have been capable of turning the sandwiched position to advantage in the British-American marketplace, by playing, as Haliburton's Squire does, the devious, ironic middle man, or as Leacock does in his famous essay "Oxford As I See It" by cleverly, simultaneously lambasting both British and American systems of education, the collision between old world and new world values as it affects their own country is their first motivation to satire and irony. More precisely, in the case of Haliburton, Leacock (and later, Robertson Davies), it is their allegiance to an imperial, genteel British ideal of Canada as anglicized New Eden in conflict with the democratic ordinary realities of Canadian life and the infectious, vulgar spirit of American republicanism which forces their humour. Certainly, this is the underlying tension and *raison d'être* of Haliburton's *The Clockmaker*. For Haliburton, as a Tory aristocrat descended from an old New England family who fled the American revolution, the New Eden dream for Nova Scotia, in contrast to the reformer Joseph Howe's vision of responsible government, was based on British ideals and allegiance. Haliburton's New England legacy was the Loyalist view that by preserving the British connection in political subservience, social ideals, and intellectual culture, "the descendants of the exiled Tories would

[9]R. E. Watters, Introduction, *The Sam Slick Anthology*, xiv-v.

grow into a great nation in the Northern regions."[10] This idealism lies behind *The Clockmaker*; its satire is born of the distance Haliburton perceived between the ideal of a superior country of British gentlemen and the reality of the coarse Bluenosers, many of whom had emigrated out of New England before the revolution and were as ridiculously Yankee to Haliburton as Sam Slick himself, who so easily duped them.

Like McCulloch, Haliburton's first posture as a humorist was that of a moral paternalist who satirized his countrymen workers for their absent virtue, for their lack of enterprise, industry, economy and false pride which deterred them from putting their shoulder to the plough, inheriting the earth, and fulfilling the dream of a renewed Anglo-Saxon Christian civilization. Both men were lovers of a pastoral ideal of their own country, Nova Scotia, and angered because the people of the province were not living up to a new world expectation. Old Mosey in *The Stepsure Letters* is an imperfect perfect example of their type, whose system of farming is so inept that he finally finds himself "jobbing about among the neighbours, till he can get away to Ohio, Upper Canada, or to some other country worth the living in" (p. 114). Haliburton is equally insistent about informing his Anglo-Saxon yeomen as to their agricultural-religious responsibility. "This place [Nova Scotia] is as fertile as Illanoy or Ohio, as healthy as any part of the Globe"[11] is Sam Slick's correct claim and the minister in "The Minister's Horn Mug" makes Haliburton's Christian point, "Agriculture was ordained by Him as made us, for our chief occupation" (p. 126).

While collapsing idealism is generally the source of both irony and satire, in early Canadian humour the dream of a new world utopia meeting reality is a steady invitation to satire; and an escape into pastoral memory and convention a constant ironic fancy. A classic expression of the latter, the ironic retreat as comic métier, is Haliburton's later humorous work on his colony, *The Old Judge*.

The Old Judge, written after Joseph Howe had obtained responsible government and Haliburton had lost his "anti-democratic" battle with him for Nova Scotia, is a fine chronicle of manners, full of descriptive interest and not without humour. Significantly, however,

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[10]J. D. Logan, "Why Haliburton Has No Successor," *The Canadian Magazine* LVII (September 1921), p. 366.

[11]Thomas Haliburton, *The Clockmaker* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1958), p. 163.

the utopian hope which led to satire in *The Clockmaker* is replaced in *The Old Judge* by a nostalgia for a lost Eden and a benevolent irony of defeat and acceptance. Although as the author explains, "You will, perhaps, smile at the idea of antiquities in a country which is universally called a new world,"[12] he celebrates the Nova Scotian past, including its picturesque beauty; Fred Cogswell nicely summarizes the thrust of the fiction when he explains: "Although *The Old Judge* is not lacking in the political bias and humour that characterized Haliburton's work, it is a sad book—full of regret for a way of life that was pssing and masking its bitterness with ironic dignity."[13]

The vision of paradise to be and then lost, and its ultimate mode of humour, the ironic dignity of the gentleman, necessarily affects the status of women in Haliburton's humour. Looking backwards in *The Old Judge* to the Golden Age of Nova Scotia in the late eighteenth century meant to Haliburton the resurrection of conservative thought, of Burkean idealism and spirit, and of the doctrine of sentimentalism which, among other things, claimed that the truly aristocratic and ideal woman was morally superior and more sensitive than the male. The obscene joke, then, which Haliburton was fond of in male company, was not fit for the ears of innocent Eves and aristocratic mothers whose maternal "divinity within her" in *The Old Judge* "sympathizes with the celestial, and invests it with the attributes of a ministering angel" (p. 61). Humour, in fact, really could only embrace woman when she fell from her pedestal and became thereby a proper object of satire and reform. Since immigrants were not universally British gentility, Haliburton had plenty of material. In *The Old Judge*, he explains: "Nothing astonishes the inhabitants of these colonies more than the poverty, ignorance and degradation of the people who are landed upon their shores, from the passenger ships that annually arrive from Europe" (p. 109). The natural outcome of these rough settlers and the primitive frontier fact was a savage comedy of sexual battle which Haliburton articulated through Sam Slick and his taming of women, a comedy which in his Tory-minded attitude towards women he could not help approve of, although he distanced himself from its primitive "republican" excesses as the civilized Squire. A significant portion of Sam Slick's humour then is based on subjugating and "beatin womankind," on putting the "spring-stop" to her tongue and in demonstrating through such savage comedy as the flaying of

[12]Thomas Haliburton, *The Old Judge* (Ottawa: The Tecumseh Press, 1978), p. 113.
[13]Fred Cogswell cited by M. Parkes in Introduction, *The Old Judge*, x.

Marm Porter by Sam in "Taming a Shrew" that " 'A woman, a dog, and a walnut tree/The more you lick them the better they be' " (p. 123).

While some thoughtful male critics like R. E. Watters worry about women as the butt of the sadistic joke, most do not. Moreover, it would seem that Christian culture and its metaphor of lost Eden due to female fault (When Adam delved and Eve span/ Who then was the gentleman?) is a firm first psychological premise of Canada's gentleman humorists, Haliburton, Leacock, and Davies, whose comic personas retreat into an ideal world of civilized male order and authority, venturing out only to belittle women from a distance for falling from grace (into vulgar equality); or, in the case of the old judge, to report with irony a gaudy, plebian, tasteless caste of women cavorting about in what ought to be genteel society:

> Oh! Look at that old lady, with a flame-coloured satin dress, and an enormous bag hanging on her arm, with tulips embroidered on it, and a strange looking cap, with a bell-rope attached to one side of it, fanning a prodigious bouquet of flowers in her belt . . . Oh, observe that member woman, that lady from the rural districts, habited in a gaudy-coloured striped silk dress, trimmed all over with little pink bows, having yellow glass buttons in the centre; a cap without a back, stuffed full of feathers like Cinderella's godmother; and enormously long gloves, full of wrinkles, like the skin of an elephant! They are both happy, but it is the happiness of fools. (p. 85)

Stephen Leacock, writing copiously from 1911-1941, is next in the line of Canada's pastoral minded and patriarchal gentlemanly humorists. Brought up a "Christian gentleman"[14] by a genteel British mother "down on her uppers" in Ontario because of a profligate husband, Leacock was, like Haliburton, by temperament and maternal influence, a Tory squire whose Orillia estate and pastoral retreat at Lake Simcoe is not unlike Haliburton's country home in Windsor, Nova Scotia. Leacock's view of the ideal Canadian nation, too, was like Haliburton's. His faith was in the British connection, in bringing the best Anglo-Saxon immigrants over, and in promoting a great nation under the aegis of the Empire. Threatened by the changing face of Canada as it moved from a rural, agrarian society into an urban, technological, and socially fluid one, Leacock attacked the

[14]See Stephen Leacock's humorous essay, "The Struggle to Make Us Gentlemen," *My Remarkable Uncle* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Co., 1942).

crass materialism and vulgarity of a rising commercial class in *Arcadian Adventures* and waged satirical war against the Machine and its Age in most of his several volumes of humorous sketches. His best known and most revered volume *Sunshine Sketches of a Little Town* is a classic Canadian utopian comedy, a pastoral illusion of humanistic living in small-town rural Ontario; its humour that of a kindly, nostalgic irony, very much like Haliburton's *The Old Judge*, which lovingly addressed the foibles of the town's inhabitants and proves Leacock's telling and characteristically Canadian "lost Eden" philosophy of humour that "The true humorist must be an optimist. He must present the vision of a better world, if only of a lost one."[15]

Although in the twentieth century, Leacock moves out of the expressly biblical culture of his Nova Scotian predecessors, he maintains the pastoral and racial hope of "inheriting the land" and the voice of the moral and literary patriarch who worries about the dehumanizing evils of excessive money getting (as in the speculations of Jefferson Thorpe in *Sunshine Sketches*), the lack of standards in mass culture, and now the bold "new woman." Although Leacock, like Haliburton before him, is valued most for the creation of a trans-American comic prototype—in Leacock's case the persona of the modern "little man" beset by bureaucracy, technology, and family—his more significant national persona is that of his authoritative, highly literate, superior gentleman. This is the voice of Leacock's humour which like Haliburton's Squire Poker is distanced from the likes of Sam Slick and the "mobocracy" he represents, the voice who in the "Author's Preface" to *Winnowed Wisdom* offers up "the darned little average man" with his "limited little mind" as the butt of the joke.[16] This is the persona of Leacock's humour who repeatedly attacks the decline of a past standard of polite and gracious language and high literacy, preferring MacAulay and Gibbon to the modern, corrupt "Attaboy" standard;[17] and this is the persona who when he pays attention to women at all either sentimentalizes them as "The Little Girl in Green" in *Arcadian Adventures* in support of the "good old Victorian days, where women were angels, fairies, godmothers and such,"[18] or attacks the modern feminist as "the Awful Woman with

[15]Stephen Leacock, *The Greatest Pages of American Humour* (London: Methuen & Co., 1937), p. 174.
[16]Stephen Leacock, *Winnowed Wisdom* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Co., 1926), viii.
[17]Stephen Leacock, *Winnowed Wisdom*, p. 89.
[18]Stephen Leacock, *Humour: Its Theory and Technique* (London, 1935), pp. 266-67.

the Spectacles."[19] Like his Maritime forefathers, Leacock is a tenacious patriarch of humour who, interestingly enough, as he is confronted by the raucous modern company of Gibson girls and suffragettes, assumes what might very well be his nation's classic identity—one which I may be permitted to call, since Leacock did before me—the man with the brassiere.

In Leacock's humorous fiction the "manly independence" which Frye points to as part of McCulloch's and Stepsure's pastoral myth moves from domestic authority over women towards bachelor status and even androgyny. A piece like "The Cave Man As He Is" from *Frenzied Fiction* is typical. The persona is a critical and free bachelor observer of the new domestic mores where the husband is comically overrun by a modern virago in an ironic "uncivilized" cave-man setting. In a few other pieces, the gentleman himself takes on feminine dress or disguise. In "The Intimate Disclosures of a Wronged Woman" from *The Iron Man and the Tin Woman*, the real persona is obviously male but curiously assumes a feminine voice to attack the modern "aggressive" female psyche. In *Behind the Beyond* the travelling English Canadian in France has his masculinity and dignity compromised when he is feminized by French fashion, taking "the stuffy black ribbon" from his "Canadian Christie hat" and replacing it comically with "a single black ostrich feather . . . fashioned with just the plainest silver aigrette."[20] And on the international scene, the Canadian gentleman in the sketch "Abdul Azziz Has His: An Adventure in the Yildiz Kiosk," fantasizing about his nation's international impotent role, is finally positively personified as a male professor dressed in the pioneer garb of poke bonnet and plain black dress. It would seem, then, that when women refuse to take their rightful place as Dorothy Stepsure, the Anglo-Canadian male persona of Canadian humour reverts to pre-Eden and takes back his rib, absorbing unto himself the feminine disposition.[21]

Projected, too, through the Leacock persona of these last two examples are faces of the national character. In the sketch from *Behind the Beyond* the Leacock persona can be interpreted as

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[19]Stephen Leacock, "The Woman Question," *Essays and Literary Studies* (London: John Lane, The Bodley Head, MCMXVII), p. 121.
[20]Stephen Leacock, *Behind the Beyond* (London: John Lane, The Bodley Head, MCMXIX), p. 121.
[21]For a complete discussion of the Leacock persona see Beverly Rasporich, "The Leacock Persona and the Canadian Character," *Mosaic* XIV/2, pp. 77-91.

symbolically playing out his masculine role to the feminine French fact in the nation's curious marriage of two solitudes; and in the last sketch, in the international arena, the persona as the feminized professor suggests the emergent modern "female" Canadian identity of peace-maker. If Haliburton's Squire Poker's double ironic perspective occasioned by his habit of looking in on himself by looking out at Uncle Sam and John Bull prophecized, as R. McDougall claims, our "twentieth-century commitment to the uninspiring but useful middle course"[22] in the international bodies like NATO, Leacock's diplomatic professor in long skirt and bonnet signified its modern reality, and a hopeful, new, charitable, virtuous—even Edenic—national ideal in the age of the global village.

The quest for Eden, the quarrel with Eden, and Eden regained, may not be the absolute, stringent pattern of a national humour (or even exclusively Canadian) but certainly, the ideal of an arcane garden place, parodied, or presented as a hopeful model in social satire or in ironic comedy, persists in Canadian letters. In the east, a company of gentlemanly men of letters, McCulloch, Haliburton and Leacock, the founding members of Robertson Davies' and Samuel Marchbanks' "clerisy": a group of literate people who do not exclude those of taste, smilingly corrected and entertained society while they dreamed of past and future Anglo-Canadian golden ages. More recently, in the west, W. O. Mitchell and Robert Kroetsch in *Who Has Seen the Wind* and *The Words of My Roaring* revive the garden myth outside of the soft satire and farcical comedy of the prairie small town, while Paul Hiebert parodies the pastoral dream itself through the colonial sentimentalism of that happy, romantic lady, Sarah Binks. In French Canada, too, the attachment to the Edenic mirage is the source of humour, executed as a brilliant, Québécois, gothic farce in Roch Carrier's *The Garden of Delights* and presented as satiric celebration in Jacques Ferron's *Quinze Jam*.

The reasons for the pastoral preoccupation are no doubt various, but they would seem to include the longstanding effects of a clerical and colonial paternalism which promotes both Christian metaphor and myth. As well, the New Eden ideal meeting, if not the reality, at least the mythology of nation as vast, formidable frontier establishes the basic incongruity of much of our humour. In any case, for many of our twentieth-century humorists, virtue continues to exist in the

[22]R. McDougall, Introduction, *The Clockmaker*, xv.

country, vice in the town and city, while women as picaresque adventurers or satiric sages exist hardly at all. It seems to me that in order for the comic tradition in Canada to become more than, in the words of Sam Slick, "small potatoes and few in a hill," women need to join, as equal jovial participants, that laughing company of men dubbed by Mark Twain "the belly and the members." Otherwise, we will never boast of a progressive, full-bodied tradition of literary humour in this country. It may very well be, too, that this will not be accomplished until the serious moral mythology of Eden with the female as seductive destroyer of the garden dream completely recedes from or is happily revised in the Canadian comic imagination. Certainly our laughter will persist at the comic novels and humorous sketches written from a male point of view but without an alternate, genuine female perspective, I venture to say that for literary women, at least, it can only be half-hearted.

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