

# The Political Other in Nineteenth-Century British North America

The Satire of Thomas Chandler Haliburton

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**ABSTRACT** In the first half of the nineteenth century, British North America was trying to find its way within the Empire and in North America. The American democratic and republican experiment offered the Canadian colonies an alternative that seemed both appealing and threatening. The Nova Scotian politician, historian, and satirist T. C. Haliburton articulated the fears of his time in a series of humorous sketches targeting a general audience and designed to spur a collective debate on the advantages and disadvantages of democracy. This article explores Haliburton's political satire in parallel with the classic interpretation of democracy in America offered by Alexis de Tocqueville. Both authors wrote about American democracy at about the same time and related to the American model from without, being aware of the profound effect the new form of government could have on their own communities.

Between the British-American War of 1812 and the Mexican-American War of 1846, the face of the North American continent was reshaped by the rapid growth of the American republic. In full territorial expansion, as ten more states joined the Union its booming population fueled by a powerful economy and by massive emigration from all over Europe, the American experiment was thriving against all odds. It was successful to such an extent that, by the middle of the nineteenth century, the young republic had become a model for most of the other former colonies in the Americas. At the same time, its trademark, "democracy," underwent an unprecedented process of negotiation, redefinition, and institutional elaboration in the troubled context of revolution, counterrevolution, and reform in the Atlantic world.<sup>1</sup> Democ-

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1. For a survey of the literature on the history of the concept of "democracy" in American studies, see Sandra Gustafson's excellent "Histories of Democracy and Empire," *American Quarterly* 59, 1 (March 2007): 107-33.

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racy was not contested only in the New World. In the wake of the French Revolution and of the chaos left behind by the Napoleonic Wars, debates over the future of this new experiment in political government raged in Europe as well. The American success story was enflaming the imaginations of reformers, while the very same American realities made conservatives detect in them dystopian elements of a world fallen prey to the unbridled passions of the mobs and condemned to perpetual and collective mediocrity.

This article sets out to examine a view of American democracy originating in a space that, in the first half of the nineteenth century, found itself at the intersection of the British Empire with the new American democratic and republican empire—the Canadian colonies. My focus will be the image of the United States in the political satire of one of Canada's first historians and publicists, Thomas Chandler Haliburton. I will explore the connections between the political ideas separating the American colonies from the British Empire and Haliburton's literary articulation of national identity in British North America. At the same time, I will compare this early Canadian interpretation of American democracy to that of another outsider to the process, the French philosopher Alexis de Tocqueville, whose *Democracy in America* represents perhaps the single most influential account of democracy in the New World, of its workings, its dangers, and its advantages. Tocqueville belonged to a different intellectual tradition from Haliburton's, and he had a radically different experience of democracy. Nevertheless, in *Democracy in America* the French philosopher tried to find in the American democratic experiment answers to questions about the struggles of his own society, an endeavor parallel to Haliburton's attempt to explain American democracy in his satirical sketches. Both writers commented on American society at virtually the same time, the 1830s, and both related to the American model from without, being acutely aware that the new form of government that was in its experimental stages in the United States had the potential of ultimately reshaping their own communities.

In the new settler-invader societies that the British Empire had scattered across the world, the issue of representative democracy was particularly urgent, given the transformations that the empire itself was undergoing.<sup>2</sup> Were these little Britains going to remain part of the imperial family, or were they

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2. The British settler-invader colonies are Canada, Australia, South Africa, and New Zealand. Despite their particular historical evolution, the American colonies also belong to the same category. See Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffith, and Helen Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures* (London: Routledge, 1989).

going to follow the example of the rebellious thirteen colonies less than three decades earlier? Was democracy the future, the path to social Utopia, or simply a monstrous outgrowth of modernity as seen in the French Revolution? And which type of democracy was it going to be? In Europe artists and historians alike voiced their skepticism toward the rule of the people and expressed their doubts about the possibility (or desirability) of absolute equality. In the United States the debates over the nature of democracy led to a gradual definition of the concept that strengthened its conceptual incompatibility with “empire” and, by extension, with Europe. On the other side of the Atlantic, in Britain, the American republican and democratic alternative to traditional forms of government functioned as a catalyst for parliamentary reform. As Paul Giles points out, the need to understand, explain, and, possibly, reject the American model conversely triggered an unprecedented scrutiny of the English constitution itself. This trend also contributed to the growing awareness of the existence of *two* distinct Atlantic communities once united by their Anglo-Saxon blood, but now irrevocably separated by political aspirations.<sup>3</sup>

The national narrative that was being negotiated in the United States after the end of the War of 1812 had as much to do with competing versions of democracy as with the creation of an overarching ideology designed to connect a loose federal empire on the edge of a crisis caused by slavery. As Sandra Gustafson notes, “In a world still largely committed to monarchical government, the United States was an experiment in the trial stages.”<sup>4</sup> The young republic was overflowing with an aggressive nationalist ethos of the romantic type, articulated in direct connection with democracy, individualism, and equality. This ethos was manifested in the expansionist tendencies that were to culminate in the Mexican American War, and which tried to obscure the internal contradictions of racial and social inequality. With all its undeniable appeal for the disenfranchised of the world, who viewed America as a promised land of social equality, however, the U.S. discourse of freedom and nation building did not completely dominate the middle decades of the nineteenth century in the New World. An alternative narrative of the nation was struggling to find its voice, side by side with the American one—the colonial nationalism of British North America. This bicultural, underpopulated remainder of the British Empire in the New World staunchly resisted the lure of republicanism, did not choose democracy over empire, and re-

3. Paul Giles, *Atlantic Republic: The American Tradition in English Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

4. Gustafson, “Histories of Democracy and Empire.”

mained monarchical and British. Here, as in the mother country, the shortcomings of representative democracy and reform were more than just theoretical arguments in debates over the political destiny of the colony. Rather, they played a crucial role in providing a stable theme in the chorus of the multiple voices that fragmented the North American space along the fault lines of regionalism, ethnicity, religion, gender, race, and class. As a result, for over half a century the early Canadian discourse of colonial nationalism was to overlap and engage in dialogue with the romantic American ethos in a fascinating ideological dance that transcended regional idiosyncrasies and had as its final objective the rescue of the British colonists from the dangers of being seduced by the prospects of the grandiose odyssey of a continental North American identity.<sup>5</sup>

#### THE CLOCKMAKER

In the 1830s the Nova Scotian Thomas Chandler Haliburton (1796–1865) was a prominent politician and historian, well known for his colorful involvement in the political life of the colony, as well as for his writings. He remains to this day Canada's first worldwide acclaimed satirist. Like Tocqueville, Haliburton was formed in a culture rooted in the ideology of the Old World, viewed the French Revolution as a crucial turning point in human history, and was doubtful about the applicability of the American model elsewhere. He remained throughout his life a vocal member in the ongoing debate over the fate of the Maritime colonies within the larger family of the British Empire, the available choices being either annexation by the United States or a reinvention of the role of the colonies in the imperial network. Haliburton's political satire, which constitutes the focus of this article, provides an accessible illustration of the complex process of negotiation of the limited identities within British North America itself, shaped by the ethos of the age as much as by the colonists' own attempt to make sense of the place that their community was to occupy in the new imperial and continental paradigms.

Previous research on Haliburton's sketches has focused primarily on his use of satire and on his pioneering use of the North American idiom in his

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5. The Dominion of Canada was created in 1867. Therefore, using the term *Canada* when dealing with the British colonies in North America in the 1830s is an anachronism. I will, however, occasionally use the term as shorthand for the entire region when I discuss it as a precursor of modern-day Canada. Where there were regional differences between the various British colonies in North America, these will be made explicit in the text.



Figure 1. *Judge Thomas Chandler Haliburton*. Print Collection, Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Division of Art, Prints and Photographs, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations.

prose, which is said to have inspired iconic figures of American humor such as Artemus Ward and Mark Twain.<sup>6</sup> This article sets out to explore the literary construction of the American Other in Haliburton's satire through the lenses of the author's political views, and of the larger debates over equality and political representation in the Western world. It argues that Haliburton, as an upper-class, white, male British North American, perceived American democracy as a radical form of otherness threatening his own sense of self and the stability of the world as he knew it. Consequently, his writings reflect his staunch resistance to the leveling world democracy was bringing about. His opposition to radical reform is not entirely surprising. Through his background and his profession as a lawyer, then as a member of the Supreme Court of Nova Scotia, and, later on, as a defender of the colonies in his position of MP in a rather apathetic British Parliament at Westminster, Haliburton belonged to the ruling colonial and aristocratic elite, as well as to the intellectual elite of the colonies, a privileged position he enjoyed and which he saw threatened by the new age.

Haliburton never hesitated to voice his political views or to offer solutions for how the seemingly unstoppable torrent of history could be halted. These solutions included a dramatic limitation of the franchise, a consolidation of the power of the executive councils, the complete acculturation of the French, and a redistribution of patronage from the mother country to the best and most deserving colonists (one of whom he had no doubt he was). Indeed, throughout his political career Haliburton strove to articulate a distinct British North American ethos rooted in a rejection of democracy and of the American model of government, and in the maintenance of the imperial connection at all costs. The same ideas and attitudes toward the British monarchical and aristocratic system and its American democratic and republican alternative will be found distilled for popular consumption in his

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6. For more on the writings of Thomas Chandler Haliburton, see Pierre Spriet, "Les deux Amériques dans l'œuvre de Th. Ch. Haliburton," *Annales du CRAA* [Centre de Recherches sur l'Amérique Anglophone] 16 (1991): 95–110; Daniel Royot, "Sam Slick and American Popular Humour," in Frank Tierney, ed., *The Thomas Chandler Haliburton Symposium Papers* (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1985), 123–31; Walter S. Avis, "Further Lexicographic Evidence from the Clockmaker," *American Speech* 27 (1952): 16–19; Francis Palmer, "Gleanings for the DAE Supplement," *American Speech* 22 (1947): 199–206; Reginald Eyre Watters, "Sam Slick," in Richard A. Davies, ed., *On Thomas Chandler Haliburton: Selected Criticism* (Ottawa: Tecumseh Press, 1979), 238–47. Richard A. Davies published an excellent biography, *Inventing Sam Slick: A Biography of Thomas Chandler Haliburton* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005).

political satirical sketches because Haliburton, a versatile speaker and writer, adapted his political message to a wider audience in the *Clockmaker* series by choosing a very accessible genre to make his ideas readily available to his fellow countrymen, whom he hoped to stir into action.

Haliburton's most famous creation, Sam Slick, is a Yankee clockmaker of Slickville, Onion County, Connecticut. He originally appeared in a series of sketches published in serial form in the *Novascotian* and later collected in book form in three volumes between 1836 and 1840 under the full title *The Clockmaker; or, The sayings and doings of Samuel Slick, of Slickville*.<sup>7</sup> In these sketches the author laments the progress of reform in Britain and the stagnation of the British colonies in North America, and he warns of the expansionist tastes of the United States and of the pernicious effects of bestowing any political powers on the masses. Haliburton gets his point across not by writing didactic lectures, but rather by penciling short, witty stories that convey his doubts about democracy as a worldview, although the later volumes of his Slick sketches tend to err on the side of didacticism. In his earlier volumes, however, he amuses and instructs at the same time, offering his readers a synthetic and sympathetic counterargument to the American ideology, tackling variations on some of the themes that were recurrent in discussions on democracy in the age: the fear of mobocracy and of the inevitable decline of civilization.<sup>8</sup>

*The Clockmaker* belongs to a hybrid genre, located somewhere between moral essay and picaresque novel. The work opens as the narrator, later identified as a (presumably British) Squire, meets Sam Slick, the American peddler. They start a conversation, become friends, and end up traveling together across Nova Scotia. The three series of *The Clockmaker* represent the Squire's record of these conversations with Slick. Their witty exchanges and comments are inspired by what they encounter on their wanderings and illustrate the different political or social traits that Haliburton wanted his readers to ponder. As a general rule, these stories emphasize the superiority of the British colonial system, while more or less subtly drawing attention to the flaws of the American democratic system. Haliburton also emphatically comments on state formation in mid-nineteenth century North America,

7. Thomas Chandler Haliburton, *Sam Slick, the Clockmaker, His Sayings and Doings*, 1st (1836), 2nd (1838), and 3rd (1840) series (Toronto: Musson Book Company, 1935). All further references in the text will be to this edition.

8. Alan S. Kahan, *Aristocratic Liberalism: The Social and Political Thought of Jacob Burkhardt, John Stuart Mill, and Alexis de Tocqueville* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992).

providing his readers with an accessible comparison of the two competing national narratives in North America at the time. Each series had a particular purpose: the first used the American example to stir the Nova Scotians into action to solve their immediate financial difficulties; the second disparaged the Reform movement and criticized the new ideology of “democracy”; the third was targeted more at an English audience than at Nova Scotians and had as its main goal to persuade the Colonial Office not to grant responsible government to Nova Scotia.<sup>9</sup>

Haliburton’s use of Slick as well as the unnamed and presumably British Squire as his literary personae may hint at the difficulty to articulate and sustain any stable national self-definitions in British North America at the time. What Canada—or better said, Nova Scotia—should be emerges indirectly from the dialogue of the Yankee and the Briton, rather than from the creation of any memorable native character. There is no Canadian equivalent to Sam Slick. The resulting identity patterns change and are constantly renegotiated throughout the three series in an endless triangular dance among the British North Americans, the Americans, and the British. The colonial self remains ambiguously located in medias res between the two aggressive parent cultures, Uncle Sam and John Bull, from whom it is separated and yet with both of whom it has clear affinities. This ambiguity did not affect the popularity of his creation—quite the opposite. During the 1830s Haliburton’s wandering Yankee peddler was famous and quoted not only in Montreal and Halifax, but also in Boston, New York, and London, where, according to Haliburton’s biographer Roberts A. Davies, *The Clockmaker* sketches were a serious rival to Dickens’s *Pickwick Papers*, which had come out at about the same time.<sup>10</sup> In fact, Haliburton was the first Canadian author to achieve such popularity, quite an accomplishment for a colonial writer.<sup>11</sup> It is estimated that all together approximately one hundred editions of *The Clockmaker* were published in the

9. Victor L. Oakes Chittick, *Thomas Chandler Haliburton (“Sam Slick”), a Study in Provincial Toryism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1924).

10. Davies, *Inventing Sam Slick*, 62.

11. Bentley’s 1837 London edition of *The Clockmaker* enjoyed such a tremendous success that it was republished in an American edition in Philadelphia. Even here the book was immensely popular, and within six months four new editions were issued. As Joseph Howe pointed out in the issue of June 8, 1837, of the *Novascotian*, Haliburton’s creation enjoyed an unprecedented degree of popularity, particularly unusual for a colonial author.



nineteenth century.<sup>12</sup> The success that Slick had with Haliburton's British audience may have been due to the symbolic value of this character. This charming if occasionally boorish Yankee embodied what was then held to be "the American philosophy," its values and cultural assumptions, positing himself as the negative pole of a witty comparison between the advantages and disadvantages of the two systems in North America: British, colonial, and elite-driven, versus American, republican, and democratic. Slick provided the colonists with a coherent negative pole around which to negotiate their multiple identities, while to the Americans he offered a charismatic and flattering, albeit occasionally ironical, national self-image, a stereotype created by a North American, a refreshing change from the dismissive accounts of British travelers to the New World, such as those of Charles Dickens and Frances Trollope.

Despite the charm of his Yankee character, Haliburton uses his political satire to outline an alien Americanness opposed to what he perceives to be a British and Canadian identity, and in this process he exposes some of the tensions embedded in the process of national self-definition in mid-nineteenth-century North America. As Anthony D. Smith has noted, every nation has a dominant or "core *ethnie*," which provides it with a large part of the cultural basis on which the nation is built.<sup>13</sup> *Ethnies* and nations share the need for a cluster of symbolic elements that helps to construct the historical continuity of the nation in the social imaginary of the members, so that national identifications consist of an ethnic core together with its political manifestation.<sup>14</sup> The difference between the two sets of political articulations of the nation in Haliburton's interpretation minimized the role of the Anglo-Saxon ethnic core that the Americans and the English Canadians shared, making it play merely a secondary part among the ethno-symbolic elements that helped to construct the historical continuity of the two political entities. The common allegiance of the members of the two communities seems therefore to lie primarily in their allegiance to a territory and to the laws of that land, rather than in the ethnic, linguistic, or religious similarities that united them. Loyalty to the land becomes loyalty to the

12. For a complete list of all the European and North American editions of Haliburton's Slick sketches, see Chittick, *Haliburton*, 653–65, and John Daniel Logan, *Thomas Chandler Haliburton* (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1923), 153–61.

13. Anthony D. Smith, *National Identity* (London: Penguin, 1991), 11.

14. The *social imaginary* refers to the values, institutions, laws, and symbols shared by a particular social group and by the society that group belongs to.

empire, its laws, and its tradition. At the same time, the new supra-ethnic core that acquires preeminence for Haliburton's definition of national identity in English Canada will be "British," despite the fact that "British" itself remained a term fraught with contradictions.<sup>15</sup>

Haliburton's satirical sketches successfully illustrate the larger process that projected the British dimension of early Canadian self-identifications as the supra-ethnic core of the young community. The Nova Scotian judge rhetorically organized around this core the shared memories, myths, values, traditions, and institutionalized practices that he believed ensured the continuity between the larger British identity and the limited Canadian colonial identities at work in British North America. Haliburton remained a staunch supporter of the British imperial project and of the British monarchy in North America. He was a passionate believer in the Toryism of Edmund Burke, yet he lived to see the decline of the worldview defended by the British thinker, and he struggled to stop this decline on both sides of the Atlantic, in an attempt to protect the bonds uniting the Canadas to the ideological center of his spiritual geography.<sup>16</sup> In Haliburton's Tory reading, British North America is a land whose laws are British and therefore fundamentally alien to the American ethos and ideals. His satire showcases the process whereby the political dimension supersedes the centrality of the ethnic core in imagining the nation in mid-nineteenth-century British North America—"British" becomes more important than "Anglo-Saxon," a phenomenon already analyzed by Paul Giles in *Atlantic Republic*.<sup>17</sup>

Thus, for Haliburton American democracy represents an intrinsic part of an intricate identity equation that revolves around redefining Britishness in the empire and negotiating the place of the Canadian colonies in the imperial framework. His more famous contemporary, Alexis de Tocqueville, however, describes American democracy as uncomplicated by ethnic or supra-ethnic associations. He does not notice any significant difference between the British colonists in Canada and the Americans, or between the two societies, and he focuses instead on the analysis of what he sees as a form of government rooted in the particular circumstances of the New

15. For a better understanding of the complexities of Britishness in Canada, see Daniel Coleman's excellent study of Britishness as race in *White Civility: The Literary Project of English Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006).

16. Fred Cosgwell, *The Dictionary of Canadian Biography Online*, [www.biographi.ca/EN/ShowBio.asp?BioId=38597](http://www.biographi.ca/EN/ShowBio.asp?BioId=38597) (accessed June 26, 2007).

17. For more on this, see Paul Giles's discussion of the evolution of attitudes toward reform and republicanism in Britain in the eighteenth century in *Atlantic Republic*, 12–31.

World. He may have been an outsider to North America; yet, unlike Haliburton, he had a direct experience of democracy and its consequences in his own society. Tocqueville's study of American democracy and his perception of the United States betray his own cultural bias and expectations. Nevertheless, for him, the choice of democracy over aristocracy, or of republic over monarchy, did not challenge national loyalties; therefore, his take on the American experiment will be different from Haliburton's, although in many respects the two interpretations touch on common points.

Tocqueville remains a notoriously ambiguous figure in the history of French liberalism. He was described suggestively by Alan S. Kahan as an "aristocratic liberal," in the European tradition of John Stuart Mill and Jacob Burkhardt, and his discussion of the inevitability of equality in the modern world provided the main conceptual tools that were used to dissect American society well into the twentieth century.<sup>18</sup> In 1831 Tocqueville visited the United States to see for himself the American experiment in popular government, and he returned to France both admiring and distrusting it. The product of intensive research over the next four years, his two volumes of *Democracy in America* (1835 and 1840) sophisticatedly articulated ideas that were already widespread among those members of the upper and middle classes who were watching anxiously the encroachment of populist modernity on the fortress of the old order. Yet to Tocqueville democracy was more than a simple political philosophy; it was a worldview that shaped American culture and the very fabric of North American society, dramatically influencing the manner in which the individual conceptualized justice, time, and his own place in history.

This aristocratic liberal saw in the eighteenth century two tendencies that were easily mistaken for one another—the hatred for inequality and the love for liberty. The French Revolution had started as a struggle for liberty and evolved into a struggle for equality, the two not having the same values or the same consequences in their nineteenth-century manifestations.<sup>19</sup> Tocqueville's book echoed two main fears associated with democracy among the European middle class and among those aristocratic liberals who did not wholeheartedly embrace a future governed by the masses, despite their theoretical openness to democracy. One fear regarded the rule of the mob,

18. For an excellent study on the reception of Tocqueville in America, see Matthew Mancini, *Alexis de Tocqueville and American Intellectuals: From His Times to Ours* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman and Littlefield, 2006). For Tocqueville and aristocratic liberalism, see Kahan, *Aristocratic Liberalism*.

19. See Kahan, *Aristocratic Liberalism*, 27–33.

beautifully crystallized in his concept of the “tyranny of the majority”; the other was the fear of a general decline in Western civilization—the “middling standard” in the arts—in a century overwhelmingly described by aristocratic liberals as an age of bourgeois hegemony.<sup>20</sup>

Soon after its publication, Tocqueville’s interpretation of American democracy became the norm by which local, colonial varieties of democracy were assessed, from British North America to Australia.<sup>21</sup> The British Empire was feeling the pressure of equality and reform, and, as managing its far-flung provinces became more expensive and difficult, new strategies had to be devised to deal with the fate of regions that had been an asset but were threatening to become a burden to the Crown. The specter of revolution loomed menacingly in the distance, and for decades British politicians and thinkers alike wrestled with the need for alterations in the social structure of the empire to avoid the bloody turmoil that had torn France apart. To the members of the British and colonial upper middle class, absolute democracy appeared far from a solution, let alone a panacea for existing problems. The fear of the rule of the mob, of a government controlled by public opinion rather than by the educated elites, and of the decline of their civilization permeates the discourse of the age in Britain, even if in London a republican alternative no longer seemed to be a serious possibility after the passing of the Reform Bill in 1832.<sup>22</sup> For the British American colonies, however, things were more complicated because of the Crown’s neglect of these remote possessions, which opened the way to speculations about their future fate—maintenance of the status quo, independence and republic, or simply absorption into the their powerful neighbor. The elites of this part of the glorious empire saw themselves as the helpless witnesses of a society inexorably racing forward toward a modernity that seemed unavoidably

20. *Ibid.*, 29.

21. See S. F. Wise and Robert Craig Brown, *Canada Views the United States: Nineteenth-Century Political Attitudes* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1967), for a discussion of the influence of Toqueville’s work on French Canadian radicals; G. M. Craig, “The American Impact on the Upper Canadian Reform Movement before 1837,” *Canadian Historical Review* 29, 4 (1948): 333–52, argues that the reform movement in Upper Canada was influenced by Tocqueville’s understanding of American democracy. Haliburton himself tries to contradict Tocqueville’s understanding of American democracy in his historical essay *Rule and Misrule of the English in America* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1851). For Australia, see Richard White, *Inventing Australia: Images and Identity, 1688–1980* (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1981).

22. Giles, *Atlantic Republic*, 31–71.

American, discarding the teachings of tradition and the comfortably safe ways of the past. Not surprisingly, many of them viewed the American republic as an example (usually negative) of what the future of Britain and of the empire at large might look like, if given a chance.

#### COMPETING NATIONALISMS

Shaped by the British idealism that represented the ideological glue that held together the vast and multifarious reality of the empire, the nineteenth-century English Canadian imagined community emerged in an area situated between two linguistically homogeneous yet ideologically and politically opposed cultures: the United States and the British Empire. The two Canadas (Upper and Lower) and the Maritime Provinces of British North America were isolated to the north of the United States, loosely organized, separated from one another by inaccessible masses of land and stretches of water, which meant that contact with each other was often more difficult than with Britain or the United States. After 1783 Nova Scotia had been reorganized as Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, and Prince Edward Island. The Atlantic provided them with a common space for transportation, trade, and communication, so that the Maritimes were physically and ideologically closer to Britain than to the rest of the continent and had managed to forge a more coherent sense of local identity in relationship with the mother country. In Nova Scotia in particular, awareness of the bonds that blended the province into the fabric of the empire was strong, and the colonial nationalism of the elites was articulate. With Halifax the center of the main overseas branch of the Imperial Federation League and home to an important British garrison, the colony had become an indispensable base of imperial military and naval power.<sup>23</sup> Neighboring New England also influenced the cultural profile of the region, as many New Englanders had moved north even before the American Revolution, attracted by the lands rendered available by the Acadian deportation.<sup>24</sup>

The literature written in the English-speaking provinces in the 1830s reflected the tensions traversing the North American space, as well as the identity dilemmas of the nascent imagined community, as voiced by the colonial elites. By taking up the dialogue between the two trends competing

23. For an exhaustive discussion on empire federalism in nineteenth-century Britain, see Ged Martin, "Empire Federalism and Imperial Parliamentary Union, 1820–1870," *Historical Journal* 16, 1 (1973): 65–92.

24. G. A. Rawlyk, ed., *The Atlantic Provinces and the Problems of Confederation* (St. John's, Nfld.: Breakwater, 1979).

in the New World—tradition and reform, or the rule of the elites versus the rule of the people—and by crystallizing it in metaphorical form, the writings of the age transformed this tension into a palatable form, ready for easy consumption by larger audiences. As a direct consequence of the colonial nationalism of British North America at the time and of the presence of the United States in the direct geographical proximity of the colonies, I argue that the Americans became Others whose ideological distinctiveness was emphasized in narcissistic fashion: the American characters that step forth from Haliburton's writings are rooted in a distinct political philosophy, rather than in an ethnic, religious, or racial one. They unambiguously represent ideological Others in as much as they identify with a universe conceptualized by different and immutable laws structuring their societies—equality, democracy, republic.

The American republic in the mid-nineteenth century illustrates Smith's model of the territorial political nation. Its counterpart, the ethnic model of the nation, denies the individual the possibility of ever becoming anything else than a member of the group he or she was born into. A nation, understood in these terms, is first of all a community of common descent, and it is this stress on descent that prevails in the imaginary definitions of that nation, rather than any territorial elements. On the contrary, the territorial type of political nation places emphasis on the historic homeland as the interpenetration of territory and national identity. In the age of Manifest Destiny, the entire North American continent gradually emerged as the historical homeland of the new republic. The territorial nation is "civic" by definition, and the common allegiance of its members lies in their loyalty to a territory and to the laws of that land, which are supposed to give a "a measure of common values and traditions among the population"; at the same time, it is understood that allegiance to that nation can be changed.<sup>25</sup> As pointed out earlier, despite the ambiguous nature of the very concept of "Britishness" and its multiple redefinitions in the colonies, it was this Britishness that, in Haliburton's view, was to play the role of a supra-ethnic core to the colonial communities in North America and supersede the old Anglo-Saxon commonalities that had united the mother country to her rebellious progeny before 1776. Empire functions therefore in Haliburton's worldview as a community of descent, transcending conventional territorial boundaries because it stretched across the globe. In contrast to the territorial political nation in full expansion south of the Great Lakes, Haliburton's

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25. Smith, *National Identity*, 11.

interpretation of the British North American colonies relied on the above-mentioned supra-ethnic core embodied in the continuity of common imperial descent to resist either incorporation in the American republic or an independence that would have gone against their legacy of unadulterated Britishness.

The world of which Haliburton wrote was the known universe of the glorious British Empire, on which the sun never set. Like the continental Canadas,<sup>26</sup> Nova Scotia was at the time of the creation of Sam Slick the locus of a clash of interests between the empire and the United States. Politically, the colony was at a crucial moment in its development, trying to come to terms with its own reform movements, with the struggle for responsible government, as well as with the subtle renegotiations of its relationship with Britain. The Tories were worried; only fifty years before, the New England states, not necessarily much older than Nova Scotia, had reached a similar point in their development. The result had been complete independence and the American republican experiment, which was now being nervously observed by the British colonialists north of the border. The reformers, by contrast, were not that worried that history should take a similar course. They saw in the United States a model worth copying—indeed, perhaps the only viable strategy of development for the British North American colonies.

Haliburton's satire can be understood therefore as part of the larger discussion on contested nationalisms and state formation in North America in the nineteenth century, because it dramatizes the competing versions of national identity intersecting in the Canadian colonies at the time. Initially Haliburton had been in favor of the reform movements and fought against the dominance of the colonial oligarchy, but with time his views became more and more conservative. Later on, as the reformers, led by Joseph Howe, started arguing in favor of responsible government for Nova Scotia, Haliburton's support weakened, for fear that these movements would lead to complete independence for the colony. His satire began to be used for different political and social ends, and, in creating Slick, his declared goal was to shake his fellow countrymen from their political torpor and to promote changes in the colony, without dismantling the imperial framework.

By amusing and deriding the Nova Scotians at the same time, Haliburton attempts a complex process of defamiliarization. Through the eyes of his Yankee character the old realities of Nova Scotia are cast in a new light, and

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26. Until 1840 English-speaking Upper Canada was separate from French-speaking Lower Canada.

the things taken for granted are approached from a different perspective—that of a republican, democratic Yankee. At the same time, the apparently seductive political system from across the border is scrutinized and criticized “from within,” so that the advantages of the imperial connection over the American model become clear and true beyond any doubt, voiced as they are by a native—Slick. Yet this is far from a simplistic exercise in demonizing one’s contender. Haliburton admired the British for their traditions and their institutions, yet he resented their patronizing attitude toward the colonies. He disliked the Americans for their brashness, for their opportunism, and for having rejected the empire in 1776, but he clearly was impressed with their industry and efficiency. As a result of this double vision, Slick steps forth from the pages of *The Clockmaker* cloaked in his creator’s ambiguous attitude, torn between fascination with and rejection of the new American center.

In making his Yankee character comment on British North American realities, Haliburton automatically assumes the existence of a set of political, ideological differences that set the two communities apart, a set of differences which he takes for granted that his readers will acknowledge as well. Haliburton was not the first North American author to use the interplay between self-images and heteroimages for the purposes of humor, but in his *Clockmaker* sketches he goes beyond a simple reworking of already successful patterns by adding to them a clear ideological dimension.<sup>27</sup> Under his pen, the frontier telltale stories that had preceded the literary birth of Sam Slick are adapted and used to put into perspective two national types and two imagined communities, thereby expanding the regional model onto an international level. The Nova Scotian author was consequently the first to coherently articulate the divide between the two communities living side by side in North America, thus making the shift from the “parochial mode of thinking,” to the continental one, and including the political, ideological coordinate in the complex equation of national identity of nineteenth-century North America.<sup>28</sup>

#### DEMOCRACY AS OTHERNESS

Understanding Haliburton’s view of democracy is crucial to any accurate assessment of his representation of the United States. Haliburton’s comments on American democracy, permeated by his obsession with the tyr-

27. For a full discussion of the literary sources of Haliburton’s Slick, see Davies, *Inventing Sam Slick*, 52–60.

28. In Logan, *Thomas Chandler Haliburton*, 95.



anny of the majority and the specter of cultural decline, bring to mind those made by Tocqueville in *Democracy in America*. Although the latter's book deals primarily with the United States, mentions of the British colonies do exist. In his American trip, Tocqueville made a brief detour and visited French Canada, but he was disappointed by what he found there—a conquered and broken culture whose passivity was attributed to the excessive influence of the Catholic Church.<sup>29</sup> He never made it to English Canada or to the Maritimes, yet he expressed strong opinions about the fate of the “Anglo-Saxon race” in America. Though he acknowledges the cultural distinctiveness of the defeated French Canadian nation, Tocqueville fails to see any significant differences between the English-speaking Canadians and the Americans. At the end of volume 1, “The Three Races in the United States,” in a good romantic and Herderian fashion, he clumps together the Americans and the inhabitants of the British colonies under the label “Anglo-Americans.” Tocqueville notes that the English Canadian population is “identical with that of the United States” and that the “English race is not stopping at the Union’s borders but continuing to advance well beyond them, toward the northeast.”<sup>30</sup> The passage emphasizes at the same time the hatred separating the Americans and the English: “There is no hatred more venomous than that which exists between the Americans of the United States and the English.”<sup>31</sup> Tocqueville concludes, however, that “neither differences in law nor differences of situation—war or peace, order or anarchy—had any perceptible effect on the successive phases of Anglo-American expansion.”<sup>32</sup> This favoring of a rather ethnic interpretation of national allegiances seems to have prevented the French thinker from grasping the existence of a competing form of nationalism in North America, or the particular kind of nationalism at work in the northern colonies, their complex mix of democratic impulses and conservative inertias, and the power of these inertias in influencing the elites’ understanding of democracy and reform. Haliburton’s satire is rooted precisely in his acknowledgment of this difference, although it unavoidably loses in the process the subtleties of Tocqueville’s analysis of democracy in general.

Even though in spirit he belonged to the ancien régime, a world forever

29. In Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* (1835, 1840; rept., New York: Library of America, 2004), 886. All further references in the text will be to this edition.

30. *Ibid.*, 471.

31. *Ibid.*, 469.

32. *Ibid.*, 473.

shattered by the French Revolution, by the mid-1830s Tocqueville seems to have resigned himself to the inevitability of the victory of the democratic principle over the aristocratic principle. Unlike Haliburton, he viewed equality as an unstoppable drive of humanity. For him democracy merely ensured an “equality of conditions” rather than represented an absolute status. It was a lens that affects the perception of culture and of its institutions. It gave new meanings to individual behavior, representations, and social relations, automatically casting them in a more flexible and mobile mold. It inspired a whole way of life, influencing minds, creating citizens, and shaping them in the light of the new moral code that was the fruit of the rule of the people.<sup>33</sup>

Haliburton’s approach to democracy is more conservative and less prone to ideological ambiguities than Tocqueville’s, primarily because of his strong Tory leanings. At the same time, for the purposes of political and social satire, for Haliburton things had to be cast in black and white, so stereotypes had to be rendered fully recognizable. Both authors, however, shared a similar elitist ethos and an outsider’s view on the American democratic system. For the Nova Scotian judge, the quality of a society is conditioned by the degree to which it respects the individual and his or her rights, a view that should not be mistaken for a defense of individualism in the sense propagated by the American credo, which he vigorously mocks in his Yankee character. Haliburton fears the changes that equality would have on social relations, and he rejects an ideology he perceives as ultimately leveling. Democracy’s potentiality of equality and uniformity scares Haliburton, who favors a more petrified social dynamics, which would preserve the rights of the individual as well as the privileged position of the upper class, and which would ensure the survival of order as he knows it. In defense of his point of view, Haliburton’s thinking operates with the opposition democratic versus aristocratic, to which is added the dichotomy of democratic Caesarism, or mobocracy, versus democratic freedom. Like Tocqueville, Haliburton has one overarching fear: that people will love equality more than they love liberty and will be willing to sacrifice the latter for the sake of the former. In his opinion, a society organized on the monarchical principle will better maintain and defend freedom, as well as the distinctions in rank and quality. Such a society would provide the individual with a stable environment, where a Darwinian “survival of the slickest” would not apply, where tradition would be respected, and where the positions of the

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33. *Ibid.*, 3.

various social actors would be forever safe from the violence of the mobs and from their leveling democratic impulses.<sup>34</sup>

For Haliburton, freedom outside the boundaries of the law cannot exist, and justice can come not from the people but only from a higher authority; in no case should a people be given the freedom to make their own justice. As an extension of this line of reasoning, because of the original choice of individual freedom over institutional tradition in 1776, the United States as a community is perceived as having made a conscious choice in favor of anarchy over order. By extension, the negative connotations of this choice are transposed onto the individual American characters, positing the rejection of law and authority as a central trait of the American character. This idea is expressed by a Loyalist character, addressing Sam in the first series of *The Clockmaker*, for whom the American “tree of liberty was a beautiful tree—a splendid tree. It was a sight to look at; it was well fenced and well protected from all parts of the globe to see it.” The implication is that, despite the world’s admiration for American freedom, the unchecked democracy of the new republic adulterated its fine principles. In the words of Haliburton’s Loyalist character, the mobs “have broken in and tore down their fences, and snapped off the branches, and scattered all the leaves about, and it looks no better than a gallows tree”; the corruption that mobocracy brought to American ideals threatened to draw the entire country into a downward spiral of violence and war. “I am afeared our ways will no longer be ways of pleasantness, nor our paths, paths of peace: I am, indeed, I vow, Mr. Slick.”<sup>35</sup>

The main fault of the Americans, unlike the disciplined members of the balanced British society, in Slick’s words, is that “they are a little grain too free”; they “have had their head a trifle too much, sometimes, particularly in elections, both in freedom of speech and freedom of press.”<sup>36</sup> And freedom, outside the enlightened guidance of the elites, can be a dangerous thing, with unexpected consequences. Tocqueville himself expressed his doubts about the benefits of an excessive freedom of the press, but his understanding of the American relationship with the law sharply differs from Haliburton’s.<sup>37</sup> Tocqueville believes that Americans obey the law because the law comes from the people, rather than from an outside source, but also because

34. Daniel Royot, “Sam Slick and American Popular Humor,” in Tierney, *Haliburton Symposium Papers*, 123.

35. Haliburton, *Clockmaker*, 1st series, 21.

36. *Ibid.*, 109.

37. Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 205–14.

“in America man never obeys man; he obeys justice, or the law.”<sup>38</sup> Haliburton, on the contrary, sees no trace of obedience in the southern neighbors of British North America. He looks at the present and finds in it confirmations of past choices: the history of the United States is to him a repeated confirmation of the original move of the colonies toward what he perceives to be a form of anarchy. Puzzled, however, by the obvious success of this supposedly defective system, he humorously attributes the fascination exerted by America on his countrymen to the power of attraction of a vortex. America is “a great whirlpool—a great vortex—it drags all the straw and chips, and floatin’ sticks, drift-wood and trash into it. The small crafts are sucked in, and whirl round and round like a squirrel in a cage—they’ll never come out. Bigger ones pass through at certain times of tide, and can come in and out with good pilotage, as they do at Hell Gate up the Sound.”<sup>39</sup>

In direct connection with his understanding of liberty and democracy, Haliburton’s sketches conflate freedom and individualism. He believed that the American democratic experiment—a lavish experiment in anarchic freedom—was inevitably going to beget monsters, the most fearful of which was the mob. In a world in perpetual transformation, vulnerable to the upheavals of industrialization that were creating an increasingly homogeneous society, the mobs represented the direct byproduct of power at the hands of disorganized masses of individuals lacking a stable system of identification. In *Democracy in America* Tocqueville did not discuss industrialization in the United States, or its possible effects on the fate of American democracy. Haliburton, by contrast, experienced North American industrialization firsthand (or the lack thereof in Nova Scotia), so he was able to comment on its effects on American society. His imperialist antidemocratic and antirepublican rhetoric hid the fears of an entire colonial elite about the inevitable blurring of class lines. Even if later in his work he expressed his admiration for a form of republicanism that would maintain class distinctions and leave to the elites the mission of educating and leading the masses, throughout his life Haliburton vocally denounced the pernicious effects of absolute democracy or of a classless world where differences would be erased and all individuals would be trapped in a national epidemic of moral and intellectual mediocrity.

Because of this fear of a classless world, Haliburton often seems to be of two minds about the necessary evils of modernization. Though the benefits of industrialization on the American economy were clearly visible when

38. *Ibid.*, 107.

39. Haliburton, *Clockmaker*, 1st series, 32.

compared to that in the stagnant British colonies, Haliburton was worried about the social side effects industrialization could bring. As democratic societies were by nature unequipped to deal with the reshaping of social relations as a result of the shift from an agrarian society, only the British hierarchical model could guarantee stability. Haliburton's vision of Nova Scotia as a middle ground between two worlds combines the conservative principles of Edmund Burke with the Yankee-inspired genius of frontier practicality and industry, making sure that the former have preeminence. In his *Clockmaker* sketches he is therefore trying to emphasize the symmetry, order, and harmony of his imagined world of colonial Britain, and he occasionally uses biblical references to build his argument. In the following fragment, Reverend Hopewell explains to Sam the connection between republicanism and agriculture.

In his words, "Man made the town, but God made the country,' and both bespeak their different architects in terms too plain to be misunderstood. The one is filled with virtue and the other with vice. One is the abode of plenty, and the other of want; one is a ware-duck of nice pure water, and t'other one a cess-pool." In a rather romantic vein, the progress and transformations that industrialization brought about are decried in the light of the social and moral transformations that follow in the footsteps of technological progress: "Our towns are gettin' so commercial and factoring, that they will soon generate mobs, Sam, . . . and mobs will introduce disobedience and defiance to laws, and that must end in anarchy and bloodshed. . . . A republic is only calculated for an enlightened and vartuous people, and folks chiefly in the farmin' line."<sup>40</sup>

Directly connected to the theme of the mob begotten by American democracy is the fear of a tyranny of this unruly, uncouth majority. Tocqueville dwells at length on the pernicious influence that the leveling effects of the majority can exert on mores, creativity, and ultimately the love of freedom of democratic peoples.<sup>41</sup> He points out the tension inherent in the two contradictory passions at the heart of contemporary democratic societies: the desire to be led and the desire to be free. The solution is to creation of a "single, omnipotent, tutelary power, but one that is elected by the citizens," and whose limiting effects on individual liberties are less visible.<sup>42</sup> He believes that "a constitution of this kind is infinitely preferable to one that concentrates all powers and then deposits them in the hands of an irrespon-

40. *Ibid.*, 98.

41. See Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 283–302, 581–87.

42. *Ibid.*, 820.

sible man or body,” but he states that the difference between the two forms of despotism is not too great in his eyes: “The nature of the master matters far less to me than the fact of obedience.”<sup>43</sup>

Like many of his conservative contemporaries, Haliburton believed that democracy appealed to the deeply individualistic side of human nature, and that it was nothing more than organized selfishness. Tocqueville himself noted the selfish impulse at the heart of democratic societies, and he discussed this at length in his chapters on individualism; to him there is a significant difference between egoism and the atomistic impulse at work in democratic societies.<sup>44</sup> Besides, religion and private associations would help reintegrate the individual into society. In Haliburton’s eyes nothing can redeem the individual from the new gospel of selfishness to which American democracy gave birth. Its result is a materialistic society that knows no good other than private affluence, whose members care only about themselves, are completely limited in their aspirations, and are incapable of respect for tradition and law. When applied to the whole country, individualism and selfishness acquire dramatic overtones. One of Haliburton’s Loyalist characters muses on the growth and decay of things in nature, creating an elaborate metaphor around the American flag and the ideals of freedom it was associated with. “‘It’s a law of nature, Sam,’ said he, ‘that things that grow too fast, and grow too big, go to decay soon. I am afeard we shall be rotten afore we are ripe.’” Even the meaning of the national symbols is challenged. The American eagle “is a fine bird,” yet he remains a bird of prey, “too fond of blood—too prone to pounce on the weak and unwary.” American expansionism in the mid-nineteenth century is symbolically alluded to in the image of the eagle “hoverin’ over Texas and Canada.” The definition of freedom that follows in the same passage is in fact an articulation of the two views of freedom competing in North America at the time, and in Haliburton’s interpretation certain types of freedom are not beneficial. “Freedom, what is it? . . . Is it havin’ no king and no nobles? Then we are sartinly free. . . . Is it in havin’ no established religion? Then we are free enough, gracious knows. Is it in havin’ no hereditary government, or vigorous executive? Then we are free beyond all doubt.”<sup>45</sup>

Haliburton’s whole assessment of the American democratic model is made from within the hierarchical system that governs his worldview, because he cannot fully internalize equality, so that the hierarchical, aristo-

43. *Ibid.*, 819.

44. Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 585–89, 610–13.

45. Haliburton *Clockmaker*, 2nd series, 224.

cratic principle never leaves his line of reasoning. In a democracy, equality is the norm, and power rests exclusively with the people who are inevitably deprived of the enlightened guidance of the elites. In this world dominated by the power of the many and of the same, Haliburton's greatest fear remains that individual liberty will end up stifled by the tyranny of the majority. Two decades later he would maintain his opinion in one of his historical works: "Democracy is no respecter of persons. Where all authority emanates from the mass, all must finally bow to that source of power."<sup>46</sup> For Haliburton the rule of a democratic "hydra" is equivalent to the despotism of one. To make his point, in the second series of *The Clockmaker*, in a process of indirect and telescopic construction of otherness, Sam Slick's British interlocutor, the Squire, comments on the arbitrariness inherent in any form of absolute power in a witty parallel between American democracy and Russian autocracy. Thus, he suggests, the American diplomats should try to make the Russian emperor see the profound commonalities between the two countries, despite superficial differences. They share "the same cast of countenance, same family likeness, same Tartar propensity to change abode. All extremes meet." While the Russians, Sam continues, "take off folk's heads without laws, so do our mobs. You send fellows to Siberia, our mobs send them to the devil." The appetite for territorial expansion is the same in the Russian monarchy as in the American republic: "You have got a liquorish mouth for fertile lands beyond your borders; and yet both have got more land than tenants. . . . Folks accuse you of stealing Poland, the same libeling villains accuse us of stealing Texas and a desire to have Canada too." Even the cult of the nation and the effervescent American nationalism of the mid-nineteenth century is interpreted as yet another common point shared with Russia: "Every man in Russia must bow to the pictur' of his Emperor; every man must bow to the pictur' of our great nation, and swear through thick and thin he admires it more nor anything on the face of the airth. Every man in Russia may say what he likes *if he dare*; so he may in the United States."<sup>47</sup>

For Haliburton, the image of the rule of the American mob is directly parallel to the American government and to its expansionist mood in the Jacksonian age, and confirmed by what the Nova Scotian judge perceives as the totalitarian tendencies of the United States. This juxtaposition of American democratic Caesarism with despotic Russian autocracy is based on the

46. Thomas Chandler Haliburton, *English in America* (London: Colburn, 1851), 69.

47. Haliburton, *Clockmaker*, 2nd series, 208.

assumption that, at a deeper level, the two situations are alike. Despite surface differences, the power of the mob-dependent democratic government in the United States is characterized by the same arbitrariness as the power of the Russian monarch. The similarity that Haliburton finds between the American republic and the Russian autocracy is therefore rooted in his belief that neither system can protect the individual from abusive power: freedom exists only within the boundaries of a law that has to transcend the political authority of either demos or monarch. In this respect Haliburton seems to echo Tocqueville's remark: "Omnipotence in itself seems to me a bad and dangerous thing. . . . Therefore, when I see that the right and wherewithal to do all accorded to any power whatsoever, whether it be called people or king, democracy or aristocracy, and whether it be exercised in a monarchy or a republic, I say, therein lies the seed of tyranny, and I seek to live elsewhere, under different laws."<sup>48</sup>

The same idea is repeated by one of Haliburton's characters, the Loyalist Reverend Hopewell, who firmly states: "I'd rather live under an absolute monarch any day than in a democracy, for one tyrant is better than a thousand; oppression is better nor anarchy and hard law better nor no law at all."<sup>49</sup> Along the same lines, in the sketch "Elective Councils," in the second series of *The Clockmaker*, Sam Slick argues that "there's no tyranny on earth equal to the tyranny of a majority," because "the greatest democrats are the greatest tyrants."<sup>50</sup> Thus, in Haliburton's view the rule of the people is invariably demonized, and American democracy is denied the virtues it customarily boasted. And as Haliburton draws the equal sign between "people" and "mob," any power the people may acquire is read as the first step toward arbitrary despotism, or mobocracy.

The dismissal of American republicanism and democracy as merely an experiment in a decentered world was not something new in British culture. From Samuel Johnson to Wordsworth, Coleridge, or Byron, Paul Giles followed the evolution of an image of America as an unstable world because of its lack of a fixed center—political, religious, or social.<sup>51</sup> Haliburton's reading of the United States in this vein is therefore in the tradition of the British culture he felt he belonged to. Because nothing is "fixed either in religion or politics," according to Haliburton, the inevitable end product of American history will be chaos.<sup>52</sup> Fragmentariness begets fragility, so that,

48. Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 290.

49. Haliburton, *Clockmaker*, 2nd series, 222.

50. *Ibid.*, 164.

51. See Giles, *Atlantic Republic*, 12–71.

52. Haliburton, *Clockmaker*, 1st series, 199.



while at a superficial level constructed as a “go-ahead nation,” ruled by the religion of progress, the United States emerges from Haliburton’s sketches as a realm of transience and impermanence, a motley gathering of nameless loose elements not bound together and doomed to be scattered by the wind of history. The southern republic is a giant with feet of clay, a land of a glorious “now,” rooted in a temporary prosperity that has no prospects for the future, as Sam’s father gloomily prophesizes in the sketch “A Tale of Bunker’s Hill.” “Our Revolution has made us grow faster and grow richer; but, Sam, when we were younger and poorer, we were more pious and more happy.” Pride and vanity threaten the survival of the country, and this danger is decoded as a form of belated retribution for the original sin of the American Revolution. “If our country is to be darkened by infidelity, our government defiled by every State, and every State ruled by mobs, then, Sam, the blood we shed in our Revolution will be atoned for in the blood and suffering of our fellow citizens. The murders of that civil war will be expiated by a political suicide of the State.”<sup>53</sup> Thus, American freedom is reread as American anarchy, and the past of the British domination becomes a lost Eden of innocence and spirituality, a time when the American colonies were “younger and poorer” but also “more pious and more happy,” which contradicts traditional readings of American history that equate the pre-Revolutionary age with a time of oppression and decline, followed by the inexorable progress that started with 1776.

Haliburton was a staunch believer in the superiority of the Anglo-Saxon race. The British colonies needed to be aware that the democratic lure masked the dangers of chaos, of disintegration and social and racial miscegenation contained in embryo in the very nature of immigration. Not only are the American mobs unruly and dangerous because of the power vested in them, but the very creation of the United States through immigration from all over the world contributes to its fragility. The powerful myth of the New World is ironically juxtaposed to that of the redeeming powers of American democracy, expected miraculously to convert a motley gathering of lowlife from the Old World into “the greatest nation on airth,” as Sam comically puts it. “Well, squire, our great country is like that are Thames water—it does receive the outpourin’s of the world—homicides and regicides, jailbirds and galley-birds, poorhouse chaps, rebels, infidels, and forgers, rogues of all sorts, sizes and degrees—but it ferments, you see, and works clear; and what a’most a beautiful clear stream o’ democracy it does make, don’t it?”<sup>54</sup>

53. *Ibid.*, 115.

54. Haliburton, *Clockmaker*, 2nd series, 155.

In the loose, chaotic Union, there is no strong central idea that can contain this unmanageable diversity or bond the states together. In Haliburton's apocalyptic reading of the American future, self-destruction is inevitable, fueled by immigration of non-Anglo-Saxon stock. New Orleans is the epitome of the United States: a carnivalesque young land, with no past, no hierarchies, and no tradition, inhabited by people from the four corners of the world, "a great caravansary filled with strangers." The carefree spirit of New Orleans is, in Haliburton's reading, a manifestation of a certain childlike innocence that disregards taboos and dismisses future and past alike. The inhabitants of the city are compared to "children playin' in a churchyard, jumpin' over the graves, hidin' behind the tombs, a-larfin' at the emblems of mortality, and the queer old rhymes onder 'em." The fragility of the city evokes the fragility of an entire country devoid of solid foundations: "That 'ere place is built in a bar in the harbor, made of snags, driftwood, and chokes, hauled up by the river, and then filled and covered with the sediment and alluvial of the rich bottoms above, brought down by the freshets. It's peopled in the same way. The eddies and tides of business of all that country centre there, and the froth and scum are washed up and settle at New Orleans. It's filled with all sorts of people, black, white and Ingians, and their different shades, French, Spanish, Portuguese, and Dutch, English, Irish and Scotch, and then people from every state in the Union. . . . It's all a great caravansary filled with strangers."<sup>55</sup>

#### THE AMERICAN DISTINCTIVENESS

Explaining away American democracy serves the purpose of negatively defining a Nova Scotian yet British identity by articulating the doubleness and ambivalence of colonial nationalism—loyalty to Nova Scotia—by recognizing its place within the British Empire. Sam is akin to the British colonists he dupes and scorns, yet he is different in almost elusive ways, a problematic otherness that, albeit displaying familiar features, transcends race, class, religion, and ethnicity. In a nineteenth century of notoriously porous physical borders, the imagined borders separating the Nova Scotian and the American communities were especially powerful markers. French Canada represented an unproblematic and clear-cut Other for the English-speaking colonies, but building an identity boundary between the two English-speaking, white, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant communities sharing the continent was more challenging. Haliburton's construction of Sam Slick represents a *mise-en-abyme* of otherness, where the Nova Scotian, British North Ameri-

55. *Ibid.*, 254–55.

can Self is looked at through the eyes of a fictional American Other. It is significant that, though Sam is a coherent character, with definable if stereotypical features, it also becomes clear that positive definitions of the Nova Scotian Self are not possible. As a result, the North American Britons exist only as a set of *différences*, with no connection to a fixed signified. The endless play of the signifiers in this complex game of cross-national stereotyping leads to the permanent *différance* of the meaning of their national identity. Nova Scotian identity is elusive, and British North America as a whole steps forth from the pages of Haliburton's writing as a cultural *différance* whose ontology is embedded in those aspects in which the various colonies are different from their American neighbor: rejection of democracy and monarchism, or, in Smith's terms, as the ultimate choice of a supra-ethnic nation over the model embodied by the American territorial nation.

At the same time, Haliburton's imagotypical construction of the United States is an unusually sophisticated stratification of otherness: a heteroimage presented as a self-image, a false image of the Other disguised under the false image of the Self. Although Sam Slick comments on the colonial realities from an American perspective, he himself is an artificial construct originating in the colonial space. Haliburton's creation of Slick is multilayered and ambiguous, as is the otherness of his character. After all, beneath Slick's pro-Americanism lies a worldview that is ultimately Haliburton's, rooted in an ontology centered on a rejection of social and political equality and on the support of tradition, community, and monarchy.

In the ethnically fragmented space of North America, imagining the nation had to focus on its interiority, on those elements that the various subgroups shared, and allegiance to the British "ethnic core" provided such a common element. Paradoxically, the American past becomes a usable past for the Nova Scotian author. The dominant teleological view of history and of the evolution of the colonies causes Nova Scotia to be perceived as inexorably following in the same path as the American colonies. The original choice of the thirteen colonies in 1776 was the wrong one, equivalent only to a fall from grace. In sharp contrast to the age's doctrine of democratic inevitability, Haliburton's literary endeavor sets out to re-create British North America as the realm of a second chance for empire in North America. Haliburton's present—the mid-nineteenth century—is consequently considered to be history repeating itself. The 1830s represent the idealized *illo tempore* of North America brought into the present. The *then* of Nova Scotian realities is the crucial *now*, a moment when the political Original Sin can be avoided by rejecting the siren song of democracy and republicanism. We are witnessing an invitation to a rewriting of history,

which is underpinned by the assumption that the birth of a new national ethos can hide behind a political move. If ethnies “are . . . historical communities built up on shared memories,”<sup>56</sup> it is telling that the American past provided the source of the shared memories of the British North American community. For Haliburton, the avatars of pre-Canadian national definitions were bound to preserve the atemporal element rooted in the imperial metaconvention, in the system of rules that governed the normality and the positioning of the British imagined community in history.

The American Revolution, in Haliburton’s reading, was more than a military uprising of some remote colonies. It offered an entirely different worldview, rooted in the people, in a revolutionary approach to community, loyalty, and time. It opposed the usual idealism of the British Empire, and the Burkean belief in society as a continuum, in tradition and the power of convention. Breaking with the past and starting anew became central points of an American philosophy that found its *mythomoteur*<sup>57</sup> in a perpetual flight from the establishment, from centralized power, embodied in the frontier myth. The clash of these two alternative metaconventions structured the central idea of Haliburton’s political understanding of British North American distinctiveness and gave shape to his subsequent imagining of the United States: the revolutionary birth, the rejection of the past, of tradition, of hierarchy and monarchy, of established religion. To the American negative understanding of freedom, as the total absence of metropolitan interference in the activities of local elites and of the societies they dominated, Haliburton opposes the British positive definition of liberty as the sum of the concessions that a sovereign power chooses to make to its subjects.<sup>58</sup>

#### CONCLUSION

Unlike Tocqueville, who preached the inexorable progress of democracy or of equality and focused on exploring the consequences of this progress on culture and on the institutions it engendered, Haliburton stubbornly believed that the progress of democracy and of reform was not inevitable, but merely one of the many alternatives available to humankind—aristocracy, monarchy, oligarchy. Equality was one of the modes of social existence,

56. Anthony D. Smith, *The Ethnic Origin of Nations* (New York : Blackwell, 1986), 25.

57. The term is used by Anthony Smith to indicate a constitutive myth that gives an ethnic group its sense of purpose and mission in history.

58. See Fred Anderson and Andrew Cayton, *The Dominion of War: Empire and Liberty in North America, 1500–2000* (New York: Viking, 2005).

applicable only to particular historical circumstances. In the case of British North America, as choice was still possible, he tried to warn his fellow citizens against the dangers of democracy. Haliburton imaginatively constructs a British North American world whose distinctiveness depends on a political, ideological choice—allegiance to one political system, one conception of society, time, and tradition. The other term of this comparison is represented by an American Other dominated by the Original Sin of the thirteen American colonies, construed as rejection of rule and of central authority. In his writings the Americans are not so different in terms of ethnicity, language, religion, and past. Nonetheless, they remain different in their willing choice to subvert the political and social metaconvention of the British space.

At the same time, though it was inevitable that the Canadian colonies would change over time (and the mid-nineteenth century was an age of dramatic changes everywhere in the British Empire), Haliburton chooses to use the British monarchist and imperial allegiances as the essential axis of definition along which the fragmented Canadian identities could be successfully organized and kept together. For him, as for many of his generation, the British North American rejection of the republican alternative in the wake of 1776 was more than a simple assertion of difference. It was the product of an ideology that united the English Canadian colonists to their British past and, they hoped, to their glorious, imperial future, helping articulate something close to Smith's concept of the "ethnic core" around which was organized their colonial nationalism.

As Joep Leerssen, an image studies critic, imaginatively put it, "Literary texts float like icebergs in a sea of discourse, are nine-tenths submerged in a larger discursive environment which is chemically (if not physically) identical to their own substance, out of which they have crystallized and into which they melt back."<sup>59</sup> Echoing the discourse of colonial society in the mid-nineteenth century, Haliburton's satire articulates what was at the time one of the two main competing nationalisms at work in British North America. His passionate rejection of American republicanism and democracy is based on the awareness that there were other compelling alternatives to the civic religion of equality and democracy in North America. Haliburton's satirical and multifaceted construction of American otherness proves that ideas and political ideologies can have a divisive potential of tremendous importance. Indeed, for this conservative Nova Scotian (and British)

59. Joep Leerssen, *Remembrance and Imagination* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1996), 2.

judge, at that particular juncture in the cultural history of the New World, democratic republicanism was an identity marker strong enough to foster a coherent set of national self-definitions, ultimately justifying the existence of another English-speaking, Protestant, and settler nation in North America, yet one that would choose *evolution* over *revolution* as its permanent master narrative.