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Résumé de l'article

Thomas Chandler Haliburton's most famous character, nineteenth-century New Englander and hero of The Clockmaker series Sam Slick, suffers from an poor critical reception that would seem to be the result of personal infamy. In fact, while there is much to legitimately find distasteful in Slick -- his sexism and advocacy of slavery, for instance -- his great international success with contemporary readers suggests that Haliburton's creation has remained, for the most part, a critically misconstrued character. A careful scrutiny of both The Clockmaker series and the critical attention paid it reveals a Sam Slick to whom the critics have been oddly oblivious. While Slick's character is inextricable from his satiric function in Haliburton's series, a closer reading helps in the recognition of Slick's more admirable traits, such as an impressive self-knowledge and a very realistic sense of dialect, which had hitherto lain unobserved amongst his faults.

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SLOUCHING TOWARDS SLICKVILLE: SAM SLICK'S CHILLY RECEPTION

Cynthia Smurthwaite

Sam Slick, New England hero of the nineteenth-century Nova Scotian *Clockmaker* series, is Thomas Chandler Haliburton's most popular and notorious character. His fame derives from numerous circumstances: his novelty among contemporaries, especially overseas, as a strong North American literary presence; his consequent currency as a uniquely New England, or Yankee, type; and his universal comic appeal, to name but three. His infamy, on the other hand, derives almost exclusively from adverse critical reception, which seems in turn to have resulted largely from personal antipathy. While there is much legitimate fault to find in Sam — for example, his advocacy of slavery, his sexism, and his abusive attitude towards animals — critics have concentrated on such traits as made him an unwelcome herald of regionalistic stereotypes, both from the Nova Scotian and the New England perspective.[1] Scholars equate his editorials on commerce and government with charges of egocentrism, cupidity, and lawlessness, questioning the ethical value of a disreputable Yankee pedlar's opinions. At the same time, they challenge his very status as a character, paradoxically dismissing him both as a stereotype of the New England merchant class, and as an eclectic collage too impossibly variegated to qualify as a flat character. Objections to Sam's lack of accountability as a theorist and practitioner of business, and to his lack of credibility as a character, combine into moral condemnation of a figure perceived as too poorly drawn to represent consistently any system of belief. Meanwhile, Sam's great international success with contemporary readers suggests that, for all his critics' analyses, he has remained a critically misconstrued character. A more careful scrutiny of this figure as he emerges from the trading circuit of *The Clockmaker*'s first series reveals a Sam Slick to whom many critics have been oddly oblivious.

As Sam's character is inextricable from his satiric function, an evaluation of his scholarly heritage is necessary to rectify the lack of a character study. Even a brief review of the debate surrounding Haliburton's audiences and satiric objects reveals its ineffectiveness in delineating Sam's part in the satire. For all commentators, whether they would place the brunt of the censure on Nova Scotia or on New England, Sam is the decisive yet variously-interpreted vehicle. Claude T. Bissell declares that Haliburton's purpose is to discourage Nova Scotian inefficiency, and Sam's, to model the promise of a successful young country. L. A. A. Harding, too, claims that in exploiting "the corrective power of Comedy using its celebrated lash on Vice and Folly . . . Haliburton was convinced that Sam was his lash" ("Compassionate" 225). Again, R. E. Watters invokes the "satiric scourge" in an even more conclusive relation of Sam's nationality to his thematic role (240-41).

A more moderate school has Slick not only observing flaws and proposing improvements, but also, and just as instructively, embodying the perils of overcorrection and the threatening propinquity of the United States in their iconoclastic capacity as a young republic and, more particularly, of New England in its mercantile capacity as a commercial centre. Tom Marshall, exploiting the implications of Sam's specific commodity, states that "Sam's job was to teach the Bluenoses 'the value of time.' They were not supposed to acquire any of the less desirable American characteristics in the process" (137). Such traits as Marshall posits as identifiably and disagreeably American — poor business ethics, boastfulness, and regional prejudice are a few (135) — Sam ironically spots among the colonists whom he is said to treat so unprofessionally.[2] The two cultures' different contexts of error are suggestively contrary: the poor business ethics become, in the colony, inept disinteres, resulting in poverty; the boastfulness becomes pride, resulting in a refusal to live within one's means. Regional prejudice assumes a traditional, rather than a progressive, stance of superiority in the Nova Scotians' sometimes visible distaste for New Englanders. V. L. O. Chittick concedes Sam's, and New England's, value as a model of "shrewdness, frugality, and intelligent activity," but maintains that Nova Scotian apathy only shares the book's censure with American politics (195).

We can subdivide a third and more conservative appraisal of Sam's satiric significance by emphasizing intention or effect. In John Daniel Logan's "Appreciation," Haliburton's concern to promote recognition and comparison among "the Anglo-Saxon peoples" assumes precedence (95). This approach posits Sam as "an epitome of the characteristics of an essentially experimental and, as he [Haliburton] believed, dangerous and self-centred civilization" (123). Matthew R. Laird concentrates more on results than on motives, and may thus be justified in placing Haliburton in a number of seemingly contradictory didactic roles at once, a position reminiscent of his hero's. Laird reviews contemporary New England critical responses to Sam Slick as an expression of all the least flattering misconstructions of the New England and, by association, the American character: Sam is a contemptibly impossible caricature, yet dangerously influential. For all the learned native resentment, Laird also insists that "Haliburton created Sam Slick not to undermine the authority of New England intellectuals, but rather for the entertainment, and the edification, of his own Nova Scotian neighbours" (73). The subordination of "edification" to "entertainment" gains importance when we reach the critic's description of *The Clockmaker's* literary qualifications:

> what was *The Clockmaker* if not a hastily assembled collection of periodical pieces — not even a proper book — in which the author stooped to employing grotesquely exaggerated dialect and crude characterization . . . to pander to an uncultivated, newly literate throng. (79)

So apposite an observation is curiously absent from most studies, despite the obvious potential for a profitable comparison of Haliburton's literary enterprise with Slick's own dealings. Nevertheless, Laird's verdict fails to account for Haliburton's favourable reception in literate and literary England.

Perhaps, in investigating Sam's status as both a literary character and an exemplar, it might be more productive to examine the means behind Haliburton's achievement rather than speculate as to his intentions. He has two distinctly contrary yet complementary spokesmen commenting on the state of the colony. If he created Sam to voice or otherwise reflect concerns about New World society, he created the Squire, Sam's companion and self-appointed ama-

nuensis, to publicize them. Sam's relationship with the Squire is our most important resource for studying him as an interactive character. The very first, and only unmediated, harangue we hear is Sam's response to the news that the Squire has compiled and published a record of their journey. Predictably, Sam interests himself most in the project's practical outcome, whether linked with any special intention or not, a question which is nowhere settled. As he rightly observes in his letter to Joseph Howe, the publisher,

> I han't been used handsum atween you two, and it don't seemto me that I had ought to be made a fool on in that book, arter that fashion, for folks to laugh at, and then be sheered out of the spec. (6-7)

Sensibly and with critical discernment, Sam objects, not only to the financial loss sustained through insufficient notice of publication and damage to his reputation, but also to the disrespectful treatment, which, he reasonably hints, almost amounts to libel (5). He will no doubt deem the addition of his very letter of complaint to the book a further presumption. An especially telling point against the Squire and his practice of plundering Sam's conversation for quotable tales is his failure to identify himself (6), a mysterious if not suspicious circumstance with repercussions, on a variety of levels, throughout the book.[3]

As for the Squire's reasons for remaining so long in Sam's company, they are far simpler, though different at the end of their tour from what they were at the beginning. Initially, and despite his and his horse's best efforts, he finds Sam thrust upon him, for Mohawk, though illustrious among Nova Scotian horses, cannot out-gallop Sam's mount, Old Clay. The thwarted Squire resignedly explains: "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" (12). The attempted assertion of some modicum of self-determination we can both forgive and dismiss as mere acquiescence to the inevitable. Having entertained a circuit's worth of Sam's opinions, however, the Squire revises his views in favour, not only of the Clockmaker as a fellow-traveller, but of still further travels with the erstwhile obtrusive Slick. He attributes the change to some of the better traits in Sam's repertoire:

> I look forward with much pleasure to our meeting again. His

> manner and idiom were to me perfectly new and very amusing; while his good sound sense, searching observation, and queer humor, rendered his conversation at once valuable and interesting. There are many subjects on which I should like to draw him out. (202)

There may be more in Sam than his skills as a talker to earn the Squire's commendation, and more in the Squire's approval than a simple reversal of attitude; we should recognize his experiences of Sam, who is unique throughout the province, as varied and still variable. Daniel Royot observes a Slick trait which, though almost definitive, is rarely mentioned in essays: "Ubiquitous and ready for any calling, he corresponds to no predetermined moral or social category, hence his utmost flexibility" (127). The Squire does not always appreciate Sam's talents but is evidently spellbound all the same; the first transaction he witnesses elicits simultaneous disapproval and admiration of Sam's salesmanship (13-16).

If he expects any admission from Sam that his ethics are wanting, the Squire is never satisfied, for Sam both professes and demonstrates great respect, not only for business acumen, but for discretion and sincerity as well. He takes professionalism very seriously, tracing many of the colony's ills to disinterest in one's proper business. The point gains ascendancy in "Too Many Irons in the Fire" (190-97), in which Sam inveighs against the unsound practice of dividing energies that should be devoted to whatever affairs a person knows best. That Sam's own career has been one of broad diversity does not detract from his argument. While he has laboured on his father's farm (137) and dabbled in the Polish hair market (71) in addition to immersing himself in the arcana of clockmaking ("gilden and bronzin," 173), he has not attempted to combine these speculations, but pursued one at a time — profitably, he assures the Squire.

His fiscal prudence has not, by and large, impressed critics, who liken it to "illegality and immorality" (Laird 73). C. C. Felton, the often-cited New England authority on the region's true qualities and ennobling potential, and contemporary of the Slick phenomenon, objected thus:

> The New England trader, pedlar, or whatever he may be, is, doubtless, sharp at a bargain, and shrewd to turn his oppor-

> tunities of gain to excellent account; but not more so than the corresponding classes of men elsewhere. (qtd. in Laird 76-77)[4]

If Sam's professionalism began and ended with avarice guided by cunning, the objection might be appropriate, although those advancing it would still have to prove that Sam was, among the sharp and shrewd, notably so. The New England literati would look in vain for any instance of theft or even remarkably clever deceit on Sam's part; he is hardly the first to advertise an inferior product as a fine one.

Still, a more decisive point is Sam's interest in the ethical as well as the financial imperatives of all kinds of business. The value he places on principled conduct enhances at once the humour and the gravity of the message so emphatically delivered in "The Dancing Master Abroad," wherein he deplores the insincerity of politicians when elections draw nigh:

> A candidate is a most purticular polite man, a noddin here, and a bowin there, and a shakin hands all round. Nothin improves a man's manners like an election. . . . Nothin gives the paces equal to that, it makes them as squirmy as an eel, they cross hands, and back agin, set to their partners, and right and left in great style. . . . Its a poor business arter all is electioneering, and when *'the dancin master is abroad,'* he's as apt to teach a man to cut capers and get larfed at as any thing else. (80-81)

Without the implicit suggestion that certain political tasks are after all inessential, that the candidate's aspirations do not warrant his sacrifices of dignity and integrity, Sam's description would lose force. It would also be weaker without a sense of his own moral standards and his belief that any concession to unethical conventions is ridiculous as well as reprehensible. The evocation of ball-room politics would not have come from any of the participants; it would indeed be an unsafe observation for anyone to make unless he felt secure in his own affairs. And Sam has not endeavoured to conceal the dark side of the clock trade; on the contrary, he alludes to it in his letter to Joseph Howe to illustrate his suspicions about the Squire's own journalistic integrity: "When an article han't the maker's name and factory on it, it shows its a cheat, and he's ashamed to own it" (6). He also indignantly points to that unsavoury conduct of another clock mer-

chant, Campbell, which has contributed to the poor reputation attached to pedlars: "he was a most an almighty villain, and cheated a proper raft of folks, and then shipped himself off to Botany Bay, for fear folks would transport him there" (7). Sam has lied to clients but could not have invoked such primary tenets of business etiquette if they meant nothing to him, especially as the Squire would be unassailably situated to challenge his moral authority.

Beyond his comical denunciations of vice, Sam often exhibits distress when encountering improper management or abuse of sober professions. His distaste for the unscrupulous Justice Pettifog, for example, is evident from the moment we hear of him, when Sam nominates him "a fit feller for Lynch Law, to be tried, hanged, and damned all at once" (25). In a still more solemn context, he recalls that the first time he heard Mr. Everett, one-time preacher and current congressman, employ profanity, "it made me feel ugly . . . for its awful to hear a minister swear; and the only match I know for it — is to hear a regular sneeser of a sinner quote scripture" (39). Intolerant of profanity even from the laity (31), Sam displays appropriate shock at meeting with it in the cloth.[5]

Nevertheless, just as Haliburton was perceived by Professor Felton and his associates to be "fixated on the clichéd flaws of the New England character" (Laird 82), so the New England critical contingent failed to see anything positive in Sam. As an outsider's picture of their national character, he must have offended them, not merely as an intensifying reflection of New England's image across the continent and beyond, but as a foreigner's audacious attempt to fix a nation's essence (Laird 73). Sam, in fact, in his earnest letter to Howe, protests a not dissimilar audacity in the Squire. But Felton's concern about a good deal more than Sam's marketing practices is evident in his description of the terms in which we hear them:

> his language is a ridiculous compound of provincial solicisms, extravagant figures, vulgarities drawn from distant sources, which can never meet in an individual, and a still greater variety of vulgar expressions, which are simply and absolutely the coinage of the provincial writer's own brain. (qtd. in Laird 72)

Watters might claim, more than a century later, that "Sam's colourful utterance is today [1969] valued more for the pleasure to be found in how he says something than for the ideas behind his words" (246), but he would not, in so doing, cheer Professor Felton. Comments such as Ray Palmer Baker's that Haliburton assumed the status of the original voice of North American dialect writing (114) are as unlikely to have pleased him. Still less amenable to his national sensibilities would have been the views of Logan and Walter S. Avis, both of whom contend that Haliburton was far from unsuccessful in his efforts to hit a New England dialect. Avis is quoted in Richard W. Bailey as having found, in his 1950 Master's thesis, that "within the limits of his [Haliburton's] medium, he presents a reasonably accurate, though exaggerated, representation of rustic Yankee dialect" (91).[6] Logan goes so far as to hint that art has improved upon nature:

> it is this liveliness in the diction of Sam Slick that convinces one that Haliburton, while in the main employing a genuine New England phraseology of localisms and vulgarisms, developed independently the dialect of his humorous characters. (115)

Returning to Watters, we find a more analytical appraisal of the linguistic Slick in the observation that "his words are almost invariably concrete, not abstract, and his language is indescribably rich in similes and metaphors created out of details from all areas of common life" (245-46). Sam does indeed think in literal terms and, accordingly, render his thoughts in the same accessible style by choosing images that are not merely illustrative, but appropriately so — that is, judged to complement the setting or the audience. His own trade supplies descriptive material for the portrayal of numerous unrelated concerns. There could, for example, be no plainer indictment of the Squire's presumption in publishing their mutual travels than Sam's just analogy:

> If my thoughts and notions are my own, how can they be any other folks's? According to my idee you have no more right to take them, than you have to take my clocks without payin for 'em. (5)

And clock-centred rhetoric enhances the practical content of Sam's protest against a neglected bridge which he and the Squire have just barely crossed in safety. If such essential means of travel

are not kept in better repair, the consequences could extend beyond physical injury: "I'll break my clocks over them etarnal log bridges, if Old Clay clips over them arter that fashion" (185).

But Sam is also adept at incorporating the theme of the moment, as when he encounters a contretemps while sampling the Reverend Hopewell's cider. Venturing to make what Hopewell considers an irreverent pun — and also, perhaps, a personal commentary — on his host's horn mug, he is obliged to apologize, claiming that the joke "jist popt out unexpectedly, like a cork out of one of them are cider bottles" (155). Besides conciliating the reverend and leading to further cider, the simile is characteristically in keeping with both the environment in which it is conceived and the circumstances that make it necessary. On an equally specialized note, Harding observes Sam's frequent recourse to animal imagery, noting that "if there is something amiss Sam immediately thinks of" some demonstration from the animal world to capture the situation's essence ("Folk" 45).

Sam's descriptive clarity reflects his hope that in making his convictions known, he might be contributing to a more prudent and prosperous Nova Scotia. For us the Squire, who apparently concurs with this view, makes Sam's theories doubly concrete by rendering any especially salient points in italics. He may also, like Haliburton, incur criticism because he has to a certain extent invented Sam's language, as it is typically more standard in italicized passages: in the presence of a moral, even the diction conveying it improves. And more than the diction benefits. In a passage in which Sam laments the incompetence of Nova Scotian legislators, we appreciatively notice the still greater sophistication of the periodic sentence structure, the balance, and the rhetorically popular triad so familiar from neo-classical writing:

> How much it is to be regretted, that, laying aside personal attacks and petty jealousies, they would not unite as one man, and with one mind and one heart apply themselves sedulously to the internal improvement and developement of this beautiful Province. Its value is utterly unknown, either to the general or local Government, and the only persons who duly appreciate it, are the Yankees. (90-91)

When the Squire recalls that Sam said this "with an air of more seriousness than I had yet observed" (90), he understates the case,

somewhat to Sam's philological detriment, though not so as to obscure his genuine concern for the province. We might instructively compare this accomplished disquisition with an earlier sample of equal authority but substantially different tenor. Occuring at the end of the second chapter, it precedes the introduction of systematized italics, yet would probably not have been so distinguished even at a later point, as its topic, instead of effective government, is the sales technique that combines "soft sawder" and "human natur." Sam explains why he has left an unsold clock behind in the custody of Deacon and Mrs. Flint:

> We can do without an article of luxury we have never had, but when once obtained, it is not '*in human natur*' to surrender it voluntarily. Of fifteen thousand sold by myself and partners in this Province, twelve thousand were left in this manner, and only ten clocks were ever returned — when we called for them they invariably bought them. (16)

For readers, as for the Squire, the remark deals as much with the propriety of Sam's methods as with their efficacy; the very tone differs from that of the commentary on the legislature noted above, issuing as it does from Sam the merchant rather than Sam the reformer. Still, the speaker, or recorder, confines the idiomatic usage — though not the grammatical errors — to the spelling of 'nature.' Linguistic, if not moral, propriety on Sam's part is often a signal of didactic content; here we receive no less than an insight into human nature.

Perhaps the refinement of italics owes something to Sam's own straightforward approach to constructive criticism; overstated as the emphasis might seem, it may well be necessary. Often the lessons that characterize Sam's more nondescript discourse fail to make an impact, as Logan's remark seems to indicate: "In general, it may be said that Haliburton moots a subject merely to introduce some anecdote or 'yarn,' and that it is difficult to discover when his intent is that of a serious social critic or that of a 'funster'" (135). Certainly, the coincidence of a lesson with a humorous tale is frequent; the combination is consistent both with *The Clockmaker*'s Horatian epigraph, "*Garrit aniles / ex re fabellas*," and with Sam's own assertion that "when reason fails to convince, there is nothin left but ridicule" (66). Even if the pleasantry could stand on its own without pedagogical value, we should not

find the moral presence confusing; humour is so integral a part of Sam's common speech as to be inseparable from either his serious or his frivolous conversation.

A final and essential point about Sam's idiom is that it sounds much more comical when given us by the Squire. The indirect but apparently faithful quotation of Sam's reverse-bartering technique, as deployed against an inveterate hold-out on clocks, is unnaturally, thus humorously, allied with the voice that reports it:

> Mr. Slick vowed he could'nt part with it at no rate, he didnt know where he could get the like agin, (for he warnt quite sure about Increase Crane's) and the Squire [Shepody] would be confounded disappointed, he could'nt think of it. (188)

The elaboration of parentheses recalls the rigorous sentence structure which elevates many of Sam's italicized remarks. Here the Squire has decided that paraphrase is inadequate, but direct quotation (which in effect we seem to have anyway) not quite necessary. Perhaps he perceives the comic potential. However it may be, it proves that we have accustomed ourselves to the dialect in its own native speaker; we need no other signal than familiarity with his speech to detect a verbatim rehearsal of his words. Furthermore, despite Watters's verdict (246), we have been listening beyond those words to the statements they convey. Sam's humorous appeal does not overshadow his editorial status.[7] This realization complements the reverse view of Bissell: that Sam's message, whether it chiefly implicates Nova Scotia, New England, or both, does not overshadow his humour (9).

Even if he did not deliver his opinions in a New England accent, Sam would still appear patently Yankee, and not simply because he constantly advertises himself as such. Every model he cites for improvement on colonial affairs, every contrast to Nova Scotian phlegmatism, is Yankee commerce. One of Sam's favourite images, the horse, helps him to illustrate the difference between the colonial and republican outlooks. In "A Cure for Conceit," an aspiring horse-racer from Colchester explains to Sam that his steed's excellence is assured by his having been "begot . . . by Roncesvalles, which was better than any horse that ever was seen, because he was once in a duke's stable in England." Sam refutes the equation of promise to nobility by translating the outrageous claim into its American equivalent, the terms of superiority most natural to him: "It was like the President's

name to a bank note, it makes it pass current" (131). The two traditions define authenticity differently: what heritage is to a provincial monarchist, purchasing power is to a New England capitalist.

In his practical way, Sam names the remedy for the province's troubles: "If they only had edication here," he feels, the natives might become more progressive. What passes for education in the colony he dismisses as irrelevant to a modern country's requirements; the classics he distrusts because the ancient Greeks and Romans "had no rail-roads" (34). The "cyphering" and "calculating" that pervade the chapter "Go Ahead" (32-36), roughly equivalent to English mathematics, challenge, supplant, and render obsolete any cultural benefits once provided by "painting and musick," although New England students still learn the fine arts so that "even in them are things" the New World might assert its ascendancy (32).

Still, his tolerance in seeking wisdom from ancient and technologically untutored philosophers rescues Sam from the utter arrogance with which many, following in the Squire's footsteps (see 133), have charged him. The exception he takes to the brief exegesis of Solomon's Wisdom books offered by Mr. Everett, a respectable New Englander with an impressive knowledge of Nova Scotia, shows the caution with which he judges the declarations of even this "No. 1, letter A" citizen. Everything Everett says seems calculated to win Sam's unqualified approval, touching as it does on the presumption of other cultures' claims to accomplishment, the uselessness of the ancients' achievements, and the sense of New England's answer to both:

> what *is* the use of reading the Proverbs of Solomon to our free and enlightened citizens, that are every mite and morsel as wise as he was? That are man undertook to say there was nothing new under the sun, I guess he'd think he spoke a little too fast, if he was to see our steam boats, rail roads and india rubber shoes, three inventions worth more nor all he knew put in a heap together. (37)

Sam's critical skills allow him to detect this treatise's weaknesses, buried though they are in the midst of sentiments he devotedly holds himself; "somehow," he objects, "I dont like to hear you run down King Solomon" (42). Even his tone suggests moderation. And the importance he attaches to veracity is evident when he de-

fends the biblical sage: "Perhaps he warnt quite so wise as Uncle Sam, but then . . . may be he was every bit and grain as honest." In this modest rejoinder we recognize the best tradition of New England trade combined with rational deliberation: Solomon's "bit and grain" answer America's "mite and morsel"; Everett's excessive claims give place to a more equitable evaluation of Solomon, who, as Sam later reminds us, "was up to a thing or two . . . tho' our professor did say he warnt so knowin as Uncle Sam" (81).

It may at first seem odd to concede in Sam a philosophical bent that appears so contradictory to the materialism which has inspired so many of his ideas. Yet capitalism has endowed Sam with many of his most viable tenets. From his father he has learned not only that there is a link between wealth and liberty, but also that even among the free, one can be more free for being observably so. The elder Slick muses after winning a horse-race: "Let them great hungry, ill favored, long legged bitterns . . . from the outlandish states to Congress, *talk about* independence; but Sam . . . *I like to feel it*" (84). The distinction has remained with Sam, while his flexible outlook has broadened its implications, so that even a reflection on musical refrains elicits a summary of the difference between practice and theory (79).

Despite his respect for its practical advantages, it would be a mistake to conclude that lucre alone dictates his social theories; without proper management, its value diminishes. Sam praises the New Englander for being, not simply ambitious, but "cute as a weasel" as well (87) — that is, acute, with special reference to verbal cunning. A censorious reading of this skill might emphasize its manipulative potential, but we see its more innocent aspects in such ludic contexts as punning and persiflage. Sam's brothers attribute some of their academic success to timely wit, recalling the word-play that saw them through their legal and medical exams respectively (128). Sam himself can usually arrange affairs so as to place any opponent, of whatever status, in the rhetorically weaker position. In the stressful matter of giving advice, for example, he assumes the voice of discernment whether he is the dispenser or the receiver. We are not surprised to see him emerge the winner from an exchange with the man who wanted to race Roncesvalles' colt; after Old Clay defeats his horse, Sam advises the colonist to trade him for more fiscally answerable farm ani-

mals: "When *I want* your advice, said he, I will *ask it*, most peskily sulky. You might have got it before you *axed* for it, said I, but not before you *wanted* it, you may depend upon it" (132). We are more impressed with his emerging intact from a dispute with the elder Slick. Relating the tale of a shooting trip, Sam describes how he countered his father's efforts to teach him how to handle a gun by challenging his illustrative allusion to Bunker Hill. It "was the only shot I did'nt miss" that day, he reminisces (125).

Notably, however, the story is not about how Sam outwitted his father, but rather how he blamed the effects of his own lack of expertise on fictitious circumstances beyond his control. The younger Sam, who could not shoot, transferred responsibility from himself to his gun; the more experienced Sam transfers the lesson from his past, to the colony's present, conduct. Typically, he is finding fault with the province, but he is also citing himself as a type of a particular weakness; such frankness challenges the view of him as consistently self-satisfied. It is as though he were rehearsing for our betterment no more than what he had to be taught in his time. His recollection of an encounter with a French traveler shows that he is willing to share his most ignorant lapses in the interests of instilling wisdom. We cannot be certain of having the whole story, but we do hear enough to understand Sam's humiliation:

> I met a Frenchman, and I began to jabber away French to him, 'Polly woes a french shay,' says I. I dont understand Yankee yet, says he; you dont understand, says I, why its French; I guess you didnt expect to hear such good French, did you, away down east here, but we speak it real well, and its generally allowed we speak English too, better than the British — ah, says he, you one very droll Yankee, dat very good joke Sare, you talk Indian and call it French — but, says I, mister mount shear, it is French, I vow, real merchantable, without wainy edge or shakes, all clear stuff, it will pass survey in any market, its ready stuck and seasoned. Oh very like, says he . . . only I never heerd it afore; oh, very good French dat, clear *stuff*, no doubt, but I no understand — its all my fault, I dare say, Sare. (57)

Although he ascribes his weak French to a surfeit rather than a dearth of expertise in Reverend Hopewell (58), Sam does not take the opportunity to linger on his teacher's erudition. Nor does he

enlarge on the healthy appreciation of learning that, despite his views on the liberal arts, led him to attend night school. Yet he took French for the same reason he tells the story: for its instructional value. The Squire gives him no more than his due when, on a later occasion, he claims: "I verily believe, the man feels an interest in the welfare of a Province, in which he has spent so long a time" (159).

Generally speaking, however, his due is something Sam too seldom gets. His critical reception, while not ignoring his contributions, either to Nova Scotian culture or to North American literature, has neglected to perform a systematic character study, thus missing many of his finest and subtlest virtues. Scholars have tended to dismiss the good motives behind his speeches in order to concentrate instead on the shortcomings they betray in their speaker; without denying the worth of his insights, they have challenged his right to offer them. The Squire himself, ironically eager to turn Sam's companionable habits to profit, sets a precedent for this unappreciative response. If he is correct in assuming that Sam is unfamiliar with "the celebrated aphorism 'gnothi seauton,' know thyself" (133), it is only because Sam does not know Greek, for he is more introspective than commentators, beginning with his own travelling companion, have conceded. More than once he demonstrates the sort of self-knowledge whereby, on first encountering the inquisitive Sam, the Squire recognizes in his own attitude "a curiosity, which in him, I had the moment before viewed both with suspicion and disgust" (9). Approaching both Sam and his critics with care helps us recognize the admirable qualities which have hitherto lain unobserved among his faults.

NOTES

[1] Detractors of *The Clockmaker* have not always been at odds with Sam's more offensive beliefs. One contemporary, James Russell Lowell, seems, as cited in Matthew R. Laird, to have concurred with Sam's views on "Irish day-laborer[s]" (qtd. in Laird 81). Daniel Royot ascribes "horse sense" (125) to the couplet at the

end of "Taming a Shrew": "A woman, a dog, and a walnut tree, / The more you lick 'em, the better they be" (Haliburton 152).

[2] Here and throughout the essay, the term "American" is an anachronism, as in Haliburton's day it referred to North America generally. As *The Clockmaker* predates Confederation, the term "Canadian" has not been used.

[3] For the Squire's own explanation of his anonymity, see pages 54-55. Presumably, however, he would have had to divulge his name to Mr. Howe, who, it seems, has likewise opted to suppress it. Note that Sam never enquires after the Squire's name.

[4] Ray Palmer Baker (112) and George L. Parker (lxxvii) both observe that Felton's 1844 riposte, published in the *North American Review*, was a reply to *The Attaché*, 1843-1844, rather than to the *Clockmaker* series.

[5] Even in religious matters, Sam's sincerity is called into question; Chittick describes that popular abstraction which he calls "the conventional Yankee" in these doubtful terms: "Though pious enough in most outward respects, he was simply not to be trusted when it came to a question of trading" (334).

[6] However, Bailey continues thus:

> Avis never forgot that Sam Slick was a fictional character and his creator a literary artist rather than a dialectologist or philologue. For Haliburton, all varieties of English that deviated from his notion of a standard were essentially comic, and however suitable Sam Slick is as a satiric observer of the foibles of Nova Scotians, he remains an uncultivated rustic. (91-92)

Compare Laird's discussion of how Sam Slick, "only a fictional character," could have excited such indignation among contemporary New England cultural adjudicators (77-78).

[7] Although he does not elaborate them, Sam has his own ideas about the advantages to be garnered from so distinctive an accent; he describes a meeting with a "Halifax Blade" thus:

> Well, says he to me, with the air of a man that chucks a cent into a beggar's hat, "a fine day this, Sir;" do you actilly think so, said I? and I gave it the real Connecticut drawl. (92)

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