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[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

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John Richardson's Unlikely Narrative of Nationhood: History, the Gothic, and Sport as Prophecy in *Wacousta*

MICHAEL BUMA

"Depend upon it, there is more in all this than is dreamt of in our philosophy"
— Sir Everard Valletort in *Wacousta*

ERNEST HEMINGWAY ONCE FAMOUSLY suggested that "all modern American literature comes from one book by Mark Twain called *Huckleberry Finn*" (22). If such a claim were to be made of Canadian literature, the originating novel would almost certainly have to be Major John Richardson's *Wacousta: Or, the Prophecy: A Tale of the Canadas* (1832). *Wacousta* has been seen by many as the first Canadian novel, and was canonized in the 1970s as part of the Centennial-era drive to "define a Canadian past and to create a usable tradition" (Mandel 81). Although recent revisionary voices have questioned its place in the canon over other early Canadian texts, such as Frances Brooke's *The History of Emily Montague* (1769), *Wacousta* has been a treasure trove for many critics interested in establishing a "progenitor of our [Canadian] tradition" (Reaney 541). Writing as late as 1987, Douglas Cronk refers to *Wacousta* as "an important national symbol for contemporary Canadians" and cites "the belief of many critics that Richardson is the first important Canadian novelist and *Wacousta* the seminal Canadian novel" (xvii, xiii). James Reaney has suggested that *Wacousta* embodies a "deep, primitive, heroic, archaic, aboriginal [Southwestern Ontario] past" (541), while Michael Hurley sees "*Wacousta* as the leader of a pack of wolf-like figures — many of them doubles and tricksters — prowling the pages of Canadian literature" (189). Hurley, Robert Kroetsch, and Leslie Monkman have separately suggested that *Wacousta* functions as a sort of proto-postmodern Canadian ur-text, evincing an embedded cultural tendency toward plurality, marginality, and decentredness.¹ Furthermore, in a last gasp

of thematic criticism, Gaile McGregor suggests that a “Wacousta syndrome” — the tendency to “retreat from nature” — has characterized the Canadian psyche from at least as early as the novel’s publication in 1832 (76).²

In the spirit of seeing *Wacousta* as a sort of literary fountainhead, this article will suggest that Richardson’s novel can be read as the rather unlikely symbolic originator of yet another “Canadian tradition”: the myth of hockey. Hockey has often been seen as “Canada’s game,” and, as such, has frequently been mobilized in the service of Canadian cultural nationalism. In this configuration, hockey purports to unify diverse internal populations while at the same time marking Canada as symbolically different from external others such as the United States. The seemingly improbable connection between Canada’s “first novel” and its national winter sport rests on two important qualifying claims which I will argue in sequence: first, that *Wacousta* represents an early gesture toward Canadian multiculturalism and, second, that this reading derives largely from its status as an historical novel. After establishing these two supporting premises, I will suggest that by placing lacrosse, a formative and symbolic antecedent to modern hockey, at the centre of this thematic and generic trajectory, Richardson inadvertently anticipates the current rhetoric of cultural nationalism that attends Canadian hockey. The title of this article, then, plays on Richardson’s alternate title, *The Prophecy*, while casting *Wacousta* itself as rather curiously “prophesying” the role of hockey in Canadian identity discourse.

Because we have reached a critical moment at which it may seem pointless, even risible, to trace an imagined genealogy of Canadianness or to identify any particular Canadian tradition (let alone its progenitor), it seems worthwhile to begin by clarifying a few aspects of my approach. According to Georg Lukács, the historical novel works to “generalize and concentrate” the spirit of an historical moment or period in such a way as to express and exemplify its major currents (39). For Lukács, this “[brings] the past to life as the prehistory of the present” and “[gives] poetic life to those historical, social and human forces which, in the course of a long evolution, have made our present-day life what it is and as we experience it” (53). Another way of framing this statement is to suggest, as Lukács does of Sir Walter Scott, that the historical novel can “[portray] the complex and intricate path which led . . . to the formation of the national character” (54). For Lukács, then,

it is entirely legitimate to read historical fiction as national allegory. It could perhaps even be argued that such an interpretive strategy — reading historical novels as what Harry Shaw calls a “mode of knowledge” that “can add to the richness of our sense of history” (28) — is especially appropriate in the Canadian context in which issues of national identity have been particularly contested and unstable. Although any exploration of “national character” should be heuristic rather than definitive, historical novels such as *Wacousta* remain an excellent opportunity to examine the series of “complex and intricate paths” that lie behind the current state of Canadian identity discourse.³ The idea that *Wacousta* dabbles in an early Canadian multiculturalism is, of course, anachronistic, but no more so than the suggestions cited earlier that the novel anticipates Canadian postmodernism. There is plenty of critical precedent, then, for this sort of genealogical thought experiment, but it should be recognized that the value of such an approach resides more in the ideas and observations it allows than in the overarching plausibility of the argument being made. Rather than insisting that *Wacousta* is somehow directly or definitively connected to Canada’s hockey myth, then, this article suggests a surprising thematic congruence between the two as an occasion for several observations about the novel’s genre, reception, and place within the larger debate over Canadian identity.

My opening claim that *Wacousta* represents an early gesture toward Canadian multiculturalism must be seen in the context of Canada’s state-directed attempt throughout the 1960s and ’70s — the same era in which *Wacousta* was canonized — to associate national identity with cultural pluralism. In 1971, the Canadian government devised a policy of “Multiculturalism within a Bilingual Framework,” which stated that although Canada would have two official languages (French and English), there was to be no state-sanctioned culture and no preference afforded to any ethnic group over another. This policy was updated by the Multiculturalism Act of 1988, which defined multiculturalism as a “fundamental characteristic of Canadian heritage and identity” (qtd. in Mackey, “Multiculturalism” 670). Eva Mackey has suggested that these policies helped fulfill “a central element of the project of nation-building”: “the perceived necessity of the creation of a differentiated and defined national culture” (*House* 70).⁴ Throughout the 1960s and ’70s, the idea of the “pluralist cultural ‘mosaic’” replaced “cultural policies that centred on maintaining British cultural hegemony” as a way

of imagining the nation as “distinct and differentiated from external others such as the United States” (*House* 50). According to Mackey, “the mythology of *how* Canada managed its different cultural groups (the belief in and representation of itself as tolerant) was one key feature of [this] emerging national identity” (*House* 23).

Dennis Duffy has suggested that “the classic Canadian historical novel” has often worked to naturalize such tolerant and pluralistic representations of Canadian history by “meld[ing] together the shards of a fractured history,” presenting an “idealized picture of an evolutionary unfolding . . . developmental process” rather than “our actual history . . . [of] violent wrenchings and reversals” (67). Duffy characterizes this “history” as one in which “whites enjoy easy relationships with cheerfully subordinate aboriginals, males from one faction mate happily and found dynasties with females from another, bystanders congratulate themselves on the glowing future this will generate, and narrators close with visions of debts owed by modern skylines to past treelines” (67). Duffy goes on to suggest that *Wacousta* deviates from this script in its failure to unite the opposing solitudes of fort and forest, British and Native, but it would seem that this departure is hardly so decisive. Manina Jones, for instance, suggests that “*Wacousta* concludes with an apparent resolution of both the historical-cultural clash that it proposes between Natives and whites and the related plot of personal revenge that Reginald Morton, also known as Wacousta, takes against the commander of the garrison at Detroit” (47). Jones describes this plot trajectory in the following terms:

By the novel’s end, the tragic impetus of its plot has ostensibly been reversed. Both the sworn enemies of the central conflict, Colonel De Haldimar, a figure of the perversity of the British empire’s old order, and Reginald, a symbol of what Robin Mathews calls the “despotic anarchism” of the New World, have been despatched, and positive alternative alliances have been forged: the marriage of a new generation of colonists, Frederick and Madeline De Haldimar, provides a generically comic ending, and this marital affiliation establishes a new ideal colonial domestic order, incorporating the potential political and cultural reconciliation of British North Americans, *Canadiens*, and Natives, represented by the happy closing triad of the two surviving De Haldimars, François and Babette of the Fleur de lis, and the Ottawa Indians Oucanasta and her brother. (47-48)

Jones notes that “the promise held by both the De Haldimar marriage and the new peace with Native people that it seems to inaugurate is particularly stressed in the final paragraph of the novel” (48):

Time rolled on; and, in the course of years, Oucanasta might be seen associating with and bearing curious presents, the fruits of Indian ingenuity, to the daughters of [Frederick] De Haldimar, now become the colonel of the — regiment; while her brother, the chief, instructed his sons in the athletic exercises peculiar to his race. (Richardson, *Wacousta* 531)

Jones’s reading of Richardson’s closing gesture toward cross-cultural unity, then, is almost exactly as Duffy characterizes the “classic Canadian historical novel”: a history in which (to reiterate) “whites enjoy easy relationships with cheerfully subordinate aboriginals, males from one faction mate happily and found dynasties with females from another, [and] bystanders congratulate themselves on the glowing future this act will generate.” Although no form of subordination, no matter how cheerfully accepted, can fully be seen as unifying, it is clear that the closing moments of *Wacousta* are intended to convey a flowering of peace and unity between the various cultural factions.

Throughout the novel, Frederick and Madeleine function as cultural mediators: Frederick is both fluent in the Ottawa language and able to disguise himself as a French-Canadian duck hunter, while Madeleine appreciates the “Indian ingenuity” of the artefacts assembled in her museum-like apartment at Michilimackinac (291).⁵ The penultimate passage of *Wacousta* (quoted above) shows the next generation of De Haldimars receiving Native presents and learning Native sports, and, as such, represents a future that ostensibly embraces the mixing of cultures. That Richardson would propose such a vision of intercultural cooperation certainly seems congruent with what we know of his personal experience and beliefs. Himself the product of mixed Native and European ancestry, Richardson grew up in a climate of frequent cross-cultural interaction and held progressive attitudes toward racial and gender equality for a man of his time (see Beasley 11-53, Cronk xvii-xxiv, and Hurley 183-84). In addition to showcasing Richardson’s vision of intercultural unity, however, the closing moments of *Wacousta* also foreground the limits of this vision. By novel’s end, the cultures have arguably been brought into coexistence rather than community, and

(as Duffy has noted) Richardson's marriage of Frederick to Madeleine rather than to Oucanasta fails to cement the incipient unity (68). Furthermore, of the members of what Jones calls "the happy closing triad" that remains at the end of the novel, it is only the representatives of Britishness, Frederick and Madeleine, who are able to procreate and thereby ensure the preservation of their culture. The remaining representatives of Native culture, Oucanasta and her brother, are siblings, while the remaining French settlers are François and Babette, a father and daughter duo. Because neither of these unions can produce viable offspring, the future identity of the colony seems likely to be determined by the children of Frederick and Madeline.⁶ *Wacousta*, then, ultimately maintains the idea of a colonial British identity while at the same time seeing this Britishness as having benefited from cultural interaction and adaptation. Twenty-five years after the publication of *Wacousta*, Thomas D'Arcy McGee was to make Canada's first argument for a multiculturalism that would go beyond "British sentiment" by "the acknowledgment of all elements, the recognition of all nationalities in one name and idea" (43).⁷ Richardson's incipient multiculturalism (for lack of a better word) is not so radical, as *Wacousta* indicates a cross-cultural unity that is ultimately contained within the framework of British rule. In this respect, Mackey's critique of official Canadian multiculturalism holds true for *Wacousta* as well: "despite the proliferation of cultural difference, the power to define, limit and tolerate differences still lies in the hands of the dominant group" (*House* 70).

To this point, I have suggested that the closing moments of *Wacousta* represent an early argument for Canadian multiculturalism that admittedly remains limited in scope and by its overarching Britishness. This unified colonial vision, however, is disrupted by more than its own limitations. Throughout the novel, the trajectory toward peace, harmony, and a forward-looking future often appears unable to accommodate certain destabilizing elements. In some ways, *Wacousta* never fully resolves the tension it proposes between the stable and unified colonial vision outlined above and the various disruptions that trouble it throughout. This discord can perhaps best be understood as a function of the novel's uneasily coexisting generic modes. Part historical novel, part Gothic narrative, part Jacobean revenge tragedy, part sentimental romance, and part Native trickster lore, *Wacousta* reveals "both the value and ineffectiveness of labelling" (Duffy 65). Although Margot Northey

and others have argued that the Gothic functions as a central feature of historical novels, it is useful to distinguish between these two modes as they coexist in *Wacousta*. While the Gothic is mysterious, magical, and associated with “a certain mood of terror or horror . . . in which the dark mysteries of life [are] brought to the fore” (Northey 4), the historical mode is realist and concerns itself with reconstructing the spirit of a past age. In *Wacousta*, this distinction can be further distilled into two generally opposed thematic aims: while the historical mode works to further the tidy and unified conclusion outlined above (“a country full of loyalists and the possibility of a fresh historical start” [Trumpener 273]), the Gothic mode works to frustrate the neatness and cohesion of this unified colonial vision.

Throughout *Wacousta*, the Gothic disorder of the forest threatens to overwhelm the tentative stability of the fort. As Hurley notes, “tricks, disguises, secrets, duplicity, illusion, betrayal, and deception are fundamental to the development of Richardson’s story” (193). As a “European who has ‘gone native,’” *Wacousta* is “a spectre that disturbs the coherent identities” on which colonial order appears to be based (Edwards 6). According to Justin Edwards, “this vision of fluid identity . . . illustrat[es] how gothic production is linked to the crossing of boundaries” and “traversing the limits whereby identity is conventionally fixed” (7). Such “destabilizations of conventionally articulated notions of self” threaten to “unsettle the smooth surface of binary systems” on which Richardson’s happy colony ending rests (Edwards 8). Although *Wacousta* does encourage some amount of cultural adaptation, its closing model for intercultural unity is premised on the existence of discrete and comprehensible cultural groups that — though apparently united by friendship, goodwill, cooperation, and assent to British governance — remain categorically distinct. Gothic uncertainty, then, frequently disrupts and destabilizes that which appears solid and coherent in *Wacousta*, and can be interpreted as calling into question the novel’s optimistic and conciliatory ending. This is certainly the case in Jones’s reading, which sees *Wacousta*’s closing depiction of cross-cultural unity as “interrupt[ed] and undermine[d]” by the “strange disappearance of Ellen Halloway” (48). Indeed, “[Ellen’s] ghostly persistence at the end of the novel constitutes a generic problem; it is a trace of the Gothic impulse that Richardson’s realist formula for rationalizing mysteries seems incapable of eradicating” (Jones 48).

Along with Kroetsch, Monkman, Hurley, and Edwards, Jones reads *Wacousta* largely in terms of its Gothic elements. While these critics are certainly not *wrong* to read *Wacousta* through the lens of the Gothic, it is fair to say that their perceptions of the novel's predominant mode have had great bearing on the outcome of their readings. It would seem, then, that the defining interpretive question of *Wacousta* is one of genre. Does the Gothic ultimately frustrate the historical mode's desire for synthesis, or does synthesis manage to contain the disordered elements of the Gothic? It is not my intention to contest Jones, Kroetsch, Monkman, Hurley, or Edwards's readings, so much as to suggest a view that might arise from closer consideration of *Wacousta's* function in the historical mode. When focus is shifted away from the Gothic and toward the historical aspects, it is the tidy and ordered conclusion of colonial unity that comes to the fore.

Wacousta takes place during the Pontiac Rebellion of 1763, a Native uprising against several British forts in the Great Lakes and Ohio regions. After defeating the French in the Seven Years' War, British troops occupied and began to administer conquered French forts. While the French had worked to build alliances and cultivate friendships with the Natives, the British treated them as defeated enemies. Dissatisfied with this turn of events, the Ottawa chief Pontiac convinced a number of tribes to join him in an attempt to capture Fort Detroit. Although eight forts were eventually destroyed and two others unsuccessfully besieged during the Pontiac Rebellion, the action in *Wacousta* focuses on attacks against Forts Detroit and Michilimackinac. The historical setting of *Wacousta*, however, is more than simply a backdrop. Instead, it is a specifically chosen context that attempts to address the cultural moment in which the novel itself was produced. By setting *Wacousta* in the Pontiac Rebellion, Richardson was suggesting a usable moment from Canadian history that would speak to the cultural milieu of the 1830s, a time in which "a nation called Canada was about to come into existence" (New 78).

The Pontiac Rebellion provided an ideal opportunity for Richardson to put forward his "country full of loyalists" vision of colonial identity at a time when — "five years before the Lower and Upper Canada Rebellions" — he might instead "have explored Canada's continuing sources of political discontent and motivations for revolt" (Trumpener 273). This is true for several reasons. First, the Pontiac Rebellion repre-

sented a challenge to British rule that had ultimately been contained. The introductory chapter of *Wacousta* describes a “system of conciliation” that, by 1832, had succeeded in uniting the British, French, and Native elements of the colony in their allegiance to England (19). Richardson is clear that unity does not efface difference, but that the “transient differences” between cultures are no longer the threat to unity that they once were (19). He goes on to suggest that “in proportion also as the Canadians have felt and acknowledged the beneficent effects arising from a change of rulers, so have the Indian tribes been gradually weaned from their first fierce principle of hostility, until they have subsequently become as much distinguished by their attachment to . . . every thing that bore the English name, or assumed the English character” (19). Pontiac’s Rebellion was the first large-scale multi-tribal Native uprising against European colonization in North America, as well as the first test to the supremacy of British rule. By framing this event through the conciliatory history of the ensuing years, Richardson makes it clear from the beginning that the violence and disorder of *Wacousta* will ultimately be resolved into peace and unity.

In addition to assuring the continuity of British rule and law, the Pontiac Rebellion also illustrated the potential for a pan-tribal cooperation among the First Nations that, under the leadership of Tecumseh, would become so important to the British war effort in 1812.⁸ When America declared war on Britain in 1812, “a relatively small number of British regulars, assisted by colonial militia and Native peoples, held the province against the [invading] American armies” (Bumsted 100). Among the colonial militia were many French Canadians, whose participation in the struggle demonstrated ideological loyalty to the British cause over that of the Americans. In other words, the War of 1812 represented a convergence of British, French, and Native cultures in the forcible rejection of American liberal democracy.⁹ This corporate act of self-definition was vastly significant for the Canadian colony, providing a model for cross-cultural cooperation and tolerance within the framing confines of British rule. Richardson had witnessed the War of 1812 firsthand as a combatant, and seems to have taken this symbolic vision of cross-cultural unity to heart. The introductory chapter of *Wacousta* describes a “spirit of union [that] subsisted between the natives and British troops, and people of Canada [the French], during the late American war” (20). In the intervening years, between 1763 and 1832,

the colony experienced a massive wave of immigration from the United Kingdom, as well as the influx of many United Empire Loyalists from the United States. This demographic shift helped to secure Canada as a preserve of British peace, order, and good government against the fledgling American experiment in liberal democracy, effectively strengthening the cultural-ideological accomplishment secured by the colonial forces in the War of 1812. In his opening chapter, Richardson casts America as the new enemy of the “unified” Canadian peoples, inasmuch as “the hatred which [the Natives] bore to the original colonists has been continued to the descendents, the subjects of the United States” (20). This point is underscored again when Richardson describes Brock’s conquest of Fort Detroit during the War of 1812: “on this occasion we ourselves had the good fortune to be selected as part of the guard of honour whose duty it was to lower the flag of America, and substitute that of England in its place” (23). By mediating the events of the Pontiac Rebellion through his introductory reminder that the Canadian peoples had recently united against a common external enemy, Richardson both foreshadows the unity sentiments of his conclusion and participates in what has become a familiar stream of Canadian identity discourse: the tendency to assert cultural identity on the basis of difference from the United States.

As noted by Mackey, the articulation of cultural identity is often a central element in the project of nation building. It is clear that Richardson saw himself as contributing in this regard, at least on some level. In 1847, the author of *Wacousta* wrote, “I can perceive, through the vista of years, a time when the people of Canada having acquired a higher taste for literature than they now possess, will feel the pride in the first and only author this country has yet produced, which as a matter of fact people they do not now entertain” (*Eight Years* 107). Aside from recording Richardson’s belief that he was writing for posterity, this forward-looking comment reveals two assumptions that seem to inform *Wacousta*. First, Richardson believed that there would indeed *be* a Canada “through the vista of years” and, second, he believed that this future incarnation of Canada would conceive of itself as a “country.” In other words, *Wacousta* is a self-conscious prototype for a national literature, a narrative experiment in colonial writing and identity. Richardson believed that he was breaking new ground — “a ground hitherto untouched by the wand of the modern novelist” — or, to be

concise, Canadian ground (11). This idea is announced immediately in the novel's subtitle, "A Tale of the Canadas," and quickly reinforced by the almost cinematic panning of Canadian geography in the first chapter.

It is this opening chapter that provides the lens through which *Wacousta* asks to be read. Apart from establishing context for "scenes with which the European is little familiarized" (11), Richardson's introduction deliberately announces the historicity of the narrative, thus reassuring readers that the conflict — the massive bulk of the novel — will ultimately yield a productive and forward-looking future. After the initial publication of *Wacousta*, Richardson attempted to foreground the novel's historical aspects in subsequent editions: in an 1838 advertisement for the planned (but never published) first Canadian edition, Richardson billed himself as "the first and only writer of historical fiction the century has yet produced" (reprinted in Morley 108), while his introduction to the 1851 edition focused almost entirely on asserting *Wacousta's* realism as an historical novel.

In the original introductory chapter for the 1832 edition, Richardson had been unwilling to "mar the interest of our tale, by anticipating, at this early stage, either the nature or the success of a stratagem which forms the essential groundwork of our story" (19). The 1851 introduction (which superseded but did not replace the initial introductory chapter) did exactly this. Richardson's purpose in the 1851 introduction was to detail an event "well known to every man conversant with the earlier history of this country" (Introduction 532), the plot by which the Natives were able to gain access to Fort Michilimackinac during the Pontiac Rebellion:

During a temporary truce, and while Pontiac was holding forth proposals for an ultimate and durable peace, a game of lacrosse was arranged by him to take place simultaneously on the common or clearing on which rested the forts of Michilimackinac and Detroit. The better to accomplish their object, the guns of the warriors had been cut short and given to their women, who were instructed to conceal them under their blankets, and during the game, and seemingly without design, to approach the drawbridge of the fort. This precaution taken, the players were to approach and throw over their ball, permission to regain which they presumed would not be denied. On approaching the drawbridge they were with

fierce yells to make a general rush, and, securing arms concealed by the women, to massacre the unprepared garrison. . . . How different the results in the two garrisons! At Detroit, Pontiac and his warriors had scarcely crossed the drawbridge when, to their astonishment and disappointment, they beheld the guns of the ramparts depressed . . . so as to take the enemy most at an advantage. Suddenly they withdrew and without other indication of their purpose than what had been expressed in their manner, and carried off the missing ball. . . . On the same day the same artifice was resorted to at Michilimackinac, and with the most complete success . . . all fell beneath the rifle, the tomahawk, the warclub, and the knife, one or two of the traders — a Mr. Henry among the rest — alone excepted. (Introduction 532-33)

The length to which Richardson goes in this passage to establish the “truth” of the lacrosse subterfuge, again, illustrates his interest in bolstering *Wacousta*’s reception as an historical novel. After laying out the historical details of the plot, the 1851 introduction attempts to further entrench Richardson’s factual credibility by mentioning his personal connection to the events through his maternal grandfather (who witnessed the siege of Detroit) and by referencing Alexander Henry, a trader and explorer who had survived the massacre at Michilimackinac and written an account of his ordeal.¹⁰ Richardson is adamant about the “truth” of his novel’s central historical event: “the story is founded solely on the artifice of Pontiac to possess himself of those two last British forts. All else is imaginary” (Introduction 536). The effect of this statement is to separate fact from fiction or, in the framework of the historical novel, setting from character. Richardson concludes his 1851 introduction with an attempt to further underscore the realism of *Wacousta* by answering two objections to the text, “one . . . involving an improbability [and] the other a geographical error” (537). The point of all this is that Richardson not only conceived of himself as a sort of national mythmaker, but also repeatedly worked to foreground the historicity of *Wacousta* (implicitly emphasizing the conclusion of intercultural unity) and structured the plot in such a way as to mediate its obstreperous events through the conciliatory perspective of the original introduction.

It is by way of the 1851 introduction that the centrality of lacrosse to *Wacousta* is ultimately made clear. Given his assertion that the lacrosse subterfuge formed the “essential groundwork” of the story and his

insistence on its historical “truth,” Richardson’s comments in the 1851 introduction both highlight the importance of lacrosse to the plot of *Wacousta* and place it solidly in the thematic trajectory of the historical mode. The Native attacks against the forts in the novel occur almost exactly as described above. When the lacrosse ball is thrown over the wall at Detroit, Pontiac and his warriors find themselves outmanoeuvred by Colonel De Haldimar and ultimately back down. When the same plot is enacted at Michilimackinac, however, the whole garrison is lulled into a state of “unsuspecting confidence” as they gather on the ramparts to watch the “Indian games” (*Wacousta* 306). Moments later, the Natives enter the fort, and a violent massacre ensues. As the mechanism of the historical attacks, lacrosse is initially configured as a divisive cultural moment in *Wacousta*: it furthers Native-European animosity at Detroit and brings about the slaughter of the garrison at Michilimackinac. By the end of the story, however, lacrosse has been thematically recuperated into Richardson’s vision of cross-cultural unity. As discussed above, the final scene describes Oucanasta bringing gifts to the daughters of Frederick and Madeleine while her brother instructs their sons “in the athletic and active exercises peculiar to his race” (531). While no game is specifically mentioned, it is almost certain that the narrator is referring to lacrosse, the only significant “athletic and active exercise” pursued by the Natives in *Wacousta*.¹¹ By learning lacrosse, the next generation of De Haldimar men appear to continue their parents’ work as cultural mediators and foreshadow a future in which sport works to unite the cultures rather than divide them. After appearing as the novel’s central instrument of intercultural conflict, lacrosse is reconfigured in the closing moments as a primary mechanism of cross-cultural coadunation that ostensibly signifies a lasting unity and an optimistic future. Lacrosse, then, is at the centre of both *Wacousta*’s historical setting and its trajectory as an historical novel toward a tidy and forward-looking conclusion. Richardson perhaps hints at this centrality when the lacrosse ball in the attack on Detroit is seen “descending perpendicularly into the very centre of the fort” (227). Despite initially appearing ominous, the centrality of this Native penetration into the heart of the novel’s Britishness is ultimately seen to be beneficial; of the British characters, the ones who survive to symbolically beget the next generation of colonists are those who have proven themselves culturally versatile and, as such, the best suited for life in the New World. Furthermore, the gravity

of the initial lacrosse games helps to valorize the unity sentiments of the conclusion: athletic play in *Wacousta* is an important cultural activity in which much is potentially at stake.

By placing lacrosse at the centre of *Wacousta*'s thematic and generic trajectories, Richardson can be said to prophesy a tradition of identity theorists and commentators who have seen both lacrosse and its symbolic successor, hockey, as mechanisms for cross-cultural unity among Canadian peoples. Lacrosse was invented by the First Nations well before the arrival of Europeans in North America. For Natives, the game had spiritual significance and would be played to honour members of the community, to decide disputes between factions, or simply as a ritual celebration of life. According to Michael Robidoux, early European accounts of lacrosse emphasize the "remarkable sportsmanship and respect" displayed by the players for their opponents, which were made all the more striking by the "violent nature of the sport" (212-13). It was this violence that initially attracted many French settlers to lacrosse, and for a "certain sector of French Canadian males, . . . the First Nations male provided an alternative model of masculinity to what they had known in France, one where physicality, stoicism, and bravado, were valued and celebrated, not repressed, as was the typical Christian model of masculinity" (Robidoux 214). Lacrosse was first conceived of as a "national" game, however, by an Englishman, George Beers, a Montreal dentist and ardent Canadian nationalist. According to sports historian Don Morrow, Beers was instrumental in standardizing the rules of lacrosse and spreading the popularity of the game (49). Throughout the 1860s, he wrote several articles in Montreal newspapers arguing that lacrosse should be adopted as the Canadian national sport rather than the "imported" British game of cricket: "As cricket, wherever played by Britons, is a link of loyalty to bind them to their home so may Lacrosse be to Canadians. We may yet find it will do as much for our young Dominion as the Olympian games did for Greece or cricket for our Motherland" (qtd. in Morrow 49).

Part of the rationale for Beers's claim was that lacrosse most closely reflected the experience of Canadian peoples, especially the First Nations and settler French. In the words of Mike Mitchell, "Beers clearly understood and accepted the role of sport in integrating the disparate aspects of the new Canadian society, and his love of the new country demanded that the symbolic sport through which this nationalism be channelled would be wholly and uniquely Canadian." By the end of

1867, Beers had largely achieved his goal: “[lacrosse] was indeed surrounded by a ‘national’ aura; for example, the formation and acceptance of the name National Lacrosse Association had its own connotation; and the Association’s provision of a banner for ‘championship’ play bore the slogan ‘Our Country and Our Game’” (Morrow 54). Whether one sees the history of Canadian lacrosse as ultimately assimilative (as Morrow and Robidoux do) or collaborative (as Mitchell does), it was inarguably — as these critics suggest — a point of frequent intercultural contact.

As attempts were made to modernize the sport — that is, to standardize the rules and market the game to a wide audience — accompanying efforts were made to divest lacrosse of its violence and physical intensity. In order to accomplish this, the National Lacrosse Association introduced rules that would effectively limit the participation of Natives and working-class whites. Barred from lacrosse, many of these players turned to other sports, especially hockey:

Unlike baseball or football, hockey was seen as uniquely Canadian in origin and character. An amalgam of modern and vernacular sporting pastimes, hockey resembled lacrosse in design and in the manner it was played. Play was aggressive and often violent, providing men the opportunity to display this emergent notion of masculinity. At a symbolic level, it was played on a frozen landscape, perfectly embodying what life as a Canadian colonialist was supposed to be like. (Robidoux 218)

According to Robidoux, then, it was the rugged masculinity-cum-nationalism of lacrosse that initially infused hockey with its nationalistic overtones. By exemplifying “images of masculinity valued in First Nations culture, and later by early Canadian settlers,” hockey provided “Canadian males with an identifiable image outside of a British Victorian framework” (Robidoux 220-21). The result of this was that “hockey became a vehicle of resistance against British and American hegemony, something that Canadians continue to call on in periods of political uncertainty” (221). It isn’t unreasonable to suggest that *Wacousta* may have played a small role in this transition. Robidoux notes that by the time of Confederation, lacrosse had commanded a “legendary status” because of its role in the fall of Michilimackinac (214), and Morrow suggests that “the massacre and capture of the fort [were] a major feature of the folklore and history of lacrosse, and very likely perpetuated the idea that Indian lacrosse was brutal” (46). The attack at

Michilimackinac, then, seems to have represented the same conflation of sport and violence that had initially attracted participants to lacrosse itself. While Alexander Henry's account of the massacre was probably better known, *Wacousta* may have helped to popularize these events and imprint them in the Canadian collective imagination. Furthermore, with its frequently gratuitous accounts of violence, *Wacousta* plays directly into the sentiments that underwrote the popularity of lacrosse throughout the Confederation period.

Setting aside hockey nationalism's connection with symbolic male violence, the game of hockey, like lacrosse before it, has often been seen as an important aspect of Canadian identity for its potential to effect cross-cultural unity. Ken Dryden and Roy MacGregor, for instance, have suggested that citizens who are otherwise divided by "age, income, status, neighbourhood, technology, distance, language, [and] culture" (10) are ineffably united by hockey: "hockey helps us express what we feel about Canada, and ourselves. It is a giant point of contact, in a place, in a time, where we need every one we have — East and West, French and English, young and old, past and present. . . . Hockey makes Canada feel more Canadian" (19). Similarly, Daniel Francis suggests that "hockey would not be Canadian if it . . . was not expected to make a contribution to national unity": "A passion for the game is considered to be one of the rare things that brings Canadians together. . . . In this reading, *Hockey Night in Canada*, the most popular radio, then television, show in Canadian history, is much more than entertainment; it is a weekly reconciliation of our differences, be they regional, linguistic, ethnic or class" (168). These characterizations of hockey are thematically identical to *Wacousta's* closing vision of Canadian multiculturalism, inasmuch as they portray a nation both defined by its willingness to preserve cultural differences and united by the power of sport to transcend them. The logic of this representation, however, is somewhat skewed. Despite the fact that the "Multiculturalism within a Bilingual Framework" act clearly stated that Canada would have "no official culture" (qtd. in Mackey, "Multiculturalism" 670), in 1994, Parliament passed Bill C-212 to officially "recognize Hockey as Canada's National Winter Sport and Lacrosse as Canada's National Summer Sport" (qtd. in Mitchell). Sports, of course, are inevitably cultural constructions and, as such, the idea of sanctioning two official national sports would seem fundamentally incompatible with the governmental pledge to recognize

“no official culture.” In other words, the rhetoric of hockey nationalism and the passage of Bill C-212 testify to the insufficiency of multiculturalism as a way of imagining the nation as “distinct and differentiated from external others such as the United States” (to reiterate Mackey). This insufficiency is accentuated by another frequent tenet of hockey nationalism in Canada, the belief that our symbolic possession of the game sets us apart from other nations and gives us “a parallel, improved version of Canadian history,” something Canadians can “puff up our chests [about] and feel we are the best at” (Francis 168, 167). These sentiments have resulted, at best, in benign nationalism and, at worst, in unabashed ethnocentrism; as Richard Gruneau and David Whitson suggest, hockey has “contributed to a vision of Canadian culture that is resolutely masculine and white” (215). Again, the cultural work of Canadian hockey aligns with the closing thematic of *Wacousta*: as noted above, Richardson’s symbolic inauguration of an early Canadian multiculturalism is contained within a socio-political structure that ultimately preserves the “power to define, limit and tolerate difference . . . in the hands of the dominant group” (to again reiterate Mackey).

Although Richardson’s multicultural vision ultimately fails under scrutiny, the cross-cultural unity aspirations of his conclusion foreshadow a major strand of Canadian identity discourse. When read as an historical novel, or at least — as Richardson seems to have intended through his historical framing in the introduction and subsequent attempts to focus readers on the historical mode — as a novel in which historical elements trump Gothic and other aspects, *Wacousta* represents a culturally divided society in which harmony is made possible, at least in part, by the unifying power of sport. By placing lacrosse at the thematic and generic centres of *Wacousta*, Richardson inadvertently anticipates the rhetoric of cultural nationalism that has attended Canadian hockey throughout much of its existence. As Canada’s self-proclaimed first novelist and pre-eminent cultural mythmaker, it is entirely fitting that Richardson should have prophesied such a prominent and persistent “arena” of Canadian activity and imagining.

NOTES

¹ Kroetsch's idea that "Canada is a postmodern country" looms behind his suggestion that *Wacousta* "portends our later coming" (22, 109), while Monkman argues that "gaps, contradictions and discontinuities" have made Richardson's fictions "more amenable to the expectations of the post-modern reader than to the reader in search of a neatly coherent nationalist ideology" (637). Hurley has suggested Richardson as a forebear to "our postmodern authors" (3) in that his "strategy of cultural dialectic and interplay — and the refusal of any easy resolution of contraries or any final, single definitive inscription of nationality or selfhood — is of central importance to our fictional and national heritage" (205).

² It should be noted that all of these responses to *Wacousta* may be seen as products of specific critical contexts. McGregor's reading, for instance, shares many of the methods and objectives of earlier thematic accounts of Canadian literature, such as Northrop Frye's *The Bush Garden* (1971), D.G. Jones's *Butterfly on Rock* (1970), and Margaret Atwood's *Survival* (1972), all of which are centralist in bias and totalizing in their accounts of national character and identity. Hurley's reading of *Wacousta* (as well as Kroetsch's and perhaps Monkman's) can also be seen as the product of a specific critical context, the postmodern moment of the 1980s and 90s that insisted on multiplicity, plurality, and the importance of the marginal and local. Whether the culture produced the critic or vice versa, however, is beyond the purview of my discussion, and does not in either configuration diminish the fact that *Wacousta* has often been read as a progenitor of Canadian literary traditions.

³ Shaw cautions against "the idea that historical novels . . . embody a defining vision of history in more than a minimal way," suggesting that "such an idea can become quickly and narrowly prescriptive in practice" (28).

⁴ Although other recent postcolonial criticism on Canadian historical fiction deals with issues of multiculturalism, Mackey is particularly useful for my discussion because of her attention to the official processes by which this policy has been fostered and enforced.

⁵ Richardson uses the word "Canadian" to refer to the French settlers (i.e., non-military colonists).

⁶ Following this line of reasoning, it should also be noted that Frederick and Madeline are themselves first cousins, and, as such, Richardson's symbolic successor generation emanates from a rather thick gene pool.

⁷ It should be noted that McGee's "multiculturalism" was perhaps not without its own limitations, as McGee himself held Fenian sympathies before coming to Canada.

⁸ Richardson had a significant personal appreciation for Tecumseh, the "great hero whom all the citizens respected and the boys looked upon with awe" (Beasley 17). This fact is perhaps best demonstrated by Richardson's long poem *Tecumseh: or The Warrior of the West*, which describes the impressive accomplishments and tragic downfall of "the noble and unfortunate" hero ("Prospectus for the First Edition"). Tecumseh also appears in Richardson's sequel to *Wacousta*, *The Canadian Brothers; or The Prophecy Fulfilled* and receives similarly generous praise: "at length, one of those daring spirits, that appear like meteors, few and far between, in the horizon of glory and intelligence, suddenly started up in the person of Tecumseh, who, possessed of a genius, as splendid in conception, as it was bold in execution, long continued to baffle the plans of his enemies" (20).

⁹ It should be noted here that the French Canadians were not necessarily united in this rejection of American republicanism, which remained attractive to many around the turn of the nineteenth century through to the Papineau uprising in 1837 and beyond.

¹⁰ According to Richardson, his maternal grandfather, John Askin, smuggled supplies into the besieged garrison at Detroit during the Pontiac Rebellion (Cronk xix). Furthermore, Askin was an associate of Henry's at Michilimackinac during the 1760s,

a fact which perhaps lends extra credence to Beasley's suggestion that Richardson used Henry's account as a source for *Wacousta*, and that "Henry's style seems to have had an influence upon Richardson" (51).

¹¹ Lacrosse is never mentioned by name in *Wacousta*. The game the Natives are said to play in the attacks on Detroit and Michilimackinac is described as follows: "Each individual was provided with a stout sapling of about three feet in length, curved, and flattened at the root extremity, like that used at the Irish hurdle; which game, in fact, the manner of ball-playing among the Indians in every way resembled" (220). While this description is enough to qualify the game as lacrosse, Richardson removes all doubt in the introduction to the 1851 edition by using the actual word.

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