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# James Martin Cawdell and Medieval Politics in Early Canada

LAUREL RYAN

IN BOTH UPPER AND LOWER CANADA, the 1830s were a time of particular social and political unrest. Crop failures in the mid-decade exacerbated existing cultural tensions between Lower Canada's relatively disenfranchised francophone population and the minority of anglophone families who controlled the politics of the colony. By the end of the decade, failed rebellions in both Upper and Lower Canada had led to the dismantling of the colonies' separate political systems and to the creation of a new, unified Province of Canada.<sup>1</sup> During this time (and throughout Canada's early history), numerous authors turned to the political and literary examples set by various cultures in history as models for how to reconstruct Canadian society. To solve the problems of the present, these authors looked for solutions in the past. The source of these historical models ranged widely from the classical world to the Middle East in the Golden Age of Islam to Shakespeare's England.<sup>2</sup> One consistent thread of interest among Canadian authors of the nineteenth century was the medieval world; yet, their adaptations of medieval models have received very little scholarly attention until now.

One of the most vocal of these early Canadian literary and political theorists was James Martin Cawdell (1784-1842), who made a career in both the military and the civil service in Canada. Cawdell strongly advocated recreating Canadian society after the traditions of medieval Britain. His political writings — and in particular his pamphlet, *The Canadian Conservative* — reveal his fascination with medieval concepts of chivalric honour. Cawdell's attempts to institutionalize medieval models in Canada were ultimately unsuccessful: he did not have the political influence necessary to achieve sweeping political reforms. Nevertheless, he also attempted to medievalize English Canadian culture in more subtle ways. Whereas his political commentary emphasized Germanic elements of Britishness, his creative work expanded this identity category to include Celtic heritage. He attempted repeatedly to establish medieval ideals and institutions in Canada through his literary

endeavours, in the process drawing upon a taste for Celtic medievalism that was emerging in both Canada and the British Isles.

Upper Canada's fairly limited opportunities for local literary publishing in the early nineteenth century served to amplify Cawdell's voice among the reading public of the province. Not only did he publish in the major literary venues of the time, but he also participated in literary societies that concentrated the province's literati. Although multiple cities in the province had printing presses, most of the output was of a more practical nature. News gazettes quickly established themselves as commercially viable, and many included brief literary features; however, except for the brief run of the *Christian Recorder* (1819-21) and the even briefer appearance of Cawdell's first attempt at the *Rose Harp* in 1823, there were no dedicated literary magazines in the province until 1831 (Vincent, Alston and MacLaren 243, 246). The closest thing to a literary magazine in these years was Charles Fothergill's weekly, non-official supplement to his *Upper Canada Gazette* (1822-26). Through this supplement — the *Weekly Register* — Fothergill gave voice to a number of local poets, including Cawdell (Peterman 403-04). Although these opportunities for literary publishing in Upper Canada were relatively scant, there were other outlets for expression, such as literary societies. The first of these in Upper Canada, the York Literary Society (1820-25), counted Cawdell among its members, alongside future political leaders such as Robert Baldwin; both men would join other, larger associations in the 1830s (Murray 36-38). The fact that there were relatively few literary venues would have come with an upside for those involved, since it would necessarily consolidate Upper Canada's reading audience. Cawdell's involvement in literary societies as well as his publications in the available print outlets means that much of Upper Canada's reading public would have been aware of his work.

### Political Models: *The Canadian Conservative*

As an English immigrant to Canada, Cawdell brought with him a distinct sense of what Britishness should mean in the colonies. His classical education provided him with a wealth of cultural knowledge that he believed should establish him in a position of privilege in a settler colony; unfortunately for him, however, his education did not buy him the respect he desperately sought.

He was born in Durham in northern England in 1784; in addi-

tion to his classical education, he trained in the law but found legal studies distasteful, and in 1810 purchased a military commission at the rank of ensign in the 100<sup>th</sup> Regiment of Foot, then stationed in Montreal (Fraser). He was soon deployed to York (Toronto), where his choice of friends brought him into disfavour with Upper Canada's Lieutenant Governor, Francis Gore. When Brigadier-General Isaac Brock redeployed Cawdell to the regiment's headquarters at Fort George (Niagara-on-the-Lake), Cawdell's lack of political circumspection got him into further trouble: in a later letter to Sir Peregrine Maitland, he admits to having "committed a very imprudent Sally in writing a Satirical piece called "The Puppet Shew" about Gore, a piece which Brock believed to satirize himself also ("Memorial" 295). This satire provoked Brock to exile Cawdell to a remote post on St. Joseph Isle (near modern Sault Ste. Marie). Cawdell attempted to resign his commission in protest, but the outbreak of the War of 1812 forced him to change his plans: his resignation was delayed until October of 1813 (Fraser).

With the war still raging, Cawdell wished to be of service to his country in a way that he hoped would garner him some fame, although unfortunately his skill as a military tactician seems to have been on par with his political acumen. In a letter to Noah Freer, the Military Secretary, he proposed an eccentric plan to form an independent state near Fort George; he was certain the Americans would respect the new state's ostensible neutrality, which Cawdell and "two or three hundred men" could use to their advantage "never [to] cease to be a thorn to the Government of the United States" (Cruikshank 96). The conclusion of his letter divulges his real motivation in making such a proposal: he writes, "By this means I am confident that I can be of more service to myself and country than if I remained a humble subaltern without a name and without distinction" (Cruikshank 96). These years seem to have set the pattern for the rest of his career: he earnestly desired to gain a name and distinction within society's inner circles, but he lacked the tact to avoid offending the members of the very circles he so wished to join.

Cawdell's subsequent attempts to regain a militia commission proved unsuccessful, and he secured his exclusion from public offices of any prominence by again satirizing Gore in 1816 in a piece called "The General & his Aid de Camp" ("Memorial" 299). He later compounded

his problems by writing unrepentantly about his penchant for political invective to Maitland, the new Lieutenant Governor. In his appeal to Maitland, the only lesson he seems to have learned is that it is unwise for “a Subaltern without Wealth or Interest to assist him” to “lampoon . . . those so much his Superiors as Lieut. Governor Gore,” while simultaneously insisting that he was the victim of Gore’s “Malice & Duplicity” (“Memorial” 295). Unsurprisingly, his continued search for public offices proved unsuccessful, and he was forced to turn his hopes for fame to other avenues. In addition to his literary endeavours (discussed below), he wrote political prose to advocate restructuring Canada’s social system. Given his lack of success in the current social structure, it seems he thought the system itself must be flawed. In a pamphlet entitled *The Canadian Conservative* — which he claims to have written in 1818, although he did not publish it until 1839 — he argues for a rethinking of Canada’s place within the British Empire. “Certainly it is a folly to suppose,” he argues, “that where colonies have territories more extensive than the mother country, and at the same time a considerable distance from it, that they, any more than children, are to remain for ever in a state of infancy. The time of emancipation must come” (7). The “emancipation” that Cawdell envisions is not simply a political separation, but rather a reconsideration of the hierarchy embedded in the colonial relationship. He wants Britain to recognize Canada as a peer, and in more than one sense of that word: he envisions the relationship between the nations as one of equal fellowship but also of equal nobility. Cawdell desires an arm’s-length relationship between Canada and Great Britain, ostensibly to help the colony come into its own as a nation, yet it seems that his real desire is not to see a child grow up but instead to see something like a clone develop with the same advantages as its original. Importantly, however, Cawdell does not want Canada to mirror early nineteenth-century Britain; instead, he envisions a new Canada that is modelled directly after medieval England, from its governments to its hierarchies to its military.

Cawdell sets out what he sees as the basic principles of feudal society in late medieval England as the guidelines for the ideal operation of Canadian society. The voting policies of late fifteenth-century England struck Cawdell as a particularly appealing way of limiting the powers of democracy (that system being, to Cawdell, “Of all the different forms of government, . . . the worst” [6]). Cawdell argues that “all who reason-

ably may be thought to be free agents, and to possess some degree of information, should have a vote in the election of their Legislators” (6), and he accepts wholeheartedly as a test of this qualification

the spirit of the law which first authorised the yeomanry of England, who possessed freehold estates of the yearly value of forty shillings, to vote for members of parliament, (in the reign of Henry VI, nearly 400 years ago,) for owing to the difference in the value of land, wheat, money, &c. at that time and in the present day, forty shillings would be equal to thirty or forty pounds now, and the land that would have given that rent, (forty shillings) would not, in all probability, have been less than thirty or forty arable acres, (the common yearly rent of land during this period was a shilling an acre); of course that law will never be brought back to its original intention in England, but it might and ought to have been in Canada. (6)

The irony here is that if (as he claims) Cawdell did write the pamphlet in 1818, then he himself would not have passed the test that he sets out: until 1822, his only position was as a teacher at a country school for an annual salary of £16 (Fraser), well short of the £30 or £40 he recommends as a prerequisite for being able to vote. Presumably Cawdell believed himself “to possess some degree of information” regardless of his financial straits, even if he did not believe in extending the same benefit of the doubt to his fellow citizens. As his appeals for public office demonstrate, he certainly felt he deserved a place among the province’s elite, and he must have believed he would soon join their ranks.

More telling than this apparent hypocrisy, though, is his assertion about what is right and possible in Canada compared to the situation in England. He acknowledges that times and laws have changed in England, and that they cannot return to what they once were. However, he seems to feel that Canada, as a young colony, has the chance to make itself into a new version of medieval England — to put into modern practice what he saw as the best of England’s history, without making the same mistakes England made along the way. In this way, Cawdell sees Canada as a blank slate upon which he hopes to write an edited version of England’s history; to him, England is the rough draft, but Canada can be the fair copy.<sup>3</sup>

The most pressing need that Cawdell identifies in remaking Canada into a pseudo-feudal society is (naturally enough given his

own desire for advancement) the establishment of “an order of Nobility and Knighthood” (8). This idea had been discussed by the British Parliament, but Cawdell feels its dismissal was too hasty:

In the debates on the Canadian Constitution, in the English House of Commons, the idea of a Canadian Nobility was laughed at by the then opposition, as, in all probability, they would have been too poor to keep up their dignity. . . . We read that in Henry VIII’s time, amongst the palace regulations of that Monarch, he gave orders that the Knights’ hall, in the palace, should be strewed with fresh hay every day, that the Knights and Gentry in waiting might be more comfortable; but in our days, even the poorer order of people have their carpetting, instead of carpetting their apartments with hay, and many instances might be named, to shew what are necessaries of life with our yeomanry of the present day, were luxuries with Nobles and Knights of former days. (8)

Cawdell’s comparison between early modern knights and modern “yeomen” is somewhat contradictory to his argument for establishing a class of nobles in Canada. He disputes the charge that Canada is too poor to support an entrenched division of classes by pointing to the general improvement of living standards for the entire populace, an argument that seems to lead to the equalization rather than stratification of classes. Cawdell’s argument blurs the distinctions between class and wealth, thus leading to a problem of circular logic in which at times he invokes wealth as a reason to create the honours of class, and at others he uses class distinctions to argue for better compensation. Again, the duality of the concept of peerage emerges in Cawdell’s arguments, as he attempts to work through the implications of economic egalitarianism on social respectability. Cawdell’s envisioned stratification is not based on wealth, but rather on access to specific types of culture. The resulting society is one in which even the relatively poor can be noble.

The increased standard of living of the general populace is, however, at best a mixed blessing in Cawdell’s opinion. In his mind, it may actually act to the detriment of society, since he believes it reduces the power of the people he thinks should rightfully govern the country:

There is at present another defect in the formation of our legislature, which did not exist at its formation, but has arisen since, from the increased wealth and advanced state of society amongst

us. In England, the wealth and influence of old families ensure the election of the gentry and connections of the nobility, for the counties, and for some of the boroughs, but we have no such advantage here — our gentry are mingled with the general body of yeomanry, and have no real representation in the House of Assembly. (10-11)

Cawdell's worry that the gentry in Parliament will be eclipsed by the "general body of yeomanry" reveals his rather essentialist notions about class: there are people whose birthright it is to govern (and if this class does not exist, it should be created), and then there is the rest of society. His real argument, then, is emphatically not that the "poorer order" of Canadians should be granted titles by virtue of having the material qualifications for early modern knighthood, but rather that (extraordinary) wealth is not necessary to maintain the inherent dignity of the noble classes — even if, as in the case above, it helps maintain their influence. He points to the case of Germany: "what a numerous train of Princes, Nobles, and Knights, who have scarcely any other inheritance than their honours, and their military pay in the service of their Sovereigns. Are they despised? — No" (8). Yet here too his example proves to be a less-than-ideal foundation upon which to build a stable, prosperous nation: even in the mid-nineteenth century, contemporary historians accepted that the proliferation of small, poor and weak duchies making up the Holy Roman Empire<sup>4</sup> contributed to its collapse in 1806.<sup>5</sup> Not only were the smaller territories easier to conquer, but Napoleon was also able to convince many of the princes to mediatize their neighbours in order to enlarge their personal territories, while voluntarily subjugating themselves to the French Empire (Bryce 1866, 398-400). Yet despite these significant problems with Cawdell's own model, he thinks that the pride of the powers-that-be in Britain is the only thing preventing them from granting titles to Canadians. "But alas!" he moans, "I am afraid the British administration is too proud to allow the Colonies to participate in the splendid honours of the Empire, and yet on this system, 'the salvation of Canada depends, and the wiles of Democracy could not prevail against it'" (*Canadian* 8).

The counterpart to the loyalty inspired by these honours, in Cawdell's system of defense, is "a good and efficient Militia, to defend us from our insidious neighbours [the United States]" (11). Cawdell complains that "The Militia plan of all modern colonies, seems to have blindly copied from those of ancient Greece and Rome, or the feudal



system in England, without paying sufficient attention to the peculiarities incident to the manners and customs of different nations and of different ages” (11). Despite this objection, quite ironically, Cawdell’s own plan for a Canadian militia also mimics feudal military systems. England’s feudal armies were composed of three roughly defined groups: levies of serfs, mercenaries, and the knightly classes (including both influential magnates and lesser landholders) (Prestwich). It is upon this last, most elite segment of the fighting classes that Cawdell bases his proposal for the Canadian armed forces. His plan is the creation of a militia that is well paid, well trained, well respected, and well bred — essentially, a new knightly class. Ironically, he sees Canada’s social climate as more appropriate to this medieval reincarnation than England’s specifically because Canadian society is more egalitarian: “The great body of the Canadian militia, being men of landed property, or the sons of those who are, of course form a more respectable class of society, and are accustomed to live better and more comfortable [sic] than those from which the greater part of the English militia are drawn” (13). Cawdell’s belief that Canadian soldiers are “more respectable” than English ones stems from the fact that even the lower classes in Canada — unlike in England — tended to be “landed,” thus establishing them as akin to at least the lower orders of knights and gentry in medieval England. Owning land puts people into the higher social strata in Cawdell’s view, and it does not seem to bother him logistically that most of the population thus becomes upper-class. (In this way, Cawdell perhaps anticipates Garrison Keillor’s fictional Lake Wobegon, where “all the children are above average.”)

For Cawdell, this innate degree of respectability among the Canadian soldiers should naturally be rewarded financially and materially, an argument he supports by again referring to England’s late medieval past: “A few centuries ago, professional soldiers, or men at arms, as they were called, (Cavalry) were much better paid than at present; in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, their average pay was 2 shillings sterling a day, which was also the pay of a member of parliament sent by a city or borough” (13). This comparison seems to be as much about social status as it is about compensation: Cawdell envisions that the members of his ideal Canadian militia will be public officials of equal standing and importance to members of Parliament. This comparison becomes even more favourable in light of Cawdell’s previously discussed argument that

members of Parliament should primarily be gentry. It is at this point that Cawdell's argument coalesces. Coming from landed families, the members of the militia should enjoy similar privileges as knights of the emerging gentry in late medieval England; the gentry, in their turn, should not only be rewarded with honours and titles but should also control the government. Despite the contradictions in the finer details of Cawdell's argument, these broader contentions work together to support his main thesis: that Canada should remodel itself as a chivalric society.

In Cawdell's rosy view of history, England's medieval past has inherent elements of respectability and honour; therefore, instituting semi-feudal systems in the Canadas would impart that respectability to the growing colonies. His ideas about the politics of medieval England and Europe shared much with his understanding of the literary models of chivalric romance; as he saw it, the literatures and politics of the medieval era emphasized the honour of nobility, and he thought that bringing medieval ideas of honour to the Canadas would increase his own reputation in local society as well as that of the colonies on the international stage.

### Literary Models: *The Roseharp*

Although Cawdell did not have the influence to achieve these sweeping political reforms, he nevertheless attempted repeatedly to fashion Canada after medieval Europe in its cultural institutions. Whereas his overtly political commentary had focused primarily on English medieval history, his creative works took a broader view of the history of the British Isles, merging Celtic and English influences in his literary attempts to medievalize Canada. At this time, a popular appetite for Celtic medievalism was emerging not only across British North America but also in the British Isles; Cawdell thus contributed to a growing transatlantic literary trend.

Cawdell tried at least twice to launch a literary magazine entitled *The Roseharp*, although unfortunately at neither time did it prove viable. No copies exist of his 1823 attempt, and it seems that he was able to print only the first sheet of what was to be the introductory number of his 1835 *The Roseharp: for Beauty, Loyalty and Song*. Cawdell likely wrote the contents of the 1835 introductory number himself (Fraser), no doubt hoping to attract other contributors for future issues. The number opens

with Cawdell's announcing the launch not only of the magazine but also of the corresponding "Roseharp Patriotic Academy," a quasi-chivalric institution which he envisioned to "be somewhat similar to the Masonic Society of the Knights Templars [sic]" (1). Membership in this chivalric order would be open to both sexes, and general members it seems would be styled "Academians," "Knights," or "Ladies" of the Roseharp. The upper levels of this order were to include the "Knights St. George of the Roseharp," the "Roseharp Chieftain," and numerous other positions all ultimately subordinate to "The Sovereign Liege Lady of the Knights of the Roseharp" (2). Cawdell was clearly heavily influenced by the courtly love tradition in medieval romances in his structuring of the order to give at least symbolic primacy to ladies of the court. More remarkable though is the combination of cultural referents he includes in the titles of the ranks as well as in the title of the order itself. By itself, his invocation of St. George, the patron saint of England, would be standard, but it seems unusual that Knights of St. George would be subject to a "Chieftain"; this latter title in particular stands out from the others on the list, since it is not a traditionally chivalric designation, but rather (in this case) a Celtic one. Although the label could be culturally ambiguous, the context of the rest of the magazine clarifies its origin: most of the number is taken up with "The Raven Plume," a work of prose fiction set in twelfth-century Wales, which Cawdell uses to establish an origin story for the name "Roseharp." The story is unfortunately incomplete, in fact ending mid-sentence, since Cawdell seems to have been able to produce only one eight-page sheet of his projected twenty-four-page first number. However, it still serves to set up the basic plot of the story, a romance (in both the medieval and modern senses of the word) set in twelfth-century Wales involving the daughter of an exiled noble family and a nobleman fighting to defend the throne of the rightful prince against a usurper. The noble soldier recognizes the high status of his lover and her family through their possession of and proficiency with a harp.

Cawdell explains the significance of the harp in a footnote, crediting the "Encyclopedia Britanica [sic]" as his source:<sup>6</sup>

The Harp was the favourite musical instrument of the Britons and the other Northren [sic] Nations, (Harpa, is the Welsh word). By the laws of Wales, the harp was one of the three things that were necessary to constitute a Gentleman, and none could pretend to

that character who had not one of these favourite instruments, or could not play upon it. By the same laws, to prevent slaves or inferior persons from pretending to be gentlemen, it was expressly forbidden to teach or to permit them to play upon the harp; and none but the King or Sovereign Prince, and then Musicians and Gentlemen were allowed to have harps in their possession. A Gentleman's harp was not liable to be seized for debt, because the want of it would have degraded him from his rank. The Harp was in the same estimation, and had the same privileges amongst the Saxons and Danes. (7n)

Cawdell's explanation stresses two things: the noble associations of the harp in Celtic cultures, and the broader Britishness/Germanicness of these same customs. His assertion that "none but the King or Sovereign Prince, and then Musicians and Gentlemen" would have harps is, on its own, not illogical: there would be little reason for a non-musician to own a harp, unless its owner was wealthy enough to afford decorative luxuries. There is, however, little evidence (either in Cawdell's *Britannica* source, or in other contemporary scholarship) to suggest that possessing or playing a harp under other circumstances would be a crime. Indeed, the Anglo-Saxon monk Bede (c. 672-735) includes a story in his *Ecclesiastical History of the English People* that suggests that some level of musical talent with the harp was valued at all ranks of Anglo-Saxon society: the story begins with the shame of Caedmon, a cowherd, at not being able to take his turn in the singing in the feast-hall, when the expectation is "*þæt heo ealle sceoldon þurh endebyrdnesse be hearpan singan*" [that they all must in succession sing with the harp] (Mitchell and Robinson 222). Likewise, the bardic orders of Wales do not seem to have been restricted to — or even to any significant degree composed of — the nobility, although many of the bards certainly worked under the patronage of noble houses (Lewis). The use of the harp does not seem to be quite so restricted historically as Cawdell suggests, but given the name of his magazine and order, it suits his purposes to imagine that association with the instrument confers gentility. Even though Cawdell had been unable to join the ranks of the province's elite through his political schemes, he still hoped to become recognized as a gentleman through his cultural projects. Defining nobility through cultural ability is at the centre of all of Cawdell's projects, even his political ones: recall, for example, that he would allow a test of knowledge as a substitution for a test of income in determining whether someone should have a say

in the governance of the country. Acquiring culture and knowledge would thus be a path to acquiring nobility; however, Cawdell privileges certain cultures in this formula at the expense of others.

Cawdell's commentary on the harp seems designed to lead his readership to the belief that the cultures of the medieval Welsh, Saxons, and Danes were to a large degree interchangeable; to him, all of these cultures were part of a general ideal of northernness that Canada could also share. Indeed, even the title of the magazine indicates this cultural fusion: his choice of the name *Roseharp* signals his desire to integrate Welsh and English heritage, the rose symbolizing England ("Official Symbols of Canada"), and the harp symbolizing Wales (Morgan 91). Likewise, Cawdell's explanation of the importance of the harp claims sweeping cultural similarities; significantly, Cawdell modifies his source text to present an even more homogenous image of the medieval north. The original *Encyclopædia Britannica* entry asserts, "The harp was in no less estimation and universal use among the Saxons and the Danes" than it was among the Welsh (276), whereas Cawdell goes so far as to declare, "The Harp was in the same estimation, and had the same privileges amongst the Saxons and Danes" (7n). Cawdell's adaptation accomplishes two things: firstly, it reinforces the exclusivity of the harp in all three cultures by replacing *Britannica's* claim of its "universal use" with an assertion of *privileged* use of the instrument. Secondly, by stressing the similarities of the harp's place in all three cultures, Cawdell claims cultural uniformity among what he refers to as the "Northren Nations" — "northren" being the spelling of "northern" in the Lowland Scots dialect. Notably, *Britannica* on this point reads simply as "northern nations" (275). Cawdell further conflates Welsh and Anglo-Saxon cultures by accepting *Britannica's* claim that "harpa" is the word for "harp" in Welsh — or, as *Britannica* puts it, "in the language of the Cimbri" (275): *harpa* is in fact the Old Norse term, closely related to the Old English *hearpa*, but not at all related to the Welsh word *telyn*.<sup>7</sup>

The sense of Britishness that Cawdell thus creates is an emphatically northern European one, merging elements of Celtic, Anglo-Saxon, and Scandinavian cultures; importantly, however, this Britishness is dissociated from any French roots. Like that of many other anglophone authors of the time, Cawdell's vision for British North America did not foresee a cultural future for the substantial francophone population in the colonies. When Upper and Lower Canada merged in 1841, francophones

significantly outnumbered anglophones in the newly united Province of Canada. Yet, Cawdell's writing plays into a common belief among English Canadians at the time that anglophone culture would not just predominate in the colonies, but would completely assimilate the conquered French Canadians. In his description of the cultural roots of the harp, Cawdell chooses to highlight the Britons as the primary group among his "Northren" nations, and this choice is a racially charged one. The Britons were a Celtic people who inhabited the majority of the island of Britain, the Brittany region of France, and Britonia in northern Spain. In the fifth century, the Anglo-Saxons conquered most of the Britons' island territory, except for a few areas such as Wales and Cornwall. The Britons did not simply disappear from the Anglo-Saxon controlled areas — some high-born Briton women may even have married into Saxon royal families (Campbell 41) — but linguistically and culturally the traditions of the Germanic invaders predominated in the area that became England; Wales, on the other hand, maintained its British character and its close cultural ties to Brittany in France. Cawdell's invocation of the Britons as a specifically northern people actively dissociates them from their French and Spanish connections. Moreover, his appeal to them as a Celtic culture whose name has been appropriated by the English supports his project of creating a concept of Britishness that is northern, Celtic and Germanic, but most emphatically not French.

A number of factors may have contributed to Cawdell's impulse to merge medieval Celtic and English histories. The legends of King Arthur and his knights are a potential inspiration for Cawdell's association of Celtic Britons with English chivalric culture: King Arthur — a central character in chivalric romance and a hero to the modern British — was a Briton. As such, however (if indeed he existed at all), he would have fought against the invading Anglo-Saxons; he is therefore not a prime example of cultural cooperation. Furthermore, only in fiction were he and his round table an example of chivalry in the mode of post-Norman Conquest England: he would likely have lived sometime during the fifth through seventh centuries (Barber 1-11), whereas chivalric culture peaked some five to six hundred years later; so his life would not have borne a recognizable resemblance to that of the character in Arthurian legend. Moreover, Arthur is intimately connected with French chivalry, since many (if not most) of the legends about him were

written in France; the body of Arthurian literature would not, then, reflect the sense of northern Britishness that Cawdell wished to create.

While Cawdell was thus unlikely to have been inspired directly by the Arthurian stories, he was certainly participating in a broad, transatlantic interest in medieval Celtic cultures. I have identified 107 works of Celtic medievalism published in the literary magazines of British North America from 1789 to 1870, some written by prominent figures such as Robert Baldwin and Thomas D'Arcy McGee, and others published anonymously. Meanwhile, a similar fascination with Celtic history was on the rise in the British Isles; Clare Simmons argues that the Acts of Union of 1801 and Britain's increasing urbanization prompted "writers and artists . . . [to pay] even more attention to Britain's 'Celtic fringes' and the folk traditions preserved in outlying regions of the British Isles" (104). These North American and British trends of Celtic medievalism fed off each other, and one of the points of contact was the far-reaching influence of Sir Walter Scott. In addition to his historical romances, one of his earliest literary projects was collecting Scottish oral ballads and tales for a collection he published as *The Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border* (1802-03). Simmons contends that "while Scott and his associates were sometimes over-trusting of their informants, their willingness to believe that the songs they collected were genuinely ancient shows a new respect for the Middle Ages" (105). This "new respect" for Scott's idealized vision of the British Middle Ages crossed socioeconomic classes: among the wealthy and titled, the thirteenth Earl of Eglinton took inspiration from Scott's *Ivanhoe* to remodel his Ayrshire castle after a medieval fortress and to hold a re-enactment of a medieval tournament in 1839 ("Eglinton Tournament"). Such enthusiasm for reliving the Middle Ages was not limited to those with money — the jousts and processions drew an estimated crowd of 100,000 spectators, who were unfortunately disappointed when the event was cut short due to bad weather (De Sapio 92) — nor was it limited to the British Isles.

Scott and his historical romances may even have been more beloved in early Canada than they were in his native Scotland. As a Scot, Scott also fit well into Cawdell's project of northernness. He enjoyed such popularity in Canada that, as Carole Gerson argues, his brand of historical romance set the "pure standard" (69) for the writing of fiction in Canada for nearly a century, even after his popularity had waned in the rest of world. Gerson attributes this astonishing degree of influence

to a number of factors. On the most basic level, “Scott was esteemed for having made fiction respectable and directly or indirectly received the homage of scores of imitators who filled the pages of Canadian literary periodicals with historical romances set in Europe” (67). On another level, Canada’s political circumstances and ethnic heritage fostered a climate to which Scott’s work was especially suited: “The threat of cultural and political absorption by the United States further consolidated the appeal of Scott, a representative of the nation [of Scotland] from which approximately one-quarter of English-speaking Canadians claimed descent, to those desiring to strengthen Canada’s emotional ties to the British Empire” (70). Moreover, Gerson contends that Scotland and New France served similar roles in the English/English-Canadian literary imaginations: “Both nations, having suffered defeat at the hands of the English, had ceased to present a political threat. English-Canadian writers were quick to find in French Canada a New World counterpart to the folklore, history, and local colour of Scott’s fiction, which they could develop with a mixture of condescension and nostalgia” (71). The relationship between the medieval Scottish and the English as imagined by authors such as Scott — a relationship based on cultural assimilation — may have served as a model for the kind of relationship English-Canadian authors wished to cultivate between Canada’s anglophone and francophone populations. It is important to note, however, that Cawdell does not represent French Canadians as a quaint artefact of the past; indeed, he does not represent them at all. Much as Cawdell erases Indigenous peoples from the story of Canada, he erases French Canadians as well to imagine a Celtic and Anglo-Saxon future for Canada.

This ethnic model proved to be at the forefront of a trend in English Canadian writing of the time: other authors-cum-politicians, such as Robert Baldwin and Thomas D’Arcy McGee, likewise created a literary landscape for Canada that embraced a pseudo-medieval Celtic form of Canadian Britishness. In 1820, a young Baldwin wrote stories about love, duty, and honour that were rather ironically inspired by James Macpherson’s *Ossian*. Macpherson’s stories were ostensibly medieval Scottish versions of stories by (and about) the Irish legendary figure *Oisín*. Whereas Macpherson fraudulently presented his *Ossian* stories as medieval Scots Gaelic stories that he had simply translated, Baldwin acknowledged the distance between his work and his inspira-



tion, noting only that his stories were in “Imitation of Ossian” (72, 76). Baldwin’s Ossianic stories emphasize the importance of duty to one’s family and community above all else, a theme that also guided his later political career in the Parliament of the united provinces of Canada East and West. Another author-activist-politician, Thomas D’Arcy McGee, employed medieval history directly in his writings: he explored medieval Ireland’s role as a centre of scholarly Christianity to encourage appreciation in Canada for Irish culture. Even at a time when the mass migration of Irish refugees was causing elevated social tensions, McGee’s *A Popular History of Ireland: from the Earliest Period to the Emancipation of the Catholics* (1863) was very well received; contemporary reviews of his history reveal the willingness of Canadian literati to accept Irish heritage into Canada’s expanding sense of Britishness.

Cawdell was not, then, as out of touch with national sentiment as his failed political experiments might suggest. In both his literary and political works, he turned to Britain’s medieval past to create a model for Canada’s future. He lacked the necessary acumen to find supporters for his political experiments, but his literary works tapped into a deeper popular consciousness, an anxiety about creating a new nation that manifested itself in turning to the models of the past.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Cawdell referred to Upper and Lower Canada together as “Canada.” For consistency, I have followed this practice except where it is necessary to distinguish between them.

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Diana Brydon and Irena Makaryk’s *Shakespeare in Canada: “A World Elsewhere”?* and Daniel Fischlin’s *Canadian Adaptations of Shakespeare Project* for explorations of the literary, cultural, and political resonances of England’s early modern period in Canadian culture.

<sup>3</sup> This notion of North America as a *tabula rasa* underlies many of the medievalist projects in early Canada, and reveals one of the most insidious problems with looking to Europe’s past for Canada’s future. Cawdell, along with other medievalists, erases the histories of Indigenous peoples in the Americas in order to create a seemingly blank space.

<sup>4</sup> The Holy Roman Empire consisted, at its peak, of modern Germany, the Czech Republic, Austria, Slovenia, Switzerland, Luxembourg, Belgium, the Netherlands, northern Italy, and border regions of France and Poland.

<sup>5</sup> Likewise, the German Confederation, established in 1815, essentially maintained the sovereignty of its individual member states, thereby leading not to national unity but to further discord. The Kingdom of Prussia and the Austrian Empire — the two largest member states — were mutually suspicious of each other, and the princes of the larger, wealthier states controlled the Diet, or national assembly, to the detriment of the princes of

the smaller states. None of the general citizenry of any of the states had any representation in this national body, and in fact many of their liberties — such as freedom of the press, which Cawdell surely appreciated in Canada — were severely curtailed under this system (Bryce 1911, 459-61).

<sup>6</sup> The passage is closely adapted from the entry on “harp” that appeared in the fourth through sixth editions of the *Encyclopædia Britannica* (1810-23).

<sup>7</sup> The *Encyclopædia Britannica* corrected this mistake by its ninth edition in 1880, which clearly lists the Germanic and Celtic etymologies (Hipkins 488-89).

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