

Stephen Leacock and Douglas Gibson

[Stephen Leacock](#), Canada's giant of humour was born in England in 1869, and immigrated to Canada as a child. I discovered his work as a young teen. Reading in bed, I nearly fell out of it laughing at *My Discovery of England* (1922), with its hilarious send-up of colonial attitudes, the human side of international borders and the cultural differences between British and Canadian men on a train.

Leacock's essays still demonstrate the power of words. In "How to be a doctor," he gently mocks the fear of illness, simultaneously revealing the human fallibility of the medic. "How to live to be 200" pokes fun at the man who "was ridden by a health mania," and then, in spite of his healthy habits, got some "old-fashioned illness" and died like anybody else.

Another early favourite was "A, B and C, the Human Element in Mathematics," a tragicomedy in which the characters in math problems come alive as a bully, a follower and a weakling. In another hilarious feat, he catalogues train engines and their drivers in a sonorous spoof of Homer's catalogue of ships from [The Iliad](#).

By an interesting coincidence, I just read an interview with editor-turned-author [Douglas Gibson](#), who spoke last night as part of the [Vancouver International Writers Festival](#). I discovered that he too fell in love with Leacock's work in high school. The melodramatic [Nonsense Novels](#) was Gibson's first discovery. His first assignment as a beginning editor? a biography of Stephen Leacock, of course.

Douglas Gibson has just published [Stories about storytellers: Publishing Alice Munro, Robertson Davies, Alistair Macleod, Pierre Elliott Trudeau and others](#) (ECW Press, 2011) It's been called a "prize read" by [Alice Munro](#). Gibson appeared in Vancouver last evening. This one-man-show will speak in [Ottawa](#) on Sunday.

Three years after Stephen Leacock's death, a medal was established to honour him. Since 1947, the Stephen Leacock Medal for Humour has been awarded annually to the Canadian author judged to have written the funniest book of that year.

Leacock was also a founding member of the [Canadian Authors Association](#). This year the CAA book award winners were announced at the [Stephen Leacock Festival](#) in his hometown of Orillia, Ontario, where his former house is now a [museum](#). Fans of [Stuart McLean](#) will be unsurprised to learn that he is a three-time winner of the Leacock Medal.

In 1969, the centennial year of his birth, Leacock was featured on a six-cent stamp. If he were alive, no doubt he would find something funny to say about that.