

## HUMOROUS EXPRESSION REENACTED IN TRANSLATION: THE RECREATION OF THREE CHARACTERS FROM STEPHEN LEACOCK'S SUNSHINE SKETCHES

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**Abstract:** This article on my proposal of an annotated translation of Stephen Leacock's comic novel *Sunshine Sketches of a Little Town* (1912) comprises the scrutiny of a rather non-hegemonic and overlooked discursive literary channel: humour. My analysis of the novel and reflection upon some of the excerpts translated elaborate upon the role of the translator as an active agent for the diffusion of epistemologies that deviate from normativity – highlighting how the translation of comic effects contribute to the dissemination of such deviation in time and space.  
**Keywords:** Stephen Leacock; *Sunshine Sketches of a Little Town*; Humour; Translation

## EXPRESSÃO HUMORÍSTICA REAPRESENTADA NA TRADUÇÃO: A RECRIAÇÃO DE TRÊS PERSONAGENS DAS ESQUETES ENSOLARADAS DE STEPHEN LEACOCK

**Resumo:** Este artigo discute minha proposta de tradução comentada do romance cômico de Stephen Leacock intitulado *Sunshine Sketches of a Little Town* (1912); nele, estudo um atributo literário contra-hegemônico muitas vezes subestimado: o humor. Minha análise de alguns dos excertos traduzidos do romance articulam uma reflexão sobre o papel do tradutor como um agente ativo para a difusão de epistemologias que desviam da normatividade – enfatizando como a tradução de efeitos cômicos contribui para a disseminação de tal desvio no tempo e no espaço.

**Palavras-chave:** Stephen Leacock; *Sunshine Sketches of a Little Town*; Humor; Tradução



*The fool doth think he is wise, but the wise man knows himself to  
be a fool*  
(Shakespeare, 1599)

## **1. Sense in Nonsense: Introducing Stephen Leacock's usage of the Comic**

Most of Stephen Leacock's literary writing is comical, even though it uses comedy as a tool to bring forward a socio-political critique on Canadian events during the historic period encompassing their elaboration. Having been born in England and coming to Canada with a strong agenda to address the social issues of the country, "Stephen Leacock represented in a way the great paradox which is Canada" (Staines 70). Leacock acted as an embodiment of the Canadian paradoxical nature during its construction as a nation when, for instance, he addressed the issue of US influence within "his" country: "However much he understood – even welcomed – the close social and cultural relations between Canada and the United States, he also demonstrated in his humour that longstanding nervousness about 'American' dominance". Staines argues, moreover, that, besides impersonating the national paradigm in his own contradictory experience within the country, and although Leacock may have considered himself an American humorist, "it is impossible to overlook the fact that his own national experience of being a Canadian actually distanced him from American culture and its traditional humorous expression" (Staines 71).

Curiously, therefore, it seems that it was precisely what made Leacock different from a "real Canadian" – that is, the fact that he was an immigrant writer – that gave him the opportunity to discuss the country from a new perspective. The fact is that "Stephen Leacock the economist is a forgotten man" (Frankman 51). But Stephen Leacock, the writer, can never be, for it is, I believe, through his comic narratives that the author is able to say what he could not when "speaking seriously". As a matter of fact, Frankman believes Leacock has never really been able to speak seriously without allowing

humour to influence his writings: “In Leacock’s many writings on economics there is an ever changing relationship between the serious and the apparently frivolous” (56). This is not at all an ingenuous interpretation of Leacock’s work, for the author himself has often defended such position by criticising those who look at politics from concrete and mathematical terms. In his view one should not try to evade his/her inner feelings and emotions (the brain, if you will, would only operate if the heart kept beating) when dealing with the functioning of society. On the contrary, it is through economists’ sentimental interaction with that which they are theorising upon that such theories might arise as they were supposed to be. In his nonfictional book *Hellements of Hickonomics in Hiccoughs of Verse Done in Our Social Planning Mill* he poses that:

[Political economy] is an obstinate and *crabbed science* [emphasis added], living on *facts and figures, untouched by imagination* [emphasis added]. Economic scholasticism is drowning into final oblivion [...] behind locked doors [...]. The time had come for political economy to alter or perish [...]. What I think is that the whole science is a wreck and has got to be built up again. For our social problems there is about as much light to be found in the older economics as from a glowworm [...]. It is no aid in *calculating the incalculable* [emphasis added]. You cannot express the warmth of emotion in calories, the pressure on the market in horse-power, and the buoyancy of credit in specific gravity! Yet this is [...] what the *pseudo-mathematicians* [emphasis added] try to do when they invade the social sciences. The conceptions dealt with in politics and economics and psychology, the ideas of valuation, preference, willingness and unwillingness, antipathy, desires etc., cannot be put just into quantitative terms. (Leacock (a) 84)

Criticising this apparently excessively intricate and obscure science that depends too heavily on details and outlines which, at the

same time, completely disregard the usage of imagination, Leacock makes his point rather clear. This piece of text previously introduced demonstrates how clear it would be for him that any sort of reflection is doomed to be imprecise if it were elaborated upon without the surfacing of imagination as an important tool for its materialisation. Therefore, one could infer that any sort of political economic theorisation (the ones disregarding fantasy and imagination) which tried too hard to give shape to the shapeless, to describe the indescribable, and/or to explain the unexplainable would be precisely the kind of theorisation that Leacock could never agree with. This is the reason why he believed Canadian political economy was a wreck and should be built up again before it perished. He names the theorists who endeavour to create and nourish such thinking as “pseudo-mathematicians”, for, in his view, they limit their judgments to the concrete level, leaving no room for the abstract, for feelings, and for art to emerge. In the words of Frankman: “apparently Leacock believed that the very seriousness of the question required the counterweight of levity, if one hoped to make one’s point” (56). As a result, Frankman believes that, at least scientifically, his point was not made. That is, the very device with which Leacock hoped to gain attention appears to have contributed to his relative neglect: “His light-hearted, increasingly superficial treatment of questions of national policy [...] assured that his works did not stir thought on the great questions of his time” (Frankman 57). Nevertheless, and still according to *The Oxford Anthology*, he is one of the few Canadian writers who have achieved a world-wide reputation: “Stephen Leacock was a humorist who speared hypocrisy and pretentiousness, shams of all kinds, with wonderful flights of satire, parody, and nonsense” (Weaver; Toye 274).

## **2. A Symbolic vs. “Real” Power: Impugning The Local and Universal Logic**

Throughout his life, one could say Leacock successively defended the notion of freedom as well as the notion of independence, but

he did not believe that such issues had anything to do with business or market. Actually, he strongly believed one should get rid of business to understand the importance of freedom and in(ter)dependence, and this he shares with the readers in the very preface of the *Sunshine Sketches*. Therein he declares that independence and leisure were the keystones of his philosophy of life, also informing readers that he enjoys “more in the four corners of a single year than a business man knows in his whole life”. According to Magee, it is for these reasons that Leacock “escaped as often as he could from Montreal to his country home near Orillia” (Magee 40). This is why the advent of market and business as the main pillars of Western society was making Leacock growingly troubled and critical towards the hegemonic system. Notwithstanding the fact that he did see himself as being part of that system – which is one of the motivations for his decision to abandon social, political, and economic theory as to discuss all those issues through humorous narratives like the one brought herein. Apropos, in analytical terms, ultimately, and to make it even more difficult for those who try to categorise Leacock’s narrative into a conceptual box, *Sunshine Sketches* deviates from the traditional shape of humorous literature especially when we get to its final sketch. Generally, most comic books shall present a happy ending wherein the characters’ problems disappear and every issue is given a solution, but in Leacock’s narrative this is not the case whatsoever. Perhaps the author realised that the victory of the market, of the urban life, of the hasty metropolitan activities, was indeed something to be questioned, discussed, fought against; but, and in my view unfortunately, already embedded in the fate of Mariposans.

Mariposans’ will to become like “the city”, the fact that they were blinded by the system and already admired everything that was modern, prevented Mariposans to realise how country life had nothing essentially inferior when compared to city life. Leacock’s experience as a fictional writer is, in this sense, coherent to the literary trend that was gradually emerging for the critique of the subnational against the national. As John Pizer has enlightened, at the outset of

the new millennium “a focus on the subnational – the particular, local, and regional – dimensions of social life became attractive to authors seeking to establish a distinct identity – a discrete voice” (Pizer 218). Leacock did not agree with US ideas of market freedom and commercial competition, in the country which was once filled with those who (like the barber in the sketches that had practically no profits for taking hours to shave each customer just because he enjoyed a good chat) lived to serve more the community than their financial interests. The discussion between the local and universal, between the Mariposa paradox of representing a “regional” milieu at the same time as it is attempting to be inserted in more universal perspectives, seems to be one of Leacock’s cornerstones. This contradiction is also connected, thus, to the idea of self and the idea of other, to the otherisation of those who fail to accept the universal frames; but the notion of the “other” and the “self”, in this sense, has not taken place devoid of any historical preconceptions. On the contrary, “the portrait of otherness is patterned after the imperialist’s power’s gaze [...], which focuses on the speaker’s location” (Silva, 29). Therefore it is not Leacock that fails to transgress Mariposa “location”, but the “imperialist’s power gaze” which might overshadow the readers’ sight from going beyond such a limited plus superficial analysis of his narrative. Furthermore, and especially in countries like Canada (wherein immigration has played such a significant role for its construction as a country), this idea of universal and local, of standard and deviation, abstract and real, proves to be extremely intricate:

These conflicting discourses, one *supposedly universal* (emphasis added), the other local, one based on abstract and supposedly measurable standards, the other on factors thought to be both political and contingent, constantly clash in colonial debates, not only about university appointments, but also about *colonial culture, art, and literatures* (emphasis added). Any Canadian intellectual familiar with one extreme of this argument (a complete condemnation

of the mediocrity of things Canadian) was familiar with the other (the elevation of the national to pinnacles of greatness). Often individual writers selected their ideas from the continuum between these extremes to suit the occasion, the audience, and the context. In fact, sometimes a writer would bring a piece with *a negative picture of past colonial mediocrity* (emphasis added) and end with *a positive picture of future national literary glory* (emphasis added). (Fee 27)

The allegedly universal discourse, here questioned by Margery Fee (1992), is problematic for it creates the illusion of a universal agenda. This consequential side effect of both colonial and postcolonial traditions and literary artifacts strongly and directly impinges upon the local and upon the possibility of remodeling the global standards through the elevation of a seemingly regional sphere. Nevertheless, Leacock is one of these individual writers who were willing to pick up ideas between the extremes of the universal and the local discourse as to suit the occasion and context; notwithstanding the fact that, different from what is suggested in this previous quote, instead of bringing an unconstructive and/or pessimistic picture of a (past) colonial lack of excellence and ending up the narrative with something closer to an encouraging and optimistic picture of a (future) local grandeur for Canada and/or Mariposa, the author of the sketches insightfully and originally decides to do the opposite – Leacock, therefore, once again inverts a given logic of local vs. universal. This, that is one of the major deviations to the humoristic plus regional romanticism, was a choice that is perhaps forcing the readers to question what they believe their “happy ending” will be after they leave “their” Mariposa to become like “those from the city”. Such situation, as suggested earlier, is also one of the diverse attitudes that make it difficult for literary critics to insert Leacock’s literature into the closed boxes wherein preconceived and conditioned limitations are taken as unassailable. This standardisation requisite, characteristic behaviour of art conceptualising that comes from traditional thinking

and survives in contemporaneity, can be easily put into question, as some researchers are indeed doing. Such questioning is important for a reason; what all the discussion of standards obscures is that “this hierarchy reflects differentials based on symbolic and real power and preempts any careful examination of the actual literature in favour of prefabricated generalisation” (Fee 30). Therefore, and especially for my translation of Leacock’s sketches to take place successfully, such “careful examination” is vital, whereas “prefabricated generalisations” are surely to be avoided.

### **2.1. Laughing at Someone else’s misfortune: Translating Jeff**

There are many occasions within Leacock’s narrative when readers are invited to laugh at someone else’s misfortune, as he ironically discusses the sad reality of some Mariposans. This sort of reflection can be often delineated throughout the novel, but perhaps one of the most recurring events when it emerges is when the narrator describes Jeff’s working days. The barber of Mariposa, as perhaps most people would imagine a barber of a small town in 1912 to behave, used to chat endlessly with his clients, inevitably exposing many of his anxieties, ambitions, and wishes. During the novel, the narrator talks repeatedly about the barbershop from the other side of the window but also as a regular customer, habit that made him capable of finding out that Jeff has been gradually involving himself with some foreign businesses concerning the trade of Cuban lands to buyers overseas. It is at the moment that the narrator risks using Jeff’s attempt at enriching through these means as an opportunity for the former to discuss the whole functioning of capitalism and of the logic of capital accumulation both for marginal and central representatives:



**Table 1:** Second excerpt plus translation

<p>But, as I said, the public recognition counted a lot for Jeff. The moment you begin to get that sort of thing it comes in quickly enough. Brains, you know, are recognized right away. That was why, of course, within a week from this Jeff received the first big packet of stuff from the Cuban Land Development Company, with coloured pictures of Cuba, and fields of bananas, and haciendas and insurrectos with machetes and Heaven knows what. They heard of him, somehow, it wasn't for a modest man like Jefferson to say how. After all, the capitalists of the world are just one and the same crowd. If you're in it, you're in it, that's all! Jeff realized why it is that of course men like Carnegie or Rockefeller and Morgan all know one another. They have to [...]. In fact, I had perhaps borne him a grudge for what seemed to me his perpetual interest in the great capitalists. He always had some item out of the paper about them. "I see where this here Carnegie has give fifty thousand dollars for one of their observatories," he would say. (Leacock 35-36)</p>	<p>Mas, como eu disse, <i>reconhecimento público sempre contou muito para Jeff. Quanto mais o temos mais o queremos.</i> A sabedoria, sabe, é reconhecida imediatamente. Foi por isso que, obviamente, cerca de uma semana depois daquela Jeff recebeu a sua primeira grande encomenda com alguma coisa enviada pela empresa cubana <i>Land Development Company</i>, com imagens coloridas de Cuba, de seus campos de bananas, suas fazendas, seus rebeldes com seus facões e sabe-se lá o que mais. Ficaram sabendo sobre o Jeff, de alguma maneira – <i>um homem simples como Jefferson nunca diria como.</i> No final das contas <i>os capitalistas mundiais são todos farinha do mesmo saco. Se você está no saco, está no saco, e é simples assim!</i> Jeff pôde finalmente perceber porque é que todos os homens como <i>Carnegie, Rockefeller</i> ou <i>Morgan</i> sempre conhecem um ao outro. Eles precisam [...]. Na verdade, eu acho que já havia demonstrado certa aversão com relação ao que me pareceu <i>seu interesse permanente nos grandes capitalistas.</i> Talvez por isso ele sempre encontrasse alguma coisa sobre eles nos jornais para ler em voz</p>
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	<i>alta: “Eu vi aqui que aquele tal de Carnegie vai dar cinquenta mil dólares pra um daqueles observatórios”, diria ele.<sup>1</sup></i>
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Source: The author

Jeff is given the glimpse we are also given regarding how it would feel to be part of the centre, and no longer restricted to the margin. In Jeff’s life, therefore, the opportunity of having some more public recognition than that limited one (usually given to people in the position of a barber or any similar – marginal – profession) would never be something to pass unnoticed, especially while Mariposa endeavours to enter the global map. Supposedly, gaining more public recognition meant, both for the narrator and for Jeff himself, that brains are recognised right away – as if being publicly acknowledged were a natural consequence of one’s sapience. Nevertheless, regardless of his seemingly positive responses towards Jeff’s behaviour, gradually (in this same excerpt) the narrator comes up with some rather interesting comments towards that goal Jeff seems to be pursuing. The strategic moment of reversal – or peripety – is indeed taking place in Jeff’s discourse when those who were admired start to be criticised – this is one of the many moments when the socially regarded heroes are transformed into social plagues and vice versa. But, apart from this attention-grabbing discussion on the behaviour and intentions of these people the narrator call “capitalists” (which is rather odd since everybody inserted in the capitalist system is, inevitably, capitalist), one cannot overlook the references that are made in the previous excerpt – especially given that a translation is being proposed. One of the references, the one concerning Cuban land frauds, has already been addressed; this nonetheless deserves further attention and research even though, so far, not much information have been collected.

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<sup>1</sup> Every translation of Stephen Leacock’s novel into Portuguese is mine.

Another reference that we have is to the Rockefeller family, a very important US family with political and industrial influence both in its nation and such nation's ex-colonies. The Rockefeller would ultimately become one of the richest families due to their oil trading both within and outside the US, especially through the participation of William Rockefeller and John Rockefeller – who seem to be the ones that founded the Standard Oil Company. The family that would later associate with US banks (and such banks would ultimately get to other countries – such as Canada) is considered one of the most powerful families in US history. Furthermore, another person whose reference cannot pass unnoticed is John Pierpont Morgan (known as J.P.Morgan) – one of the most important American bankers during the period when the novel takes place. John Morgan was born in 1837 and died in 1913; he has worked as a manager in several distinct companies and has been involved in the merging of many of them – such as Edison General Electric and Thomson-Houston Electric Company. When he was not dealing with banking or financing, Morgan was also well-known for his art collection and participation as a philanthropist in US life (who perhaps would unquestionably “give” fifty thousand dollars for one [...] observator[y]). And last we have another philanthropist, Andrew Carnegie – also an American (with Scottish roots) – who was an influential industrialist, with huge prominence when it comes to American steel industry<sup>2</sup>. One could infer that these last two names (Morgan and Carnegie) seem to appear in the excerpt not by chance – that is, they are not there only due to their serving as good illustrations for capitalists – but because of their philanthropic enterprises, which stand for activities that would later be brought forward anew when the narrator ponders upon capitalists' actions. All this raises the rhetorical question: Are these people good because they want to be good, or are they good because they want us to see them as good?

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<sup>2</sup> © 2014 History. The Men Who Built America: <http://www.history.co.uk/shows/the-men-who-built-america>

When it comes to Jeff such characterisation as a capitalist solely worried about getting rich and earning public respect from the other Mariposans does not follow a very linear line. What I mean by this is that Rockefeller, Morgan, and Carnegie's ideological construct, as brought forward by the narrator, seems to grant them a single and permanent lineage; whereas Jeff, as most Mariposans, is generally put between the poles. Jeff is pleased with his role as the novel's barber, and at the same time he is not; if he is on one hand satisfied with his working in a local context – happy that the manner whereby he relates to his customers differs considerably from that of more metropolitan barbers, who would be always on a hurry to talk about so many idle themes – on the other hand he aims at “evolving”, at becoming more urban, civilised, cosmopolitan. The paradox is that he lives supposedly constrained by his local boundaries always with the feeling one must abandon such boundaries in order to embrace the future, the modernity. But can one really discredit one's local roles as to universalise one's values? That does not seem to be possible.

## **2.2. Filling in the Blanks of an Incomplete Irony: Translating Tompkins**

The presence of reminders that Mariposa would only be characterised by a perfect social, political, and financial functioning if it accepted with open arms the advent of a more profiteering and marketing approach to every issue is gradually reinforced in the lives of Mariposans. This occurs mainly through the presence of Mr. Smith and of other symbols of prosperity surfacing from the metropolis. A capitalist future can nonetheless only be achieved through a capitalist method; that is, it is not how Mariposans learned things function in their town that they are to function elsewhere – the systems of meaning of the town are far different from those of the city. Everything has to go or come from “the capital”. The city has to do with movement and the town with total stagnation. One shall thus always abandon it for moving to

the city, for good or not, in order to make money out from one's experience in the metropolis. In this sense, if there is one place that might bring fruitful results capable of allowing people to move forward and become "someone", this place is not the province but the metropolis – hence Mariposans respect and apprehensiveness towards the possibility of being "judged by the city".

**Table 2:** Second excerpt plus translation

<p>It is absolutely necessary that if this man wishes to be famous he must bring his trashy talent to the capital, that there he must lay it out before the Parisian experts, pay for their valuation, and then a reputation is concocted for him which goes from the capital into the provinces where it is accepted with enthusiasm. (Leacock 16)</p>	<p>Qualquer pessoa que pensa um dia em ser famosa deve levar o seu talento medíocre para a Capital. É absolutamente necessário que lá tal talento seja analisado pelos peritos parisienses, e que essa pessoa pague pela sua valorização. Posteriormente, uma reputação é moldada para ele, uma reputação que sai da capital rumo às províncias onde ela é recebida com entusiasmo por todos.</p>
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**Source:** The author

This preposterous assertion uttered by the narrator marks, once again, the sarcastic tone of Leacock's criticism against metropolitan values. It is here that we get to know that this admirable reputation that not only Smith but most people and things coming from the city have is not actually based on an honest judgment concerning such people. This reputation is not acquired through legal means; it is only after metropolitan people pay for their valuation that the capital experts are the ones who concoct such reputation. Leacock exposes thus the hypocrisy and fakeness of the city, and the unreliability of how people and things are judged therein since it is not their actions that define their reputation, but how much they are able to pay for such reputation to be invented by a system of lies. In the capital,

actually, everything seems to be seen as a lie, a lie that gets to the provinces like Mariposa as true; a lie that influences Mariposans as to believe that going to the city meant moving “upwards”. This, written down originally in 1912, seems to provide a very clear picture of how the contact between centre and margin takes place. A picture that was already pertinent when Leacock wrote the novel but that, in my view, is even more relevant if we take into account the globalising structure of Western politics and economics that fabricate the reputation of those we are supposed to admire and of those we are supposed to repudiate. There is no inner superiority within these values that are vomited from hegemonic realms into marginal ones, there is no perfect sociopolitical structure emerging from the centre and represented by central subjects; and there is no inner universality for the (supposedly) thriving and all-embracing status of our capitalist marketing. These are all respected symbols of prosperity that were bought by those who had money to buy it.

The paradox emerging from this defective method for providing a good and bad reputation for peoples and regions is, of course, that they might perhaps be very distant from the truth. This seems to be the case when the narrator describes those people who were not willing to make money out from their experience in the city or to cultivate what would be the necessary tools for them to get a good reputation. When it goes to people who are looking for personal achievements (especially when money is not within the package for that to be found), for inspiration, or for simple happiness, the metropolis seems to be unsatisfactory as a means for them to get closer to such values. One of the people who can best inform readers about that is the fictional character Mallory Tompkins, maybe an alter ego of Leacock himself, who was a lover of literature and whose greatest ambition was to become a writer. The only problem for Mr. Tompkins in Mariposa, however, was inspiration – reason why he often travels to the city. But why not stay in Mariposa and let it inspire his writing? Well, Tompkins had been taught by the hegemonic narrative that the city was the best destiny no matter what the purpose of the travel is. He believed that if the metropolis

was supposed to give people all they needed (which, in his case, would be a place where he could find peace, silence, and inspiration for him to think unrestrainedly) that would be the place where he would also find what he needed. Even though it never worked, he left Mariposa to the city to write his novel several times. So why would he insist in a path that has proven not to work? Simply because he is not expected to choose another one; the temporal and spatial configuration of any region depends on a linear path, from the rural past to the urban future, from the place where supposedly you can get nothing to the place where you would get everything.

**Table 3:** Third excerpt plus translation

<p>Mallory Tompkins had read all sorts of things and had half a mind to write a novel himself – either that or a play. All he needed, he said, was to have a chance to get away somewhere by himself and think. Every time he went away to the city Pupkin expected that he might return with the novel all finished, but though he often came back with his eyes red from thinking, the novel as yet remained incomplete. (Leacock 96)</p>	<p>Durante toda sua vida Mallory Tompkins havia lido todo o tipo de coisa e já tinha mais que o suficiente para escrever seu próprio romance – ou isso ou uma peça de teatro. Tudo o que ele queria, dizia ele, era ter uma oportunidade de <i>fugir para algum lugar onde pudesse ficar sozinho e pensar</i>. Toda vez que ele <i>partia para a Cidade</i> o Pupkin ansiava pelo seu retorno com o romance concluído, mas, ainda que Tompkins sempre chegasse em Mariposa com os olhos vermelhos de tanto pensar, <i>o romance ainda permanecia incompleto</i>.</p>
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Source: The author

Ironically, Tompkins would never be able to conceive another place for him to go (even though his inspiration might in fact have never left Mariposa), or the possibility to stay and allow his inspiration to get to town. Moving on is a synonym to moving to the city, if that has worked throughout global history – at least that

is why is said to Tompkins – it should likewise work rather well when it comes to his own. This, however, could not be further from the truth. How can such illusion still survive? According to Anderson the idea of a sociological organism moving cylindrically through homogeneous and empty time “is a precise analogue of the idea of the nation, which also is conceived as a solid community moving steadily down (or up) history” (Anderson 21). Everyone is unknowingly placed within this sociological organism that is supposedly moving cylindrically through this seemingly empty time: a fake temporal construction where the past, present, and future from rural and little settings like Mariposa to the urban larger ones like the City or the Capital is seen as unavoidable and homogeneous. The only reason why that reasoning was able to endure in 1912 – and even until contemporaneity – is because the national fallacy depends on such argument, the same nation that we still believe we share with our compatriots – for whatever that means. The notion that we share this solid community moving steadily is symptomatic of the state identification; and it is through this identification that we are convinced to believe that the future of the nation is analogue of our own. In this sense if moving to the future is the only choice of any space, doing likewise is also the only one for any person.

### **2.3. The translation: Changing words, meanings, and particularities**

Translators are pretty much aware that if a message is uttered in another language it is already another message – and there is nothing one could do about it. In the words of Steiner “even the most purely ostensive, apparently neutral terms are embedded in linguistic particularity, in an intricate mould of cultural-historical habit. There are no surfaces of absolute transparency” (240). This is to say that there is not any term – no matter how simple – that has an exact equivalent in another language. Words are filled in, if you will, with much more than their objective meaning – all



the meanings that surround it make them, all of them, completely unique. In the sketches, there is a panoply of references which are provided by the sketches' characters, affectively characterising Mariposa as a pattern of a particular cultural-historical habit – and this is precisely my basic premise. As suggested by Steiner one can see rather clearly that, for translating the sketches, it would be impossible to think in terms of an absolutely transparent surface. As a matter of fact, translating, in this case (actually in all cases), has much more to do with providing a literary piece with one more layer of moving meanings than with trying to be, feel or sound transparent. Everywhere we look, there is a system wherein and by these moving meanings are always inevitably present. Translation, in this sense, brings the necessary implements to make texts, authors, translators, and readers amplify their ideas regarding the intricacy of meaning. In my Mariposa (which I have captured to my own mind and interpretation), I have no intention to make a faithful reproduction of the town Leacock (1912) has originally thought of. If now the stories are being told in Brazilian Portuguese, they are other stories – and my gaze as a translator has an impact on the reconstruction of these scenes, characters and atmosphere. I am not, as a translator, a mere bridge for the original: I am a partner in the trip we are both undertaking to places hitherto uncertain. Readers and translators of this book are bound to realise, furthermore, that Mariposa is not simply the place where things are happening; the town, both Leacock's (1912) and mine, is much more than a background: it is the main character of the sketches. The plot provides an array of different stories, but no character gets, so to speak, such a prominent role as the one which is given for the town. The short sketches present us to the characters that live therein, and share with us some aspects of their lives trying to build an interesting narrative about them but which are generally marked by anti-climaxes. In the middle of the opposition rural versus urban life, we get to know Mariposa pretty well through the voice of a narrator whose discourse is permeated by a bucolic nostalgia regarding such opposition. Even though

s/he, the narrator, admires more urbanised places (such as any other character), the idea of losing the plainness, minimalism, and sluggishness of Mariposa is actually terrifying.

Mariposa is like a contextual polymorphism: a glimpse readers get of all time and all space condensed in a small town that sometimes actually seems to be in a different dimension in relation to the rest of Canada (or the world). The town seems to be “in the past”, but such past often assaults the present and looks upon the future – imagining what shall happen when Mariposa disappears, the narrator offers us a lens that few people have the opportunity to deploy. For me to “translate Mariposa” and reinsert it within the Brazilian context as a new text, rewritten more than a century after its original publication, the spatial and temporal channels of communication opened by the narrator shall be heightened, as both the idea of past and present are expanded. Moreover, the dialogue between oppositions (urban/rural, City/town, past/future) also grows and changes, because such “meanings” had a long way to go and, here and today, mean something rather different than they would mean somewhere and in another time. To translate is to allow time/space linearity to be broken and reconsidered – which makes the literary text a spiral rather than a line. As mentioned, translation is no bridge, it is a channel whereby meanings are not transposed but put in dialogue – through translation we talk to the other who is or has been, consciously remodelling identities and making concrete an interpretation which, for readers, is usually limited to the subjective paths of their minds.

The development of Leacock’s (1912) sketches depend considerably on the ironic tone of his narrator’s discourse; here, conscious that effect is what really matters, my freedom to reconstruct the story is also an opportunity to rethink such irony within our context. How to recreate the narrator’s irony? How to say not exactly the same thing, but something else that may result in an effective and successful ironic message? These are the sorts of challenges that have guided my translation. The raw material available to Leacock (1912), for his construction of the sketches,

was one: and now, mine is another: his story, its effects, and what I expect of my story and its effects. According to Rourke “it is this irony which literature is ideally equipped to act out in the lives of its characters, who spring forth, with the mark of destiny on their brows, and in so doing rouse the goddess fortune to oblige them by making the destiny as impossible as possible” (235). The ironic tone present in the discourse of Leacock’s (1912) sketches is operative and of paramount importance for us readers to build scenes, characters, and situations within our minds. Translation, herein, could never rebuild such scenes, characters, and situations if irony were forgotten. This is something irony and translation have in common: the role of making destiny as impossible as possible. In a nutshell, for me there is nothing right or wrong in terms of meaning, but in terms of result and effect: the translation is a project, a deal I make with myself, depending on no boundaries and chains elsewhere – it is the here and now that matters. When we bring old stories to new times, we are not only transforming the story herein, but aware that it has already been altered elsewhere. Leacock’s Mariposa may have never existed: and this is something that 1) we shall never know and 2) we should not care about whatsoever. My town is also an invention, not perfect nor ideal, but as unique as the original; and I invite you to invent an interpretation of your own about it.

### **3. Final Remarks: The Strength of Humour and the Translator’s Sense of Duty**

It seems, therefore, that Leacock uses humour and irony as to problematise and re-discuss the problem of Canadian development as nation depending on US economic strength and British sovereign control. According to Rourke, humor has been a fashioning instrument in America, cleaving its way through the national life, “holding tenaciously to the spread elements of that life. Its mode has often been swift and coarse and ruthless, beyond art

and beyond established civilisation” (296). In the New World, therefore, this usage of ironic and humorous devices stands for a very common and effective technique of a writer who wants to help American regions, such as Canada, to regain what has been lost due to the power given to stronger hegemonic centres. Indeed Leacock’s ironic and humorous literary treatments on the Canadian local cleaves its way through the national life of Canada – without his overlooking any spread elements that encompass the local. Humour is in this sense pivotal for an idea of a democratic and transgressing literature to be successfully conceptualised inasmuch as “it has engaged in warfare against the established heritage, against the bonds of pioneer existence” (Rourke 297). Its objective – the unconscious objective of a disunited people – has seemed to be that of creating fresh bonds, a new unity: the semblance of a society and the rounded completion of an American type. Working against such bonds of pioneer existence is crucial; a new unit devised and maintained by a literary intercontinentality that puts locals together instead of separating them is welcome. Theretofore, it is essential to move against those stereotypical, deterministic, and universal bonds that do not provide us with tools to construct any national identity but only force and reinforce certain frames for our ideal of the national never to surpass them through the fresh bonds of humour. The role of art, of literature, in this sense, is not to give us a restrained set of meanings to understand the local, but to expose other sets of meanings for our analytical tools to be even more expanded.

Vandaele observes that most critics have extensively focused on the issue of translating comic instances assuming that “the specific trouble with humor translation is that humor has a clear penchant for (socio)linguistic particularities (group-specific terms and ‘lects’) and for metalinguistic communication” (150). Nevertheless, these (socio)linguistic particularities – although they could never be adapted with no transformations into another culture (just like this is true concerning everything else) – are not necessarily the only specific troubles with humor translation, especially because of the

metalinguistic communication mentioned by Vandaele. Indeed, and as it is later put by him, as a form of play, metalinguistic communication suits humorous purposes; “and (socio)linguistic particularities can also strengthen humor because both phenomena regard the maintenance of group cohesion” (Vandaele 150). In this sense the fact that metalinguistic communication suits humorous purposes reminds one that it is important to remember that “the maintenance of group cohesion” can not only be promoted by those sociolinguistic particularities responsible for strengthening humour, but also by any other cultural aspects that might help such cohesion to emerge or to be maintained. The pertinence of such reflection upon the geographic and temporal group cohesion concerning Leacock’s novel becomes clear throughout its references to other periods – as demonstrated – and to other spaces.

There are many distinct manners for the translator to approach such issues depending on how he aims at shaping the frame of meaning settings for the reader to interpret such references. That is, in order for the reader to grasp the spatial and temporal problematic addressed in different moments of the novel, and for Leacock’s irony to be turned into the reverse discourse I am endeavouring to outline, this reader must be critically prepared. Throughout this article I have tried to introduce such reader to the reality described in *Sunshine Sketches* – cognisant of the fact that the reader of a humorous narrative shall be given the means to learn, through the effects of the comic, how such seemingly distant reality is bonded to his/her own. According to Itamar Even-Zohar (1990) literature should be conceived not as an isolated activity in society, regulated by laws “exclusively (and inherently) different from all the rest of the human activities, but as an integral–often central and very powerful–factor among the latter” (Even-Zohar 2). Bearing this in mind, this proposal of an annotated translation also comprises the problematisation of the contemporary social impact – or lack of it – of translated literature coming from non-hegemonic countries; Furthermore, it inevitably regards, thereby, the role of the translator as an active agent for the dissemination of

nonnormative epistemologies. Mona Baker (1991) in the end proves to be right when she argues that, if translators are to behave in an ethically responsible manner, their decisions must be informed “by principles that take account of the impact of their actions on others [...since...] all our actions must ultimately be motivated by a sense of duty” (Baker 278-281).

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