

“This is no way to tell a story”: literaly discourse making its way through the walled states of contemporaneity

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Davi Gonçalves¹

“To fulfil the project of cultural affirmation in the Americas it is necessary to promote continental union. The line of reasoning is as follows: the American strength, its cultural vigour, resides in the assembling of the continent, not in the fragmented expression associated with ‘national’ cultures circumscribed to restricted societies and spaces.” (Marcio Babia, 2006, p. 24)

Abstract

The object of this study is comprised by Stephen Leacock’s (1869-1944) novel *Sunshine Sketches of a Little Town* (1912). Through the advent of humour, the narrative gives readers an opportunity to reflect upon Mariposa, the fictional town where all events in the story take place, as a setting almost lost in space and time. My objective in this article is to investigate if, how, and why Mariposa is lost in space and time, attentive to the idea of individual versus collective identity and of local values versus universal ones. Cognisant that I am grappling with a narrative from the Early XX century Canada, I take such background into account for reflecting upon the epistemological contributions of the story as constructed by an unreliable narrator, as well as to raise the hypothesis that the novel might still have much to say to contemporary Brazilian readers.

Keywords: Canada. Universal versus local. Narration.

“NÃO É ASSIM QUE SE CONTA UMA HISTÓRIA”: O DISCURSO LITERÁRIO ABRINDO CAMINHO ATRAVÉS DOS ESTADOS EMPARELHADOS DA CONTEMPORANEIDADE

Resumo

O objeto deste estudo consiste no romance de Stephen Leacock (1869-1944) *Sunshine Sketches of a Little Town* (1912). Através do humor, a narrativa dá aos leitores uma oportunidade de refletir acerca de Mariposa, a cidade fictícia onde os eventos da estória se passam, como um lugar quase perdido no tempo e no espaço. Meu objetivo neste artigo é investigar se, como e por quê Mariposa está perdida no tempo e no espaço, com enfoque na ideia da identidade individual versus coletiva e de valores locais versus universais. Consciente de que estou a lidar com uma narrativa canadense do início do século XX, eu levo tal contexto em consideração para refletir sobre as contribuições epistemológicas da estória como construída por um narrador não-confiável, bem como para levantar a hipótese de que o romance pode ainda ter muito a dizer para leitores brasileiros contemporâneos.

Palavras-chave: Canadá. Universal versus local. Narração.

¹ Mestrado em Estudos Linguísticos e Literários em Língua Inglesa pela Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina (PPGI/2014). Atualmente é Doutorando na área de Teoria, Crítica e História da Tradução na mesma instituição (PGET/2016).

Introduction: “The role of natural inferiors”

The object of this study is comprised by Stephen Leacock’s novel *Sunshine Sketches of a Little Town* (1912). The author was born in England, in 1869, but six years later went to live in Canada. After becoming a professor of political science at the University of Toronto he wrote several fiction and non-fiction books which made him very well-known in the English-speaking world before he died in 1944. As described in *The Oxford Anthology of Canadian Literature* (1973, p. 274), Leacock’s legacy includes many books on economics, political affairs, and Canadian history, but he “became famous as a prolific author of humorous sketches in which his gift for controlled exaggeration and an inspired sense of the incongruous have entertained generations of readers”. The incongruities and ridiculing of the social events and processes that are addressed within my object of research are a portrayal of what Leacock saw as amenable to be criticised – unable to be listened when he did it through “serious means” he was finally successful when entering the very genre that perhaps few people would “take seriously”: humour. In his humorous texts, “he chose to address neither an academic audience, whose formal analyses he held in disdain, nor the policy makers of the day, but rather the common man” (FRANKMAN, 1986, p. 561). It is in the knowledge of the common subject that Leacock seems to believe; his audience are not those readers who never gave him much attention when getting in touch with his scientific papers.

At the onset of his career, there was nothing humorous about Leacock’s writings whatsoever; as a political scientist, the author published many academic works on issues such as Canadian economics and politics. Changing completely the sort of book that he would write (from scientific papers to humorous sketches such as the one

discussed herein), it is not that Leacock gave up on addressing economic and political issues regarding Canada. It is actually possible that he has concluded it was through literature, and especially a humorous one, that such matters could be successfully tackled. This is exactly what he does in the humorous tales of *Sunshine Sketches of a Little Town* (LEACOCK, 1912), wherein the issues discussed move “from the authorial concerns of its preface to business and political matters” (LYNCH, 1984, p. 2). This is precisely the tale that is capable to put together everything Leacock had to say about the political and social situation of Canada – the “whys” and “hows” it was getting into it – even though he might actually have done it unconsciously. Reflecting upon issues such as Canadian autonomy, its connection to the U.S.A and to the British crown, the autonomy of the country and its role in the globalising map might seem to be, today, nothing far too special. Nevertheless, one must bear in mind that Stephen Leacock was uttering ironic sentences about such matters in 1912, which is to say that he was putting forward an idea that many years afterwards would still seem to be pretty innovative and distinct from what has been taking place. In what concerns not only global economy, but actually any approach towards the notion of national epistemology, Stephen Leacock is, with no doubt, one of the most memorable American literary pioneers.

Of course, changing his tone from the scientific into the humorous and relying on fictional sketches to address issues that were once developed through the logical and skeptical language of academy, Leacock’s work and the way readers relate to it are transformed. This is so for, when we talk about fiction, there is no endeavour to provide readers with a truthful statement, a faithful representation of facts; descriptions are blurred by imagination and, for picking up scraps of logic therein, we, readers, must enter the game. Bearing,

thus, author, text, and reader in mind – Nelson (1990, p. 92) avers that one could suggest, “based upon what we have seen about reader assurance in inference, that the relationship has reciprocal elements. For if a world described in a fiction is verisimilar, readers will be all the more confident in their ability to draw causal assumptions”. This is perhaps one of the greatest assets of the fantastic elements of literature; we know that a book is most likely lying to us and not only we do not care, but we are actually willing to be as deceived as possible. Setting off from such liberty to deceive, in his book Stephen Leacock (1912) uses humour and irony as a tool to bring forward many issues that he deemed important and, among them, the issue of national identity stands out. This is why, for this particular article, I put such issue in the spotlight during my analysis, proposing as my main objective to investigate how the narrator develops the idea of collective identity in the narrative. For doing so, I shall discuss the dialectic nature of universal and local identities and values, as well as the consequences of setting up a narrative that is configured with the Canadian background of that moment: a country that was about to abandon its rural nature in order to become more urbanised and metropolitan.

The process of growth and development occurring in the country is reflected by the scenes concocted by Leacock, where we see the people of Mariposa (a fictional town where the compilation of sketches in the book take place) as the mirror image of the people of Canada. In the words of Itwaru (1990, p. 13), “such people’s search for meaning within the country named Canada is also the search for Canada as a domain of experience integral to the development of a sense of self”. The problem underlying Canadian colonial and neocolonial condition in the globalising world map has to do, then, with the historical context of the country and how such context ends up comprising

its physical and ideological exploitation. This exploitation assumed distinct shapes depending on each case; in what concerns the impact of Europe and the US in Canada we have, historically, the functioning of “Canada as a British-American colony with the British working on the exploitation of Canadian traditions, and the Americans [*sic*] on the economic and ecological exploitation of the country” (ITWARU, 1990, p. 16). Of course Canada is not alone in this cultural margin wherein it has been placed during its colonial assimilation; Europe and the U.S. have together been the villain in many other historical moments when establishing colonial and neocolonial enterprises wherever they could get. This is true mainly as we take into account both in the effective formation of colonies and in the creation of globalising systems of control for financial needs to be fulfilled through the reinforcement of hegemonic epistemes.

The unending exploitation of Canadian regional sphere, which has been selflessly included by the universal needs of the hegemonic culture represented by these mentioned institutions, has also taken place for the maintenance of colonial plus neocolonial enterprises in many other countries such as Brazil, where both traditions and goods are illegitimately exploited. No doubt today Canada cannot be compared to Brazil in terms of their hugely distinct statuses as subjugated nations; notwithstanding their differences, nonetheless, by the time Leacock’s novel was published such approximation could indeed be delineated. Nevertheless, for such physical impact to be ideologically justified (for today they apparently at least need to be) the most frequent procedure of those leading such structure has also been that of creating “a place where, like colonised peoples elsewhere, Canadians are taught imaginary histories in which they play the role of natural inferiors” (ITWARU, 1990, p. 22). Through these paradoxical imaginary histories meaning is created

for meaning to be obliterated, Canadians learn to look at themselves the way hegemony believes they should: as playing the role of natural inferiors. Isn't this the role Brazilians have also learned to play? The comparative question might seem farfetched, but my hypothesis herein is that such parallel can indeed be drawn, as I believe reflecting upon the contrasts and similarities between the colonial and neocolonial processes occurring both in Canada and Brazil contributes for our concoction of a distinct evolutionary linearity for both countries to follow – to the detriment of mere developmentalism.

The answer for such question might be simple, but the consequences are far from that. In fact, we should be worried about raising people's awareness regarding these claims that, despite their predictability, still preponderate in the invention and institutionalisation of any states and countries. They might be straightforwardly utilised for relations of power to be inserted and/or hierarchies reinforced; this is so for these inventions and reinventions might be converted into practices in which the dream of permanence is exploited. All for "the imposition of political ordering, and in this also works to constrict meaning, to limit vision to the confines of the power which ceaselessly seeks to construct human living in the fixity and narcissism of its own image" (ITWARU, 1990, p. 9). Constricting meaning, then, seems to be rather common for the development of these illusive fixed national identities, and this is an issue that should not only be avoided, but actually also fought against in the case of countries like Canada and Brazil. These nations' self-awareness about the narcissism of the imposed political ordering would be then fairly capable of giving rise to conceptualisations less detrimental than those frequently promoted by hegemonic interests.

On the other hand, and notwithstanding the controversial condition of those who attempt to create a national identity without allowing that

identity to be homogenising nor marginalising, a nation needs its identity, or better, its identities. But how can you find a manner of identifying a group of people and/or peoples without ending up overlooking some of them in the process? To put it in another way: How can you call someone or something Canadian without already entailing the concept of what is that which is not Canadian? Is there a meaning without its contrary? Is there any inclusive identity without any exclusive one in the package? According to Itwaru (1990, p. 23)'s line of reasoning, "the identification of the self through a series of negations is actually the negation of the self". Inasmuch as every minor inclusion does indeed generally entail major exclusions, these are very intricate matters to be posed and reflected upon; but my questions can and shall be answered. After all, a country does not need to have central and marginal identities, it might allow "identities" to surface, without judgements of value, without the maintenance of systems of hierarchy, without erasing other identities in the process. It is by watching and learning with the ones who have inequitably "otherised" cultures taken by them as minor for their own benefit that these "minor countries" might respond differently.

What I mean is that, curiously, the collateral damage of the marginalisation of deviating identities is the opportunity for one to fight back; when the centre inevitably creates its margin the margin is provided with the wherewithal to look back at the centre with creative and imaginative eyes. These are not nonetheless common and/or usual eyes; they are able to see the flaws which surround the body of those who failed to notice such flaws. They are perceptive eyes, which see what we tend to turn a blind eye on. As a result, counter-hegemonic perspectives are enabled in the ex-colony; the country, after it is invented and reclaims the right to reinvent itself. The epistemological advancement in colonial functioning would indeed be our learning

that this or that region does not need to fit in preconceived moulds of meaning to be effectively inserted in the globalising world map. After all, “country in its invention, in its recognition of itself as a country, is always in motion between that which it constructs as its inception and that which it sees itself becoming – as well as that which it is seen as becoming” (ITWARU, 1990, P. 10). In *Sunshine Sketches of a Little Town* (LEACOCK, 1912) an unnamed narrator talks about his/her neighbours and about the town where they all live in; doing so, s/he invents an idea of the Canadian country; and it is my intent to investigate how and why.

Discussion: “Exactly the other way”

Recollecting what is pinpointed at the beginning of my article, Stephen Leacock is a writer of fictional and non-fictional works. As such, curiously (since he was a political scientist), the author’s most memorable nonfictional writings about social justice, global marketing, and politics² had actually never been able to reach so many readers as his most memorable literary humorous pieces³, which are generally filled with insights that discuss these very same issues. It is thus through the fictional that the nonfictional became palpable; since, in academia, Leacock’s colleagues believed his writings “suffered either from the ‘imperialistic blight’ or from the insufficiency of his preparation in the social sciences” (FRANKMAN, 1986, p. 51). Leacock was not and still cannot be described as a respected social scientist – despite his repetitive attempts to become one his “serious” writings were never taken as pertinent. One could say it took quite a long period for Leacock to start his literary career for that time, which began when he was

2 The Unsolved Riddle of Social Justice. (UK, London: John Lane; The Bodley Head, 1896) and Hellelements of Hicconomics in Hiccoughs of Verse Done in Our Social Planning (USA, New York: Dodd, Mead, Mill, 1908).

3 Literary Lapses (UK, Cambridge: Echo Library, 1910) and *Sunshine Sketches of a Little Town* (Toronto: Bell and Cockburn; London: John Lane, 1912).

41, but his decision to become a humorous writer allowed him to rescue all those social criticisms that were chained in his academic texts and “insert them within the humorous armour of a seemingly idyllic body” (FRANKMAN, 1986, p. 53). It was through laughter that readers became aware of the palpability of his critique by exposing the ridiculous potential hidden in those aspects he had already criticised in his previous texts. That is, it was not his talking about politics and social issues that made readers grasp his arguments; it was the political and social issues in the background of the events going on in Mariposa that did so, by transforming such arguments into the town’s characterisation.

This is coherent with what Leacock himself says at the very beginning of *Sunshine Sketches of a Little Town* (LEACOCK, 1912) where there is an introduction wherein he presents and explain some features of the piece. There the author makes an interesting confession: “Many of my friends are under the impression that I write these humorous nothings in idle moments when the wearied brain is unable to perform the serious labours of the economist. But, actually, my own experience is exactly the other way”. (LEACOCK, 1912, p 3)⁴ Curiously, thus, Leacock opens up his novel by posing that even though his friends believed that his humorous writings had been written in idle moments when he felt unable to perform the labours of the economist; this was not the case whatsoever. In fact, it was exactly the other way – that is, for Leacock it was exactly in the moments when he was imagining the comic events going on in Mariposa that his brain was most effectively performing the labour of the economist. His humour has never

4 “Muitos dos meus amigos têm a impressão de que eu escrevo essas frivolidades humorísticas em momentos idílicos quando o cérebro, cansado, se torna incapaz de tratar dos temas laboriosos e sérios do economista. Mas, na realidade, minha experiência particular com o humor se resume ao contrário disso.” (This and all the other translations of Leacock’s novel are part of my work in progress, bearing in mind that my thesis also convey the annotated translation of this sketches)

been devoid of his political thought: no humour is. Based on the ironical critique gradually developed by Leacock (1912) during the novel, it would be rather plausible to call him a “parodist”, based on Steiner’s (1975) definition of it. Such definition nonetheless is not only worried about defining the parodist but also demonstrates how symbolical he is for highlighting the translation problematic – one which inevitably permeates my endeavour to displace Leacock from the source context as to place in the target one.

George Steiner, in “The Claims of Theory” (*After Babel*, 1975, p. 258), poses that “undoubtedly the ‘parodist’ enriches his own culture and is invaluable to the spirit of the age. But he only appropriates what is concordant with his own sensibility and the prevailing climate”. This insight indeed seems to fit pretty well in Leacock’s condition; in the end the author does bring many new items to the early XIX century Canada, but all the items he is able to see and restructure are restrained to his contextual boundaries. The thing is that it does not matter how Leacock is able to enrich his own culture and how invaluable he is for the spirit of the age, everything brought forward by his characterisation of Mariposa and Mariposans depend on his own sensibility and on the prevailing climate. I am not trying to convince anyone that everyone’s opinion is limited to their temporal and spatial context; but such context provides a certain array of tools and possibilities for us to think or rethink a limited amount of issues whose nature cannot be escaped from until time passes or spatial frontiers collapse. Nevertheless, it is exactly out from the array of tools offered to the parodist that they can be arranged in an idiosyncratic manner – that is, if time and space are limiting aspects of our cultural environment, this is not due to their inner chains, but due to people’s inability to think of such realms less predictably. As Steiner (1975, p. 259) would later affirm, the contextual elements

encompassing the parodist’s mind can be either used to reinforce second nature aspects of such context or also for this parodist to “enforce new, perhaps recalcitrant sources of experience”.

In what regards these new and recalcitrant sources of experience, and as suggested in my introduction, when I posed that the people of Leacock’s (1912) Mariposa are a representation of Canadians, the fictional town where the story takes place is one where many things stand for another – i.e. basically everything therein seems to have a metaphoric potential. Having said that, in the sketches, the person embodying Leacock’s great fears is called Mr. Smith, the character who brings ideas of urban construction and financial profit for solving every problem in Mariposa even though such seemingly constructive notions inevitably require diverse destructions to be promoted in the town. The scenes where this is made clear are indeed very metaphoric, and they make it clear that the sort of growth and enhancement entailed by hegemonic developmentalist thinking is one that can only devise any notion of futurity if the memories of the past are not only taken for granted, but actually wiped out from history as a whole. Mr. Smith serves the purpose of allegory rather well, such “as when he solves the crisis of the church building fund by setting fire to the old building for the insurance money” (MAGEE, p. 39). Such solution is proposed because the town’s reverend had made a mistake: he approved the project of a new church without having the necessary money to pay for it; as the debt grows, the only way Mariposans can save themselves from bankruptcy is if the insurance of the church were activated.

This is exactly what Mr. Smith guarantees by setting fire on the church; without thinking twice and without any sort of hesitation, the huge structure is put down by him. This is the reason why if there is a character that is growingly seen by the reader as the greatest source of evil, in the

book, this person is Mr. Smith; who is curiously exactly the person that represents every value Mariposans have learned to admire. Now, the idea of destroying a church as to build another one might look innocently funny, but, again, it is not whatsoever. In *Sunshine Sketches of a Little Town* (LEACOCK, 1912) laughter is never innocuous, it is always serving a pretty serious purpose. In the words of Magee (2006, p. 41) “Leacock both comprehends urban life and laughs at it. This time, however, the laughter is unfriendly, harsh, satiric [...]; the city leaders are seen as hypocrites and, in this context, Leacock is not gentle with hypocrisy”. Mariposa is always in search for a leader; and, during such quest, all possibilities seem questionable (not to say preposterous); but that is precisely an assertion about our political world, where it looks as if we were doomed to have the worst of people in control of our lives.

In the narrative, the interests of those city leaders, here embodied by the figure of Mr. Smith, are to use hypocrisy to their benefit, for it is hypocrisy that allows them to behave evilly and for selfish reasons whereas they look benevolent and as if they were worried about the community welfare. Moreover, Adam Smith – who might be considered, why not, the main inspiration for this particular character – is indeed mentioned by Leacock and ironically compared to humorists in the sketch “Great Humorists from Chaucer to Adam Smith”. Smith’s behaviour is nonetheless one that makes it difficult for both Mariposans and readers to identify it as essentially guided by selfless or by selfish purposes. This is so for he is such a resourceful character that none of his actions can be interpreted as motivated by what he is willing to do because he is an “essentially” good or bad person or because, in a given situation, he wants to pass as one. This is a reflection that takes us to the antagonism of essence and appearance: a theme that has been thoroughly discussed in philosophy.

In the book *Derrida and the Future of Literature: An American Odyssey*, Joseph Kronick (1999, p. 61) understands that “any effort to determine the essence of something, to determine it as such, requires both the thinking, forgetting, and effacing of difference. To think something in its essence is a thinking oblivious of difference, to the other that determines it as such”.

Smith’s hypocrisy, in this sense, is what makes it rather complicated for readers to determine the essence of his actions – reason why it would be dodgy not to bear in mind what he gains through such actions. Moreover, if he represents the developmentalist leaders that are so crucial for neoliberal thinking, the church represents the memory of a past faded to erasure; the memory of a country that needs to be adapted for its future to become something possible. This little church is like the local colour, values, and interests, which could never cope with the advent of the big church; everything that stands in its way must be demolished to make way for the future. Every alternative is given for the local identity to survive the hegemonic interference, just like many alternatives emerge for the memory of the little church to remain; but, ultimately (and especially when one finds out there is no return) no possibility shall work and, such as the church, everything that connected us to a local, regional, urban, and nonfinancial past is forgotten. Later, this simultaneous openness and closeness of the imagined community would become confusing even for the narrator, as he explains how intricate the whole idea of that new and bigger church was.

I suppose things are just the same elsewhere, I mean the peculiar kind of discontent that crept into the Church of England congregation in Mariposa after the setting up of the Beacon. There were those who claimed that they had seen the error from the first, though they had kept quiet, as such people always do, from breadth of mind. There were those who had felt years before how it would end, but their lips were sealed from humility of spirit. What was worse was that there were others who grew dissatisfied with the whole conduct of the church. (LEACOCK, 1912, p. 67)⁵

5 “Imagino que as coisas sejam sempre as mesmas em todos

So far we lacked, though, a clear-cut definition of nation – which, in this moment, seems rather appropriate: “the nation is an imagined political community - and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign” (ANDERSON, 1996, p. 9). Again we get to the point when the closed and open paradoxical nature of the national ideal is disclosed; Canada, like any other nation, as this imagined community – whose financial, social, and religious features are supposedly shared by the whole body of citizens within its borders – is, at the same time, both limited and sovereign. After all such sovereignty depends on its simultaneous limitation. Besides the building of the new church, however, there were several other institutions that marked the insertion of Canada in the path for the future – all of them, of course, serving the supposed ideal of a national community.

As my thesis project includes translating Leacock’s narrative into Portuguese, it is important for me to take into account the idea that the narrator seems to elaborate upon in what regards the nation. This is so for, from such an idea, references are made through the establishment of an ironic tone that, here and then, provoke laughter and provide readers with an opportunity to rethink some concepts (in this case, concerning their national identity). After coming up with the relevance of all these references to other people and situations for the novel’s context to be gradually delineated, one can imply that it would be indeed impossible to overlook such moments when endeavouring to provide a careful translation. Such care proved to be necessary, for instance, in the excerpt when I decided not to translate the term “Livery Man”,

os lugares – eu me refiro ao tipo peculiar de descontentamento que foi penetrando na congregação da igreja anglicana de Mariposa, após a construção do farol. Havia aqueles que afirmavam saber ser um erro desde o início, apesar de terem mantido silêncio, como geralmente o fazem as pessoas com maior amplitude moral. Havia aqueles que, já há alguns anos, podiam sentir como tudo iria acabar, mas seus lábios tinham sido selados por sua humildade espiritual. O pior era que havia ainda aqueles cuja insatisfação crescia com relação a toda conduta da igreja.”

keeping it in English in a foreignising fashion. I have made such choice since there seems to be no translation for Johnson’s (a secondary character of the narrative) job into Portuguese. When my version of the novel is available, such detail shall be explained in a note informing that the term used to stand for an ancient method of conveying a freehold by formal delivery of possession carried out by someone officially granted the task of voluntarily transferring property, especially land, in name of one owner to a new one.

Hence the importance of understanding (as this case demonstrates) that when adapting an original text for the target audience, the translator cannot forget how important it is not to misunderstand the role he is assuming thereto. Steiner (1975, p. 267) poses that “[t]he relation of translator to author should be that of the portrait-painter to his sitter. A good translation is a new garment which makes the inherent form familiar to us yet in no way hinders its integral expressive motion”. I indeed aim to foster a relation with Leacock’s piece similar to that of the portrait-painter to his sitter. Bringing the 1912 Canadian *Mariposa* to the 2014 Brazilian context great care has to be taken not to hamper this expressive motion of Leacock’s discussions, for my new garment shall always provide further readings without eliminating deviating ones. It is exactly such aspects, which reinforce the boundless temporal status of *Sunshine Sketches of a Little Town* (LEACOCK, 1912), that has, in the first place, convinced me that allowing the piece to travel for more than one century.

Moreover, the novel might now get in the hand of readers that, supposedly, might seem to have no spatial or temporal connections with it is a feasible task; in the end, literature has no boundaries, no frontiers, it survives over time and space. Within such frame, the translator is one of those subjects who find themselves responsible for strengthening the ultimate literary potential. It is

interesting, in this sense, to note that this identity transmutability symptomatic to the process of bringing the foreign text into a national context (in this specific case from the Canadian into the Brazilian one) also emerges in the literary voice of Leacock's narrator in both target and source contexts. What we experience from the beginning to the middle of *Sunshine Sketches of a Little Town* (LEACOCK, 1912) is what sometimes seems to be an extradiegetic narrator – who is watching the scenes narrated even though he is not physically present in such scenes when they are effectively taking place. In other moments, what we have is nonetheless an intradiegetic one – that is, a narrator who is somehow present in the scenes narrated. By the end we nonetheless are convinced that he is not only present, but actually that we surprisingly also are. This surfaces from the novel's construction when the narrator decides to chat with us, as the following excerpt demonstrates:

Odd that you never knew, in all these years, that the train was there every afternoon, puffing up steam in the city station, and that you might have boarded it any day and gone home. No, not "home", of course you couldn't call it "home" now. "Home" means that big red sandstone house of yours in the costlier part of the city. "Home" means, in a way, this Mausoleum Club where you sometimes talk with me of the times that you had as a boy in Mariposa. (LEACOCK, 1912, p. 159)⁶

It is when the unknown reader takes the train to Mariposa, in the last chapter, that we have this conversation between him/her and what seems to be the narrator, who blames readers for seemingly having had many opportunities to visit Mariposa (to return "home") but who were oblivious to the train that was available every day. It is curious

⁶ "Estranho você nunca ter notado, em todos esses anos, que o trem esteve lá todas as tardes, soltando fumaça na estação da cidade, e que você poderia ter embarcado qualquer dia e ido para casa. Mas não, a palavra não parece mais ser "casa", é claro que você não poderia chamá-la de casa hoje em dia. "Casa" significa aquela sua grande construção de arenito vermelho que fica na parte mais nobre da cidade. "Casa" significa, de certa forma, aquele Mausoleum Club onde, por vezes, você me fala dos seus tempos de garoto na cidade de Mariposa."

therefore to notice how the word "home" is problematised by this passenger sitting close to the reader; whose ironic approach to the concept of a "home" demonstrates how such notion differs depending on the context where it is applied and from whose perspective it is conceived. After this civil and refined criticism directed by the narrator towards our definition of the word home, when the former reiterates that the latter would no longer be capable of understanding Mariposa as one's home after having been infected by the urban disease with his big red sandstone house in the richest side of the city. People in the same condition, it seems implicit, would no longer grasp the meaning of the word "home" or, better, the narrator's listener, who have left Mariposa to live in the city, has learnt to understand it in a distinct (not better or worse) manner. His feelings work as anyone's would: after having (compulsorily) felt in love with the metropolis and after being convinced that inherent to the "homes" are some values and aspects that were actually artificially placed therein, s/he was transformed.

Nevertheless, what seems most relevant in this excerpt is the fact that perhaps now, at the very last pages of the novel, we have the first and best chance to risk a deeper characterization. We meet, now, not only this person who for so long has talked to us (who we were since the beginning able to infer that were part of Mariposan life), but actually this person who is reading the sketches: me and you. The narrative construction seems in such sense pretty modern for something written in 1912, as there is this dialogic rapport between narrator and reader; talking directly and indirectly to us, the narrator's tone leaves us with the impression that we have indeed misinterpreted Mariposa as a local far away from our reality. Stopping the narrative to talk to us, recollecting some facts and advancing others, the narrator makes it clear that the atmosphere of the novel is an imaginative one, but these strategies

also evince the time and space (de)construction of the scenes. Thereby, when reading and translating Leacock's (1912) piece, one should be aware that, in addition to the clear temporal inconsistency between source and target texts, there is another aspect that triggers our attention towards timing in the novel. Besides the great number of analepses and prolepses taking place in the narrative, readers also have to deal with a rather confusing chronological organisation of events.

This seems to be cohesive with Leacock's (1912) attempt to make the book look like a conversation between two people who just met within a train during the journey from the City to Mariposa. Such aspect is important because, as readers might infer those who are telling stories would never be able to tell the same stories in the same fashion inasmuch as not only the manner of how things are described is endlessly undergoing changes, but also even the order of events. This depending on what is being highlighted in each occasion or simply on the fact that there is an idiosyncratic linear progression from one event to another liable to vary according to the way those who narrate decide to link one moment to another. A renewed relationship with time seems thus to be crucial both in translation and literary terms; not only when it goes to the insertion of the novel in the Brazilian contemporary context, but also for the reader to get how such narrative had been constructed even before it was translated. One of these first moments when the narrator's discursive disorganisation has a major impact on readers' comprehension concerns the moment when he starts talking about the sinking of the boat in the town's river. Even though readers had not gone through all the instants before and after the tragedy when the boat has sank they are curiously firstly informed about the rescue of those Mariposans who were on the boat; that is, they get to know that

everything was fine even before knowing that there had been a problem:

That's what the people of Mariposa saw and felt that summer evening as they watched the Mackinaw life-boat go plunging out into the lake with seven sweeps to a side and the foam clear to the gunwale with the lifting stroke of fourteen men! But, dear me, I am afraid that this is no way to tell a story. I suppose the true art would have been to have said nothing about the accident till it happened. But when you write about Mariposa, or hear of it, if you know the place, it's all so vivid and real that a thing like the contrast between the excursion crowd in the morning and the scene at night leaps into your mind and you must think of it. But never mind about the accident, let us turn back again to the morning. (LEACOCK, 1912, p. 46)⁷

The events have thus taken place in that summer evening before we even knew that Mariposans went to the boat in the morning; everyone gets saved by the life-boat; and the narrator seems to be finally relieved. It is after his relief is shared that he stops to think about how nonlinearly he has told us about such event, and we, as readers, cannot help getting mesmerised. The narrator nonetheless would later explain that he is aware he has made a mistake (in the end, the lack of linearity, in many occasions, proves to be providential), but justifies that it is his connection to Mariposa that makes him unable to narrate events mechanically. In his view anyone who knows the place would get confused since, when talking about it, the moment can be felt as vividly as if it was occurring anew. But then, after he apologises, he asks readers to forget everything he

⁷ “Isso é o que a população de Mariposa viu e sentiu naquela noite de verão, enquanto observavam o bote salva-vidas saltando pelo lago com suas sete rampas e a espuma clara invadindo a proa por todos os lados com seus catorze homens subindo para o salvamento! Mas, meu Deus, agora me dou conta que essa não é a maneira que eu devia estar contando a estória. Suponho que a verdadeira arte da narrativa teria sido eu me manter calado sobre o acidente até que ele viesse a acontecer. Ah, mas é que quando você escreve, fala ou escuta algo sobre Mariposa, se você conhece o lugar, tudo se torna tão vívido e concreto que uma coisa simples como o contraste entre a multidão fazendo a excursão pela manhã e essa cena que ocorreu de noite simplesmente salta na sua mente e você não para de pensar dela. Mas, bem, então esqueça o acidente – vamos voltar para quando tudo começou.”

said because he was going to turn back again to the morning. These anachronisms taking place in the novel cannot be overlooked by reader or translator, for they are, as suggested, extremely meaningful for us to understand how involved this narrator is in the events narrated. Temporal incoherencies, like everything else, are not generally placed in a narrative by chance – in the end, if Leacock wanted to “correct” such misunderstandings regarding how events are placed and organised, he would just have erased and rewritten moments when the spatial and temporal inconsistencies appear. This lack of control over what he says seems indeed to be part of the several reminders given to the readers to gradually make them enter in the narrative’s atmosphere of an oral communication – to make them aware that they are not reading what a narrator has written, but listening to a friendly fellow who is just trying to establish an idle conversation with them.

Now that I am getting to the end of my analysis, it could be said, from the studied excerpts, that Leacock’s (1912) narrator is successful in his/her discussion regarding national identity – as well as in his/her reflection upon the dual condition of universal versus local values in *Mariposa*. As a Canadian, the author seems to be aware that such issues are inherent to the reality of his country, at least at that moment; divided between its status as a colony and a post-colony, Canada had to be conceived as something other than a completely autonomous place or a simple appendix to the U.S.A and to the British crown. The obstacle of becoming and being allowed to become is present in many other nations which suffered similar ideological sanctions like the ones that consciously and unconsciously, directly and indirectly, haunt the Canadian imaginary. During its establishment as a country, the interests of Britain, France, and the U.S.A always seemed to come before what was really necessary for Canada. In this case of colonial

repression in marginal cultures the issue of cultural inauthenticity emerges, allowing a bridge concerning both Canadian and Brazilian relationship with those cultural sources taken as “original” to be constructed. Such relationship is deeply scrutinised by Imre Szeman in the article “Literature on the Periphery of Capitalism: Brazilian Theory, Canadian Culture” (2001).

In Szeman’s (2001, p. 30) words: “What is suppressed in this idea of cultural inauthenticity, in Canada as much as in Brazil, is a recognition of the material, historical circumstances that first established the idea of an ‘original’ culture to which others, by contrast, seem to be mere copies”. Departing from the author’s analogy between Brazilian and Canadian marginal traditions with mere copies of original cultures, one could think about how the notion of translation fits well in such ambivalence. To a certain degree Brazil and Canada are already translations of major nations, both countries are essentially ideologically constructed as faulty copies of holy sources, and nothing better than such metaphoric background for providing a discussion on Leacock’s sketches translation into Brazilian Portuguese. In this sense, the more unfaithful such national “translation” is the better, for both Canada and Brazil shall be able to respond to an unfair tradition that has read national cultures with derisive eyes thoroughly blinded by foggy lenses. Szeman (2001, p. 31) argues that “the root cause in both cases can be found in the long process of European imperialism and the array of ideologies and concepts associated with it that served to enable, legitimate, and sustain the imperial project.”

Such array of ideologies has, in this sense, served to legitimate the imperial project in the past and still serves today; the discourses related to its religious and civilizing mission, and the discourse of anthropology and its concern with the primitive have not been abandoned in contemporaneity,

but only retextualised as to adapt in the context wherein contemporary readers find themselves. The marginalisation of Leacock's questioning on the industrial world and way of thinking engulfing the small town of Mariposa are, thus, an illustration of the power of "Eurocentric discourses of modernization [...] and development" (SZEMAN, 2001, p. 32). Brought and reflected upon by Leacock more than a hundred years ago, discourses of modernisation and development still thrive in this decade; the translation of his sketches proves to be, thus, essential for giving readers the necessary tools to reposition themselves in front of such discursive ideologies. David Harvey, in his book *The Enigma of Capital and the Crises of Capitalism* (2001), discusses about how the paradox of developmentalism through neoliberal enterprises can be regarded both a traditional and contemporary one. Starting in the first stages of global industrialism, the theorist demonstrates in his analysis how, at the beginning of the XXI century one could say that "the uneven geographical development of both crisis and recovery continues apace" (HARVEY, 2001, p. 223).

Evolving rapidly, such process of uneven geographical development was something that made cautious thinkers (such as Leacock) direct their attention towards these matters. In this sense, offering a translation of Leacock's (1912) novel is indeed somehow an opportunity to see the bridge that connects this past of an emergent developmentalist tradition within Canada with the Brazilian present – which has been guided to a considerably comparable direction. If there is something that connects every globalised country it is the will to grow, the supposedly inherent necessity to be developed. Therefore, what makes this retextualisation of Leacock's novel even more interesting is the fact that, as well noticed by Harvey (2001, p. 132), it was "between 1980 and 2010 that [...], on the world stage, uneven geographical

developments of neoliberalism were everywhere in evidence, along with differentials of resistance". It was the first stages of such picture that Leacock has been capable to identify. He was living in a period whose constructive epistemes were in process of being altered, inasmuch as "[m]ental conceptions of the world would be reshaped as far as possible by appeal to neoliberal principles of individual liberty as necessarily embedded in free markets and free trade" (HARVEY, 2001, p. 131). It was the late maturity of such mental conceptions guided by principles of egocentric ambitions through free market that gave shape, therefore, to the uneven geographical developments of neoliberalism discussed by Harvey (2001). Ultimately, what he deemed and described as the neoliberal world wherein we are supposedly living – surviving – in the contemporaneity, is one that follows such parameters. He would put it bluntly as to make his conclusive point that "this is a world in which the neoliberal ethic of intense possessive individualism and financial opportunism has become the template for human personality socialisation" (HARVEY, 2001, p. 175). Unfortunately, I am forced to agree.

Final remarks: "Boundaries and closure"

Better than crying, laughing is nice, is not it? But thinking about why we laugh, making out how laughter happens, and giving some more room for a more thorough investigation on the comic is something that might turn our notions on the comic into something even nicer – and, egotistically, helps me to translate it. I conclude my analysis therefore highlighting my project to, setting off from the thorough scrutiny of Leacock's (1912) work, provide Brazilian readers with an updated version of my research object. I am aware that, regardless that it seems to occupy a less credited locale in what concerns the questionable hierarchies of art

(e.g. the tradition whereby tragedies, besides being regarded as more complex and ambitious, would serve to more relevant purposes than comedies), humour needs to be translated. For such translation to be undertaken, as a translation research myself I am rather cognisant that a consistent theoretical framework is required. This is the reason why I rely on the major insights provided in Antoni Brey's book *The Ignorance Society and Other Essays* (2009), mainly due to the author's ambitious analysis of the controversial nature of Western culture in what regards access to information. The author poses that even though it became second nature to believe we have "all the knowledge available within our reach, this does not necessarily mean that we are capable of doing anything with it [...since...] ignorance is fully normalised and unhesitatingly accepted into the models of social success" (BREY, 2009, p. 34).

And indeed, even if all the advancements regarding technology and global communication are taken into account, can we say such "communication" is already effectively taking place? Wendy Brown, in *Walled States, Wailing Sovereignty* (2010), also emphasises the paradoxical tenets which are symptomatic of globalising processes and its developmentalist discourses. This mainly as she suggests that, even though globalisation might have destroyed commercial frontiers between regions, it has also contradictorily created new ones between peoples – coherent to my analysis reflection upon the idea of development as destruction followed by construction followed by destruction etc., in a cyclic fashion. In Brown's (2010, p. 84) view these walls are responses to a controversial transnational economic, social, and religious flaw: "An economically driven erasure of distinctions between peoples, cultures, states, or currencies is countered by a security-motivated press for boundaries and closure". In this sense the models of social success so common in the

contemporaneity are also responsible for this successive destruction and creation of frontiers separating peoples and regions according to hegemonic interests. Apropos, one of the best manners to illustrate that is perhaps to observe our condition as Brazilians, who have much more contact and knowledge about the U.S. history, culture, and language than we have when it goes to our neighbour countries in Latin America.

As a result, the twenty-first-century walls, so deeply criticised by Brown (2010), restrain ideologies from dialoguing, and alienate readers whose will becomes to experience any literature that offers no risk of serious reflection – which is far from being the case of Leacock's (1912) sketches. It is in this sense that "Canadian fiction deserves and needs more readers quantitatively. But the very nature of literature being produced also means that we need readers of better quality [...]. This places the onus, then, on an informed, experienced, and discriminating reading public" (KEITH, 1989, p. 214). William Keith (1989) might be suggesting herein that the contemporary world is not devoid of good literature, but devoid of an effective and fruitful approach towards literature. As one might infer both from the allegations of theorists brought so far, as well as from my analysis of *Sunshine Sketches of a Little Town* (LEACOCK, 1912), no art should be experienced as a sole source of pleasure; literature, thus, cannot be seen as exclusively fictional and incapable of touching the material world. Nevertheless, due to the intricacy of defending such approach and giving it a real opportunity to prosper, this more encompassing look towards literature "needs to be fostered by teachers of literature in schools and universities, upon whom falls the duty and responsibility to encourage appropriate and subtler reading methods" (KEITH, 1989, p. 215). Departing from this local atmosphere of schools and universities,

of course, such an audience would also later arise out of the national as a whole.

All this having been said, and regardless that literature is indeed potentially capable of travelling in-between cultures and contexts, it is essential to take into account how my analytical findings of Leacock's (1912) narrative respond to the specific temporal and spatial configuration wherefrom his novel has emerged: the early XX century Canadian countryside. According the Canadian critic J.J. McCullough, even though Canada had been "originally a nation of farmers, loggers, and fur traders, the dawn of the 20th century saw a full scale transformation of Canadian society". The great transformations arising were, therefore, guided mainly by the fact that "as new provinces were settled and colonized in the late 1800s, new cities began to spring up, and by the 1910s over 50% of all Canadians were living urban, rather than rural lives for the first time" (McCullough). As a result, still according to McCullough, "[a]n influx of immigrants, originally intended to settle uninhabited parts of the Canadian west, had likewise changed the fundamental ethnic makeup of the colony". It is important to bear in mind that, even though Leacock's family was indeed English, these immigrants that were gradually arriving in the early XX century Canada were no longer solely French and/or English subjects – as it would be the case beforehand. Moreover, such boom has affected not only simply the quantity of people residing within the country, but actually everything that could be related to the idea of their national identity therein. It meant Canada would be understood from that time on as a nation of immigrants, one whose "national" identity could never be tamed by any homogenising agendas – as a matter of fact, and regardless of political interests, the heterogeneous essence of such country highlights the fact it shall never be liable to respond affirmatively to such sort of agendas. As a matter of fact, "large

numbers of Canadians were now Irish, Italian, Polish, Ukrainian, Dutch, or Scandinavian – and even some Chinese and Japanese, too". Moreover, in quantitative terms, it is now a given fact that, up "[t]o this day, the ten years between 1906 and 1916, when Canada welcomed some two million new residents, remain the country's largest population boom" (McCullough). Following the second world war, "[t]he idea that Britain always knew best, or even that Britain was in some way superior to its colonies made less and less sense in a world where the British dominions were increasingly wealthy, important world powers in their own right."⁸

My analysis of *Sunshine Sketches of a Little Town* (LEACOCK, 1912) exposes how these features of early XX century Canadian countryside are summoned, reclaimed, and readdressed by a rather witty narrator. Perhaps Leacock's (1912) project for the narrative was precisely to make use of such context and its local values as raw material to achieve something larger – a very successful project, apropos, insomuch as after its first edition, Leacock's novel has had "a colourful publishing history"⁹. The fact that it has never been translated into Portuguese sounds somehow surprising inasmuch as it has entered and remained within the international literary system as a rather relevant commercial object. The basic setting, the fictional town called Mariposa, is clearly inspired in the small town of Orillia where Leacock had lived as a child – and where the literary award carrying his name is annually bestowed. This spatial inspiration provides per se an interesting discussion since the intention of Leacock was, according to the author himself (in the preface), to characterize the city as "any of the typical towns

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9 Copyright ©1995-2014. Canadian Literature. CanLit Poets Archive. On Contexts and Texts: Re-Branding Canadian Classics. http://canlit.ca/reviews/on_contexts_and_textrebranding_canadian_classics

in the Canadian countryside” (LEACOCK, 1912, p. 4). Yet, at the same time, the autobiographical context surrounding such attempts seems to make it impossible for him not to insert in his *Mariposa* all his affection for the city where he had grown up. In the opinion of Pete Klouda (2010, p. 18), *Mariposa* is constructed by Leacock as a space only “loosely based on the town of Orillia”. The book, Klouda (2010, p. 19) continues, consists of twelve sketches portraying “various elements of life in *Mariposa* such as business, religion politics, romance and social life”. *Mariposa* is, especially at the end of the book, characterised by Leacock as a pleasant town – as opposed to the accelerated, polluted, and superficial temporal and spatial identities of the major urban centres multiplying in Canada. As evinced in my analysis, it is precisely by trying to distance the novel’s setting from the metropolis that Leacock (1912) demonstrates how it is impossible to escape from dialogue and comparison.

Through the advent of humour, the narrative gives readers an opportunity to reflect upon the sunshine city as a setting almost lost in space and time – “almost” because it is asking for our help, wondering if we are going to value what consist in its foundations. *Mariposa*, therefore, deserves the admiration and nostalgia of not only those who miss the local that is obliterated by developmentalist needs and values, but by anyone who miss epistemes and ways of living that differ from more metropolitan ones. *Mariposa* asks us to remember, in order to change – it tells us lies for us to rethink universal truths. Gerald Lynch (1984, p. 14) suggests that, although Leacock highlights all the time how much it is ahead of metropolises with respect to social, political, and religious dimensions, “*Mariposa* is an ironically idyllic community, not an ideal one. Smith, the ‘villain’, is successful in his machinations, not merely because of the concentrated greed within

himself, but because similar faults exist and persist within the community”. As my analysis exposes, within the novel Leacock (1912) expresses his dissatisfaction with the succession of ambitions inherent in small Canadian cities that, like *Mariposa*, also dream about growing before anything else. The fact that the ending of *Sunshine Sketches of a Little Town* (LEACOCK, 1912) is not simply a happy ending – as the reality fades away and we are befriended by a narrator whose melancholic feelings of homesickness and wretchedness can be left aside no longer – is already a clear breakout against the classic comic models whereby, at the end, everything would be ultimately resolved. As readers stop laughing during particular recesses of fun, the hiatus of humour is generally filled in by a nostalgic perception towards values that are no longer available within the characters’ town. Perhaps we, ourselves, are not ready yet to see it coming for we are not as nostalgic as we should be. As discourses of growth and development are maintained, reaffirmed, and defended by us, we have unfortunately turned a blind eye to our “*Mariposas*” – and they, on their turn, are also disappearing in front of us.

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