# THE TRANSGRESSIVE CHARACTER OF HUMOUR IN HARNESS: a literary analysis and translation proposal of Sunshine Sketches of a Little Town (Leacock, 1912)

*Empoderando o caráter transgressivo do humor: uma análise literária e proposta de tradução de Sunshine Sketches of a Little Town (Leacock, 1912)*

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> Out come all these words / There's a very pleasant side to you, a side I much prefer / It's one that laughs and jokes around / Remember cuddles in the kitchen, to get things off the ground. (Arctic Monkeys, Mardy Bum, 2006)

## 1 INTRODUCTION

When one thinks of literature in English, it is impossible for the privilege received by Anglophone nations that traditionally divide the domain in what concerns such cultural manifestations to pass unnoticed. These are the cases of England and the U.S.; countries that had an active participation in colonial and neocolonial processes contributing to the imposition of systems of literary hierarchy in other, less privileged, regions. During such processes it behooved these deemed "minor" nations to accept a considerably marginalized role in this described scenario. Among these countries, several writers who endeavoured to be acknowledged might be spotted, be it by their compatriots or by foreign readers, since their literary production was starting in a moment when the central traditions had already determined who was to occupy the top of this cultural literary chain.

The fact that we, as Brazilians, do not often get in touch with Canadian literature, and that, when we do, we generally, but mistakenly, tend to believe that such literature comes from the US, or maybe it is

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Britain, since they ignore the local as to be accepted by (and here I mean "USanised") readers, has much to do with US power over the English productions in America (just like it happens in England in relation to the rest of UK). People's relationship with Canada and with other nations became much more intricate than such relationship would be comprehended if Canadian inhabitants' ideas were still taken as mere replications or extensions of British and French interests. To understand and, perhaps, alter these relations between nations – very often established and guided by rather questionable political and economic agendas – cultural identity has to be deeply analysed and translation as a bridge for such identity to travel has to be practiced. Not only how they take place in their "originality", in the regions where they depart from initially, but also, and perhaps especially, in what concerns the insertion of distinct versions of cultural identities in regions wherein they did not necessarily belong beforehand.

The implications of such emerging approach of Canadians with other nations and of their consequent natural standing off from some of solely British political matters cannot be overlooked, since this was essential for the nation to start identifying itself as more autonomous than just a colony waiting to be utilised. Such issue came to the spotlight especially during World War I, when England "forced" Canadian troops in a battle wherefrom no concrete benefit could come to Canada no matter what results were reached. Even though the matter of Canadian's identification with Canada as their nation – and their gradual questioning about English influence therein – was something common by that time, it was in 1914, more specifically, that their unhappiness became closer to a rebellious attitude towards their austere father. This was the year when Germany invaded Belgium, which forced Britain to go to war with Germany due to an alliance the countries had at the time. All of Britain's colonies, including Canada, were then promptly drafted to fight alongside the motherland. This event whereby Canadian soldiers were forced in the World War, notwithstanding their lack of involvement in it, functioned as a reminder that despite the country's emerging status as one of the wealthiest, most industrialized, modern societies on earth. Canada was still, but a mere colonial possession of a much stronger empire, still unauthorized to run its own foreign affairs. As a result, both Canadian common citizens and even the country's political representatives began to feel more skeptical about Canada's accountability

for British choices and businesses; eventually, the sacrifices of Canadian soldiers in key European fronts such as the Battle of Vimy Ridge in France (1917), where over 10,000 Canadians were killed, solidified public opinion that Canada was a mature nation in its own right, and felt they deserved to be recognized as such. It was therefore only more than half a decade after Leacock's novel – the object of this research – was published that Canada would finally (at least in part) understand the necessity to evade the shadow of its ex-colonisers.

Throughout its development as a nation, Canada has been configured as a hybrid region – one whose population, since its conception, has reflected everything but the illusion of a pure character. Following such direction, a vast part of Keith's reflections in *A Sense of Style: Studies in the Art of Fiction in English-Speaking Canada* (KEITH, 1989) intents to highlight the importance of the hybrid character of Canadian culture through the dissemination of the most varied discourses that emerge out from the most distinct means praising, therefore, those characteristics that take Canada further from the patterns mistakenly taken as universal. Concerning such patterns, and especially for elaborating a critique on a literary production that surfaces from an author whose origin is a region that does not create nor represent such pattern, this study takes as crucial and inevitable the problematisation and fragmentation of these problematic cultural and ideological models. This is because when the reading, analysis, and translation of a Canadian piece is established, the political, cultural, and social context, both of its production and reception, must be taken into account especially inasmuch as such contexts are directly related to this hegemonic shaping, which is herein attempted to be put into question. It is necessary to understand not only how the insertion of such shaping took place during processes of colonization in nations devoid of voice before a supposedly universal scene, but also how this is still occurring in neocolonial processes that predetermined fixed identities to regions and populations which are still looking for their ideological autonomy.

Both the issue of ideological autonomy and cultural identity are delineated in Leacock's novel *Sunshine Sketches of a Little Town* (LEACOCK, 1912), which is the object of my analysis and proposal for an annotated translation. The book tells the story of Canadians liv-

ing in the fictional town of Mariposa, highlighting their sense of community and ideals for growing and developing – which accompany the atmosphere that permeated rural Canada by the beginning of the XX century. Even though it is fictional, many critics affirm that, from the evidence brought by Leacock's construction of the region, Mariposa has been actually conceptualised out from his experiences while he lived in Orillia, Ontario. I do not mean here that we are controlled or restrained by the surrounding space and time that exist prior to one's writing; nothing predetermines what shall be written about and how should it be written about. Bearing all that in mind, and notwithstanding the fact that *Sunshine Sketches of A Little Town* must and does inform readers about what is fictionally required for a plausible grasp on the reflections proposed therein, it is also advantageous for this specific study to take a better view on Leacock's legacy as a whole.

No author can control what are those productions that are to make him famous or not, just like it happened to Edgar Allan Poe (who wanted to be reminded as a poet but whose short stories are the main reason for his current acknowledgment) and William Shakespeare (whose tragedies and comedies are much more reminded than his sonnets, even though he believed it would be his poetic production that would possibly make him famous). Literature, especially when aided by translation, transforms legacies into autonomous beings whose direction shall never be harnessed by any attempt at controlling; after published and translated, literary pieces can go anywhere. In terms of bridging target and source contexts, the reading of the sketches is indeed a very good opportunity for readers to identify how critical Leacock was to the theatrical hypocrisy surrounding political affairs, which, in my view, has not changed much if the early XIX century Mariposa is placed in parallel with the XXI century Brazil. The – very sad – fact that we do have that in common, regardless of the spatial and temporal hiatus separating both spaces, demonstrates how the Mariposan local has many things to say to other locals like our own. Moreover, such fact, no matter how unfortunate it is for it to survive, allows Leacock's irony to keep working – that is, if we did not have to go through the same political hypocritical spectacle, Leacock's irony, in this case, would be meaningless for us and it is actually very far from being any close to that.

This is Leacock's ironic method of criticising the democratic hypocrisy, the same hypocrisy that survived until nowadays. The illusion

of choice, the notion that people are democratically compelled to decide who is that person most likely to represent their wills and necessities, was not only symptomatic of that context Leacock is portraying, it is a reality in the current Brazilian condition, wherein elections take shape in a very similarly theatrical manner. Every Brazilian citizen knows he cannot believe in what any candidate say during a political campaign, everybody knows political parties have no meaning whatsoever, and everybody knows the elections day is just there to give us the impression that we have a choice. As a matter of fact to look in Leacock's humorous text for these "bonds of pioneer existence", for these predetermined and inherent nature of a local which could supposedly help us define *Sunshine Sketches* as regional or national and as tragic or comic, would be rather tricky since "if literature is a gauge, only among expatriates has its strong semblance existed, without genuine roots, and mixed with the tragic" (ROURKE, 1959, p. 297). To test Rourke's assertion it is nonetheless necessary to take a more careful look in Leacock's narrative as to identity how Leacock's humour shifts comic with tragic, and to set forth a plausible path for my annotated translation proposal to follow.

## 2 DISCUSSION

Knowing the rules of the game, particularly in what concerns Canadian identity, gives one the tools to rethink the idea of national unity which, as suggested by Silvestre, is not at all a simple thing for one to deal with. In his words "the notion of unity is difficult to define in Canada because the country by itself would not be able to erase the diversity and its elements of surplus domination due to its Eurocentric/racist/colonial context" (SILVESTRE, 2008, p. 10). Canada, just as any other nation, cannot and should not, indeed, erase the diversity emerging from its historical background; and trying to do so would not be wise or fruitful at all. Difficult, but not impossible, is thus the task undertaken by Canadian writers like Leacock, whose local pieces are permeated by the Canadian inescapable and Eurocentric, racist, and colonial context. Most regions, especially those which have been put through colonial regimes, are daily forced to deal with its history of eurocentrism, racism, and colonialism – but its impairments might actually allow it to reposition themselves before such institutionalised power tools. Those who

never suffer from something are never given the opportunity to gaze upon the source of that which impinges suffering upon a region; what this means is that Canada, due especially to its historical background as an ex-marginalised region which has gradually been entering a more central position, is a country whose history might bestow the necessary tools to fight the very tradition that institutionalised the region in the first place – in place of tools for it to accept its future as it had been formulated by former hegemonic discourses.

Literature, as a politically and socially active means to rethink national identities, is an interesting device to enter the game and gradually achieve the task of identity de and reconstructions. However, for such task to take place one should not misinterpret the knowledge about this problematic context as a token of alienation and acceptance, as ignoring such context would not result in its disappearance. This is so for the sociological paragon of the "nation" as a productive sign which labels identity would be justified by Canadian historical complex background which followed its insertion within the global frame. In the words of Richard, "in the early 20th century, Canada was in a period of redefinition as it moved from a frontier nation to a Western industrial nation; during this transition, Canada began to recognize the need to better characterize the nation and form a common sense of identity" (RICHARD, 2012, p. 4). This, therefore, was the moment when the Canadian national identity began to take shape – notwithstanding how biased such process has occurred. The influence of the foreign for the elaboration of the local has not been minor – as it certainly never is. When a country has no identity – at least in the terms of hegemony – it is forced to look for national parameters elsewhere: to construct itself through its experience of the other.

Nevertheless, and moving on to the object of analysis, critics have not always received Leacock's novel as positively as they could in terms of its contributions for the construction of a Canadian identity. Margaret Atwood's non-fiction book *Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature* (ATWOOD, 1972) is, as the name implies, a thematic guide to Canadian literary history, production, reception, and, more importantly, meanings and symbols. Studying the development of Canadian literature, the author shapes a severe critique on Canadian works that have focused on the US as a model for Canadian identity construction, besides condemning writers who see Canada and Canadi-

ans as victims of the US ideal, as if they had no role to play as to try and fight against such ideal. In her view, the lack of cultural identity actively being given to Canada in such models ends up giving rise to works that do not seem to have any ideological validity or respect to the Canadian local as capable of allowing meanings to emerge since, when the local appears, it is overemphasised in order to transform the country into an exotic land with empty plus hollow messages to propose; Canada, in this sense, is seen as a shadow of the US, and nothing more than that. I would like what I see as Atwood's excessively critical comments (and which shall be brought briefly) to be simply some isolated examples and/or overstatements, but in this case they are not.

Canadian national literature has directly and indirectly been generally marginalised vis-à-vis a biased process of commercial literary promotion and dissemination that has been privileging especially British and US fiction (like our literary market tradition can easily demonstrate), whereas what is produced in the country becomes gradually out of sight for the preconditioned readers who enter bookshops thirsty for the "foreign" books advertised in television. This factor per se is already capable of creating the illusion that national literature "does not exist" in marginalised countries or, worse, that foreign literature is "more complete" than what is produced inside, for instance, Brazilian and Canadian frontiers. In her guide Atwood admits that "it came as a shock to [her] to discover that [her] country's literature was not just British literature imported or American literature with something missing, that instead it had a distinct tradition and shape of its own" (1972, p. 237). Atwood, thus, finally found out that "local" Canadian literature, like Brazilian, does not need to be regarded as "universal" European or US literature with some flaws, with some things missing (and even though she was able to come to such a conclusion still as a kid, there are still many adults unable to see what she saw); the literary tradition of those who, like the Brazilian or Canadian colonies, have been marginalised by hegemonic cultures during colonial and neocolonial enterprises does not need to fit in the formulaic patterns such cultures have called "universal".

A nation has to be understood in the terms of its peculiarities, to its history, to the immigrants that came and to the hybrid cultures that, through the encounter between coloniser and colonised, were inevitably born in its singular but meaningful temporal and spatial framework. For

this reason, diligently proposed initiatives like this one aforementioned, undertaken by Atwood, are essential for a country to think and rethink how it is and how it shall be situated in the globalising world map without allowing external subjects to impose how such process must take place. Atwood's "symbols", in this sense, and notwithstanding her clear intellectual contributions to Canadian literature, are in my view considerably harmful for a less homogeneous and uniform understanding of national identities. I find it complicated to assume that a single representation – such as the island, frontier, or survival – is capable to symbolise the whole identity of a people. What I believe she is unable to perceive is what John Tomlinson would later thoroughly discuss in his book *Globalization and Culture* (TOMLINSON, 1999); that behind this idea of a national symbolic identity is a "considerable cultural effort exercised by nation-states in binding their populations into another cultural political order of local identification" (p. 270).

What Atwood does, in trying to universalise English, US, and Canadian identities through the homogenising of their national literary traditions, is overlook the fact that "identity is not in fact merely some fragile communal-psychic attachment, but a considerable dimension of institutionalized social life in modernity" (TOMLINSON, 1999, p. 271). To impose a national identity for a group of unrelated people would be thus to institutionalise an illusory connection between them; as if it were what Tomlinson calls this communal-psychic attachment that made two people part of one singular body of meanings. In his view, this institutionalised social life, "[p]articularly in the dominant form of national identity, is the product of deliberate cultural construction and maintenance via both the regulatory and the socializing institutions of the state" (1999, p. 272). Therefore, Atwood's reflections are not less detrimental to a more careful approach towards any conceptualisation of Canadian literary identities than any other socialising institutions of the state would be; both socially and politically, hegemonic interests depend on the effective representation of a combination of actually rather different people – Atwood, through her problematic provision of literary symbols, gives support to such homogenising method, which would be later put into question by Tomlinson's analysis.

Globalisation plays a key role for the national ideal to be surpassed; it is "the deterritorializing force of globalization" that would

meet a rather structured opposition against this version of considerably "banal nationalism – the everyday minute reinforcement; the continuous routinized 'flagging' of national belonging, particularly through media discourse – sponsored by developed nation-states" (TOMLINSON, 1999, p. 273). It would be thus through the media discourse set forth due to varying nation-states needs that "modernity institutionalizes and regulates cultural practices, including those by which we imagine attachment and belonging to a place or a community". As detrimental as it may seem, such imagination of attachment and belongingness to this rather questionable and imaginary spatial configuration of the nation has gained shaped through the passage of history and produced the idea of national specificity as "what we have come to know as communal definitions of cultural identity based around specific, usually politically inflected, differentiations" (TOMLINSON, 1999, p. 274). Many events taking place in *Sunshine Sketches of a Little Town* (LEACOCK, 1912) set forward this issue of cultural identity as a politically inflected differentiation in terms of national signs; one of them emerges when the character Mr. Smith decides to remodel his restaurant turning it into a café.

> Within two more weeks the plan was in operation. Not only was the caff built but the very hotel was transformed. Awnings had broken out in a red and white cloud upon its face, its every window carried a box of hanging plants, and above in glory floated the Union Jack. The very stationery was changed. (LEACOCK, 1912, p. 20)[1]

Concerning the last gadget and symbolic reference to national identity, I faced a translation problem that is worth mentioning – especially as it is also relevant for my discussion. When the narrator says that above the hanging plants "in glory floated the Union Jack" how could I translate such seemingly simple sentence into Portuguese? In terms of concrete meaning the problem could be easily solved, since

[1] Dentro de duas semanas o plano já entrava em operação. O café não foi apenas construído dentro do hotel, na verdade o próprio hotel foi transformado. Toldos emergiram como uma nuvem branca e vermelha; e cada janela passou a ser preenchida com vasos de flores penduradas, e, por cima delas, flutuava em glória a Union Jack. Até o que não tinha como mudar mudou. (All translations of Leacock's novel into Portuguese are mine)

Union Jack can be simply called "Bandeira do Reino Unido"; Leacock, nevertheless, has not chosen to write UK flag, but Union Jack, whose ideological roots take his readers to a broader meaning-making system than it would if we stuck only with the idea of the flag. The Union Jack is indeed the flag of the United Kingdom, also known by law in Canada as the Royal Union Flag, which, when the novel was written, was still used as to represent the Canadian nation – and this until 1964, when the Maple Leaf Flag was chosen to replace it as the national flag. After no longer being capable of representing the Canadian nation, the flag started to be used only when Canadian allegiance to the British crown needed to be symbolised. Today one could affirm that simply calling it the UK flag would be simpler, more common, and more accurate. However, my foreignising decision to translate the sentence into "flutuava em glória a *Union Jack*" rather than adapting it to "flutuava em glória a bandeira britânica" is due to the fact that "Union Jack" was a common term to name the flag when the British navy was conquering most of its colonies - at that time British soldiers were called "Jack Staff", this is probably why the flag's nickname "Union Jack" was adopted.

It seems to be more plausible to keep close to the colonial and neocolonial linguistic potential of the term rather than transforming it into something else as to promote easier comprehension to the detriment of the inevitable ideological richness of calling it Union Jack, much more associated to colonies being conquered and institutionalised by Britain, as the little Mariposa was being in the eyes of the narrator. But why is a flag so important for my analysis and translation? Well, because, like a map, it is a very symbolic representative of the spatial and temporal boundaries of national identity and, consequently, of the local vs. universal problematic binarism. Nevertheless, how effective can a map be to represent a certain geographical structure? Not much, as Anderson suggests, since, in his view, "[i]n terms of most communication theories and common sense, a map is a scientific abstraction of reality". Even though to common sense this map (like the flag) is successful in standing for something that transcends its concrete dimensioning, a map merely represents something "which already exists objectively 'there'. In the history I have described, this relationship was reversed. A map anticipated spatial reality, not vice versa; in other words, a map was a model

for, rather than a model of, what it purported to represent" (ANDERSON, 1996, p. 134).

Curiously, it seems, notwithstanding the fact that the map emerges as an opportunity to represent the supposed reality, what happens in local realms such as Mariposa, which are welcoming the advent of developmentalist processes to adapting the financial, social, and political practices, is that this whole relationship is indeed reversed. It is not Mariposa coming first and the map accompanying it, but the opposite, it is first convinced to be something and thus to try to change those things that are, supposedly, a hindrance for its survival. One of these changes (already addressed beforehand) concerns the will of Mariposa inhabitants to have their social relations taking place in a similar fashion when compared to those in the city. Interestingly, the narrator does not seem to be sure about the fact that he wants the town to follow such pattern; this is paradoxically present in his discourse, even though sometimes the opposite also takes place. In this sense, the reason why the narrator is bound to keep looking for images which he can never really see but only imagine is simple: such images do not exist; they are just an invention with no evidence of applicability based on his admiration for what he would like Mariposa to be.

The argument is mistaken but it is stuck in every subject's minds: the pillars of capitalist enterprises require us to see everything that has supposedly to do with the past (those things that have to do with the specific, the isolated, the local) as insignificant and to see everything that has supposedly to do with the future (those things that have to do with the global, the globalised, the universal) as of paramount importance. As a matter of fact, "more profoundly and problematically, they [hegemonic narratives] required time to accommodate the schemes of a one-way history: progress, development, modernity (and their negative mirror images: stagnation, underdevelopment, tradition)" (FABIAN, 1983, p. 144). It is high time these schemes of a one-way history were put into question; those looking for solutions to promote a better understanding between different contexts – which, different from what we have been convinced, are always relevant, no matter how temporally or spatially separated from one's context they might be – can no longer accept the ideology of progress and modernity as the oracle of global issues. Such ideology has been giving us consecutive attestations of

how incompetent it is for making us less ignorant about the self and the other, since its goal has been actually to do the opposite.

In fact, Leacock's novel and my translation of it are a material attempt (or at least an "attempt at such attempt") at advocating that it is their negative mirror images – those values emerging from places which, like Mariposa, are generally pinpointed as representing stagnation, underdevelopment, tradition – which might ultimately provide what hegemonic interests have been concealing. As literature and translation recurrently (like in Leacock's case) demonstrate, it is by understanding both self and other as local that they may finally be brought into dialogue; in this sense, to believe in the tale of universalism is not a first step onto the surfacing of other stories, but the very last step onto allowing hegemonic stories to repress marginal ones. Unfortunately, those who live in Mariposa are repetitively unable to realise this ephemeral character of everything that, like Mr. Smith, "comes from the city"; they are eager to believe that what puts Mariposa closer to the hegemonic globalising world map is, inevitably, positive for its thriving status as a town-in-development. What they do not see is that all the signs of civilisation, urbanism, and/or development (e.g.: the train station, Mr. Smith's café, the church, crime investigators, etc.) unflusteredly completely disregard Mariposa, and, notwithstanding the evidences for such suspicion, their pride for the future is, nonetheless, unnervingly unflappable.

This is why, in my view, *Sunshine Sketches* (1912) and Leacock's worries about the Canadian condition at that specific moment were strongly misread and misguidedly criticised by some critics – such as Donald Cameron, in his book *Faces of Leacock* (CAMERON, 1967), and Margaret Atwood, in her book *Second Words: Selected Critical Prose* (1982) – who understood the author's work as responsible for ridiculing Canadian locals while emphasising the superiority of more hegemonic cultures. What actually happens, as more contemporary critics would notice, is the opposite; this misinterpretation, nonetheless, takes place maybe because "[t]he moral norms of the book can be induced only from a careful consideration of the events portrayed, from an appraisal of what motivates its characters and from a thoughtful assessment of the narrator's relentlessly ironic commentary" (LYNCH, 1984, p. 9). These "careful considerations" would, perhaps, pinpoint

*Sunshine Sketches* (LEACOCK, 1912) as a response to the eagerness of many colonised regions to become like the coloniser; a critique against the hegemonic model that nourishes in marginalised peoples' minds the biased impression that becoming like hegemony is a synonym for becoming better, that growing and developing in Imperialist terms is desirable, and that getting rid of the local and getting as closer to the global as possible is the future everyone must aspire.

What this rather questionable logic fails to take into account is the fact that all this reasoning takes place not in a random and/or occasional fashion; it is part of a quite concrete agenda. The idea, it seems, is to convince us about how crucial it would be to set aside the local in our search for the universal in order to withdraw from the common subject his/her own sense of belonging. The idea of belonging to the region wherein one has been constructing one's identity in a two-way road where the self and the other are put in constant dialogue is, in this way, overlooked; and, as a result, we get both spaceless and timeless. "To belong", in this sense, is not a synonym of "to be limited"; to belong is to understand one's spatial constraints and assets – a necessary step for any effective attempt at transgressing such constraints through applying such assets. To ponder upon an idealised universal positioning within the globe is, though, much easier and seemingly preferable inasmuch as "[b]elonging is a task that requires an individual working to maintain a sense of unity or integrity while engaged in ongoing, dynamic, and developing interactions within the physical, historical and social landscape of their being" (TOMANEY, 2012, p. 664). 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 is detrimental to such sense of unity, and a hazard to the social landscape of their being; however, the positioning is gradually reinforced in the lives of Mariposans, 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"; and how Jeff's (the barber) family handle with this condition is of paramount importance for one to grasp Leacock's approach on the matter. The development of this character's daughter – Myra's – and her desistance to going to the city (due to her family's lack of financial conditions for that to happen) resulted in the complete withdrawal of her dream to be an actress, and we have also got a glimpse to us (reader) and how we are criticised by the narrator for deciding to move to the city and abandon Mariposa. There is a movement in going from the town to the city: a movement of translation, which is analogous to the one of the rural to the urban, from one setting into another. Seemingly, the city has to do with movement and the town with total stagnation (one shall 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".

> 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, 1912, p. 16).[2]

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 such reputation is concocted by the capital experts. Leacock exposes thus the hypocrisy and

[2] 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.

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; those who do not are doomed to accept them with the same open arms that Mariposans show to everything coming from the Capital. The paradox emerging from such 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. Therefore, this double-bind where the subject has to be placed either in the local or in the universal is in itself a token of the problematic plus categorical identity allotments promoted by the hegemonic interests of taking from the subjects their ability to elaborate and maintain any sense of unity and integrity. The advantageous interactions with the physical, social, and historical atmosphere between the common person and the meanings surrounding him/her are understood as an ultimate threat for they work to the benefit of identity dynamics rather than of its compactness. To forget the local is to forget that our identity interacts with the context which existed prior to us; and to idealise the emergence universalism to the detriment of such local is not only harmful to the identity construction of peoples and places: it is actually a major hindrance for it to take place.

As implied by Graham Swift, in his book *Making an Elephant: Writing from Within* (SWIFT, 2009), to place both realms in opposition

would be actually to no avail for the local is inherently strongly akin to the universal – no matter how hard we try to neglect such fact. As the novelist puts it, "[t]he key to the universal is always the local, if only because all experience is and must be local; all experience is placed" (p. 310). To experience the local would be, furthermore, to allow it to cross its borders as such local is inserted within another local – both through literature and literary translation. That is, to bring the local colour as an important character (rather than to nourish an endeavour to disregard it) of a literary discourse is the only chance any universality can be spotted inasmuch as every universalism has been born out from a rather local sphere. Therefore, and since there is no universal vs. local discourse, there is also no obstacle involved in the attempt at bringing the local instead of leaving it where it supposedly belongs. As a matter of fact, and as Swift would later aver, "[i]f one reads a book set in China or Peru, or indeed Nice, a great many local references may pass me by, but that doesn't matter, it even helps, because through them one nonetheless sense the genuinely local texture of life" (SWIFT, 2009, 311). Through the universal premise, it seems, it is not transition itself that is given by the centre to the margin, but one version of transition which implies that some regions and peoples are a model of what must be looked for, while others are deviations to this single mighty pattern; a pattern which is thoroughly put into question in Leacock's piece through his problematisation and repositioning of the questionable "moral norms" which scaffold the dualism implied by the town vs. city elusive quarrel and the universal vs. local questionable premise.

## 3 FINAL REMARKS

Notwithstanding *Sunshine Sketches*' temporal and spatial literary distortions (relevant when one thinks of its translation into the contemporary Brazilian context), my analysis and translation proposal demonstrate how the novel draws one's attention also in what concerns its intricate discussion between ambivalent conceptualisations of humour/seriousness and, especially, local/universal. This is because this last ambivalence concerns how the national portrait of Canada is connected to the seemingly local image of Mariposa. How such issues have influenced Leacock's reception both in Canada and outside the coun-

try is not something that can be ignored inasmuch as "this struggle of competing discourses of the best and the national, the universal and the local, beset Canadian literary criticism for decades" (FEE, 1992, p. 29). Like it happens in Brazil, as in any other ex-colony that struggles for developing a (hopefully counter-hegemonic) national identity, people are trying "for decades" to evade this persisting notion of the "best" as opposed to the "national", of the "universal" as desirable and the "local" as something to be avoided. Fee still argues that "the resulting ambivalence weakened those who were in the best position, in institutional terms, to promote Canadian literature; the problem was exacerbated by the weakness in publishing and in the academy that persists today" (FEE, 1992, p. 30).

I honestly deem Leacock one of those authors who have been "in the best position" for promoting Canadian literature; but, in my view, both his context of production and reception might have affected such picture. In this case understanding such contexts, such as this institutional problem that still "persists today" is essential for providing an effective bridge between Canada and Brazil, between Stephen Leacock and Brazilian readers, for my translation to take place successfully and for it to make any difference afterwards. It seems, thus, that in literature – and perhaps especially when dealing with humorous literature such as Leacock's one – there is a material connection that needs to exist between what is read and those who read it; geographically and/or spatially the readers needs to be and/or to get involved with the text he is under the process of interpreting. That does not mean only contemporary books can be read in the contemporaneity, of course, or that only Canadian people can read Canadian literature whatsoever – in the end good literature is not that one that objectively talks about a specific group of people, but that one that subjectively talks about, for, and to all of us – it just means that for a humorous literary piece to achieve its goals there must be a cultural path and such path must be available to all readers – who are to be guided by the author, translator, and, especially, themselves.

The gap between rural life, represented by Mariposans, and urban life, represented by Smith, together with all the ideological issues that permeate the actions taking place among both settings are not, essentially, original themes. But the condition of Canadian literature also

problematises the notion of "originality", which is something particularly relevant for when discussing the translation of Leacock's book, in the sense that, from a distinct point of departure, one can talk about unoriginal matters using original voices. This is why notions like "regional" and "universal" cannot be regarded as contrary to one another, for the regional might deal with universal issues and in Canada it, indeed, does: "Canadian literature does not exclude the universals, it just handles them in a characteristic way" (ATWOOD, 1972, p. 236). Especially in Canada, the difference is in the "how" and not in the "what"; that is, "it's not necessarily the 'subject matter' […] that constitutes the Canadian signature, but the attitudes to that subject matter, and through the attitudes the kinds of images and the outcomes of stories" (ATWOOD, 1972, p. 237). Mr. Smith's manipulation of Mariposans is innovatory, thus, in the sense that it concerns how this individual Mariposan "attitude" relates with supposedly universal subject matters.

In the background of the biased tradition that generally privileges those writings whose attempts are to make tales "as universal as possible" while excluding and/or marginalising textual material which strongly involve the local and regional as essential for meaning to emerge is the issue of identity and unity. Concerning such division between local and regional, this has been a controversial issue due to a tradition that mistakenly "see place as a 'spatio-temporal event', and see local attachments as containing tendencies to essentialism, 'romanticization' and reactionary politics" (TOMANEY, 2012, p. 659). What this seems to evince is that we are domesticated to ponder upon either an emphasis or erasure of the "place" – notwithstanding the fact that none of these two options are attainable and/or advantageous. It is not because an event is spatiotemporal that it is either restrained to its place and time; by the same token, no event whatsoever can try to take place without relying on its space and time as groundwork for its epistemes to be concocted. In this sense the intricate dichotomy "local vs. universal" is analogical to the one that supposedly divides localism from cosmopolitanism. Still in the words of Tomaney, "cosmopolitanism generally regards particular attachments as a sort of intellectual error, one that educated people will move beyond" (TOMANEY, 2012, p. 660). Thus, a more "universal ethics" would be reflected upon as desired to the detriment of a "local ethics" in the sense that everything local is seen "as inherently

sectional, while defense of community and place is seen as irrational, backward-looking and reactionary, even if people are being beckoned to futures that are uncertain or threatening" (TOMANEY, 2012, p. 661).

In what regards representativeness within this picture of community defense against what is uncertain or threatening, Leacock defended that if a politician was part of the market his political choices would be far from unbiased; this critique is dealt with in the sketches as to make the reader feel that, for instance, Smith's election to the national legislature "is the inevitable consequence of the relation between business and politics, and that political office is but the tacky laurel for those who are ambitious, energetic, and cunning enough to exploit this relationship" (LYNCH, 1984, p. 11). Interestingly, Leacock could never guess how such relation between business and politics would become second-nature one hundred years after his book was published. The novel is "universally" meaningful – even though there is nothing universal in the universe of meaning; the narrative Leacock constructs is far from "belonging" to a small town in Canada; much on the contrary, *Sunshine Sketches of a Little Town* (LEACOCK, 1912) is transnational, for the author uses the local colour not to romanticise the countryside but to discuss issues that affect both the condition of the fictitious Mariposa and of many other spaces. Translation is thus not desirable; it is inevitable.

Successfully superseding the regional which is generally but mistakenly taken as an exotic and isolated realm of society, and showing the relevance of Mariposa and its inhabitants for national and international readers "the artistic dangers of a concentration on local manners and a theme of local perfection were overcome" (MAGEE, 2006, p. 35); Leacock, thus, profitably evades the dangers of portraying Mariposa romantically and noncritically. Translating the sketches, therefore, gives one the opportunity to reclaim and reconsidered what Szeman calls "the irreducible particularity of local circumstances" (SZEMAN, 2001, p. 29); in her view, such particularity is thoroughly applied by hegemonic culture and serves for it to label deviant identities (in the normative view "excessively regional") and literatures as exotic, romanticized, local and therefore irrelevant when placed before the "universal" sphere (e.g. the Brazilian writers Graciliano Ramos, Jorge Amado, Milton Hatoum, and Guimarães Rosa). Everything, in the end, is excessively regional; it all depends on perspective, on who is observing from whose positioning. Analysing Lea-

cock's novel and translated it into Portuguese is an endeavour at escaping from the universal vs. local useless argument as to allow regions to dialogue – instead of stating that one is less regional than the other.

Such technique, even though applied throughout the centuries in terms of literary analysis (discussing how universal this or that author is, how eternal his or her legacy shall become, etc.) does not allow the temporal and spatial fluidity that permeates personal identities (and every identity is personal) against supposedly universal concepts to be understood as meaningful, since this would result in the inevitable problematisation of that which is understood as fixed and global: the supposedly universal. It is in this sense that the shared Americanity between the Brazilian and Canadian local colour against the fixity of what is understood as inherently "American" provides interesting opportunities for that which one understands as being solid to be liquefied. Apparently in the opposite way when facing the notion of shared Americanity the ambivalence between regional and universal literature is often brought to literary debates precisely because of how this unquestionable identity fluidity puts into question this sort of assertive categorical divisions. Interestingly enough, literary translation surfaces from the artistic scenery as a pivotal tool for blurring the concreteness of the traditional image of identity; it is by integrating the literary system of an unknown land and time that literature puts values into question, and helps us give shape to distinct ones. The dispute configured by the pace/time transgressive character which resides within the core of literary translation against the problematic pureness of universal values as a serious stance has just been summoned to the academic arena; but the fight has been going on for quite a long time. Now subjects are finally apprehending that, when society gets blind, it might very well be because it is lacking the lenses which only translation might be capable of offering. Literature is what has given us destinies; translation is what has invited us to meet them.

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## ABSTRACT

To understand and, perhaps, alter the intricate relations between central and peripheral nations – very often established and guided by rather questionable political and economic agendas – cultural identity has to be deeply analysed and translation as a bridge for such identity to travel has to be practiced. Both the issue of ideological autonomy and cul-

tural identity are delineated in Leacock's most notorious novel, which is the object of this analysis and proposal for an annotated translation. The book tells the story of Canadians living in the fictional town of Mariposa, highlighting their sense of community and ideals for growing and developing – which accompany the atmosphere that permeated rural Canada by the beginning of the XX century. Notwithstanding the sketches temporal and spatial literary distortions (relevant when one thinks of their translation into the contemporary Brazilian context), the analysis and translation proposal discussed in this article attempt at demonstrating how the novel draws one's attention also in what concerns its intricate discussion residing between ambivalent conceptualisations of humour/seriousness and local/universal.

**KEYWORDS:** Humour. Literature. Translation.

## RESUMO

Para compreender e, talvez, alterar as relações complexas entre nações centrais e periféricas – frequentemente estabelecidas e direcionadas por interesses políticos e econômicos questionáveis – a identidade cultural deve ser analisada com profundidade e a tradução, como ponte para que identidades transitem, deve ser praticada. Tanto a questão da autonomia ideológica como da identidade cultural são delineadas no romance mais conhecido de Leacock, que consiste no objeto dessa análise e proposta de tradução comentada. O livro conta a estória de personagens canadenses que vivem na cidade fictícia de Mariposa, enfatizando o seu senso de comunidade e ideais de crescimento e desenvolvimento – acompanhando a atmosfera que permeava o Canadá rural no início do século XX. Apesar das distorções espaciais e temporais dos esquetes (relevante quando se pensa em sua tradução para o contexto brasileiro contemporâneo), a análise e proposta de tradução discutidas neste artigo procuram demonstrar como o romance chama a atenção do leitor com relação ao que concerne à discussão intricada que reside entre os conceitos ambivalentes de humor/seriedade e local/universal.

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** Humor. Literatura. Tradução.